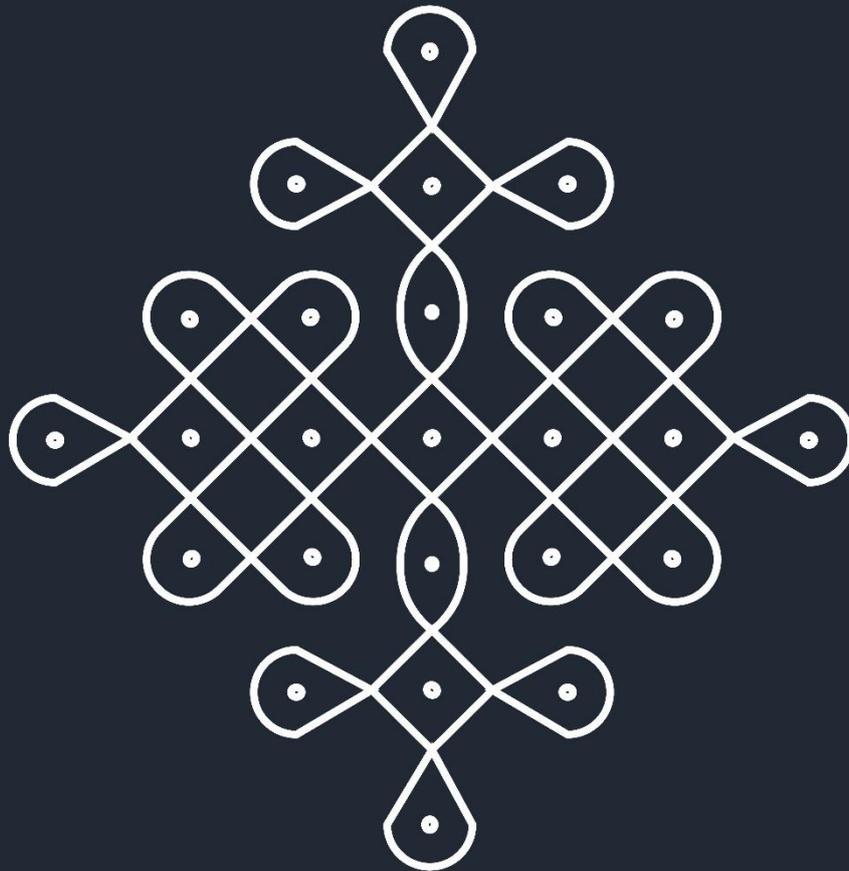# Nidān

International Journal for Indian Studies

Imagining Urbanity in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia, Part-2

Guest edited by Anne Castaing & Anne Murphy

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Preface

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It gives me great pleasure to announce the December 2025 issue (Issue 10, volume 2) of *Nidān: International Journal for Indian Studies*. Edited by Anne Castaing (CESAH) and Anne Murphy (British Columbia) and titled *Imagining Urbanity in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia Part-2*, this volume enriches the older focus that was explored in volume 1 of Issue 10, in July 2025 on cosmopolitanism, literature and emerging postcolonial themes with an additional Coda by G.S. Sahota. Containing many relevant articles, this second volume brings cutting-edge research to the forefront. While Fatima Afzal's analysis of Syed Muhammad Latif's writings focuses on Lahore's history and architectural remains, Torsten Tscahcher's article on the Tamil poetry of the Straits Settlements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries describes how Tamil poetry, using older aesthetic patterns, paints a picture of cosmopolitanism and urban life. Aranya Padil's article explores the presentation of Mumbai through Kolatkar's poems as a posthumanist assemblage, and Anne Castaing's article shows how an analysis of the *naī kahānī* Hindi literary movement reveals aporia and the misery of refugee life in post-Partition Delhi. Finally, Maaz Bin Bilal's article, an important piece for our times, focuses on the city of Banaras. Arguing against the city's imagination as predominantly Hindu, Maaz highlights, through Mirza Ghalib's poem on Banaras, the city's vibrant Muslim presence that contributes to its making. There are two more additional articles in this volume authored by Satnam Singh and Tillo Detige. While Singh explores the intellectual history of the Sikh tradition by exploring the case of Bhai Mani Singh, a scholar from the 17th and 18th centuries, Detige explores the importance of lineage in the history of Jainism in India with particular focus on the Digambara lineages of the Sultanate and Mughal periods. As usual, we also have some interesting book reviews in this issue. Nukhbah Taj Langah reviews Farah Noor's *Leisurely Feelings* (2024), Amol Saghar reviews Anirudh Deshpande's *King, Country and War* (2025), Leah Comeau reviews Tulasi Srinivas's *Wonder in South Asia* (2023), Bharti Arora reviews Sourit Bhattacharya's *Postcolonialism Now* (2025), and I present readers with a review of Mukesh Kumar's *Between Muslim Pir and Hindu Saint* (2024).

I hope *Nidān* readers will enjoy this volume!

Introduction

Imagining Urbanity in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia, Part-2

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Whereas the first volume of this special issue *Imagining Urbanity in Colonial and Post-Colonial South Asia* depicted the urban as a dystopian space, with a focus on the postcolonial period, this second volume offers a set of essays with a broader temporal sweep—from the colonial to the postcolonial period—and a multifarious sense of the urban, marked by heterogeneous temporal and relational modes, and manifold pasts and futures. The essays of this volume elucidate the identity and historical and cultural complexity of particular cities: Lahore, Delhi, Mumbai, Benares, and cities of the Straits Settlements. But they also speak, across each contribution, to the urban as a mode of living, and as embodied in diverse forms of expression. The intricate interplay between the 'ancient' (or 'traditional') and the 'modern'; the pre-colonial, the colonial and the postcolonial; and the vernacular and the cosmopolitan, found in the urban space represents dynamics of both contestation and possibility, where the shape of the present is worked out, lived, and challenged. The raw experience of the city—temporally, topographically, viscerally—is at the centre of each contribution. This rawness resonates in the Coda to these two volumes, offered by Guriqbal Singh Sahota.

In her essay *The City in the Book*, Fatima Afzal analyses the way Syed Muhammad Latif, in his *Lahore: Its History, Architectural Remains and Antiquities* (1892), embraces a colonial historiographical imaginary to present Lahore as a modern city. The city is not merely a physical space, but rather a temporal entity: the modernity of Lahore is attributed to its transition from the 'old' to a period marked by the beginning of British colonization. Adopting a teleological and rationalist logic inherited from James Mill and Hegel, Latif presents the city under colonial rule as the culmination of an era of progress, and expressive of a moral order. Afzal contrasts this vision with that of Noor Ahmad Chishti, whose spiritual history of Lahore is based on a cyclical, sacred temporality. Latif emphasizes the significance of written and rational accounts in defining the historical identity of the city. Consequently, Lahore's colonial modernity is constructed in both text and space, where the city is textualized and is read as it is travelled through.

The traversal of the city and its placement in time are also at the centre of Torsten Tschacher's essay *New Cities and Old Poetry*, which explores the liminal space of the Straits Settlements (Singapore, Penang, Malacca) through Tamil poetry composed there between 1872 and 1914. The poems offer a realistic depiction of the colonial city, with an emphasis on sensory experiences such as the sights, sounds and aromas of the city, including its bridges, markets, trams, and foreign communities. The act of 'walking the city' is a process through which poets metamorphose the urban landscape into a space characterized by experiences and innovation, both of which are captivating and cosmopolitan in nature. Tschacher's interpretation of these texts is that they reflect a diasporic Tamil bourgeoisie, comprised of Muslim merchants and scholars, who reinvent themselves within the colonial environment. In this particular context, and in contrast to common conceptions of a schism between tradition

and modernity, Tschacher demonstrates that classical poetic forms assimilated colonial realities without relinquishing their earlier forms. Consequently, traditional poetry became a means of expressing a vernacular modernity specific to the South Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia.

Aranya Padil's essay *Ordinary Enchantments: Vital Materialities and More-than-human Urban Assemblages in Arun Kolatkar's Kala Ghoda Poems* explores the embodiment of Mumbai's human and built landscape in poetic form. As Padil shows, the renowned English-language collection *Kala Ghoda Poems* (2004), by Marathi-English writer Arun Kolatkar (1932-2004), presents the city of Mumbai as a living organism where humans, objects, animals, and matter coexist and intermingle. Using Jane Bennett's vital materialism and Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblage, Padil demonstrates that Kolatkar perceives the poet as a 'sensitive witness': an observer attentive to the potency of quotidian things and the latent life of banality. The compositions in *Kala Ghoda Poems*, whether they evoke stray dogs or street sweepers, reveal a vibrant urban ecology, where matter acts and connects. Padil thus argues that Kolatkar's oeuvre is characterized by a posthumanist and poetic vision of the world, in which the traditional human/non-human hierarchy is dismantled, paving the way for an ethic of care and cohabitation within the modern city.

In her essay *Delhi in the Shadow of Partition*, Anne Castaing demonstrates how fiction reveals the way cities reflect cultural and social transformations. Castaing's essay explores how literary works from the Hindi literary movement *naī kahānī* depict the city of Delhi in the early 1950s, a period characterized by the lingering effects of the mass migrations that occurred as a result of the 1947 Partition in North India and Pakistan. Whereas in the 1950s, Hindi fiction seemed to obscure events that were nevertheless very recent, it is precisely the representation of the city that serves to remind the reader of their persistence, akin to a permanent shadow. As historian Gyanendra Pandey has written, "the Delhi of the 1950s to the 1980s was a 'Partition' city" (1997: 2263). Castaing asks, how did the city itself adapt and cope with the lingering effects and 'residues' of Partition, particularly during a time when historians exhibited a strong inclination to 'move on'?

In his article *The Somnath of my Imagination*, Maaz Bin Bilal focuses on the city of Benares, popularly represented as a metonym for Hindu India. In contrast to such a formulation, Bilal emphasizes the city's significant Muslim presence and its sociocultural contributions to it, as expressed by Mirza Ghalib's (1797-1869) long Persian poem in praise of Benares, *Chiragh-e-Dair* (1826), translated as *Temple Lamp* (2022). As Bilal shows, Ghalib offers a distinctive Indo-Persian composite perspective on the cosmopolitan nature of the city, emplacing Benares within a diverse and capacious geographic and cultural imaginary, grounded both in the local landscape and connected to a wide set of other cities and cultures.

Movement characterizes the experience of the city in these essays: travel through and within the city, and travel to and from the urban centre. People come, and people go. So, too, with cultures. Travel through and to the city is structured by time: movement relentlessly forward, which looks both back and ahead. And so it is also with the city, which the essays show is portrayed in diverse literary works as being enlivened by multiple temporalities and connected with divergent histories. The fluidity of time is lived in tension with the seeming solidity of place. We saw in the first volume of this special issue that the city is imagined as a place of promise, and because of that, also a site of betrayal. Urbanity takes shape in both. In this volume, we see the city constituted by divergent histories, and lived in visceral terms. Across them, we see urbanity as a domain of contestation, and—at times—the promise of something more than ourselves.

Coda

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Part 1 Urbanity as Futurity: Seven Points of a Southern Constellation

1. *Navigating by a Southern Constellation of Cities*.

Demands for novel theories of the city erupt from southern corners, where leaps into a distant future overtake the usual traffic of urban tropes stemming from a now classical, even quaint, European modernity. The North Star (Polaris) of the Western urban experience seems now dimmed and of relatively less utility for grasping where global humanity is veering. No time is as out of joint and no infrastructure as disjunct as that of the southern metropolis today. The speed of transformation is such that one is lifted off the ground, leaving behind the sands of past time. But apart from an ephemeral sense of euphoric rise, one feels oneself careening headlong toward unknown disasters. The juxtaposition of a pulled rickshaw and a driverless car portends a potential collision that knows no precedent. In stepping over centuries, one departs from usual scales of measure for tracking something that used to go by the name of 'progress'. I recall nearly falling into holes while riding my bicycle through unlit nights in Lucknow. In retrospect, those times seem drole. The disparate infrastructures were still commensurate somehow, but laughably mismatched and discontinuous. Now those holes seem to be gaping in de-territorialized spaces—perhaps above the skyscraper, or somewhere in the distant horizon. Crashing temporalities portend other more dire *naufragios* ahead: the southern city of today maybe a cautionary tale for the future, for we are now moving under the more perplexing constellation of the Southern Cross (Crux).

2. *Ne pas flâner ici.*

How long until the masses break through the walls? A city gate may be as well equipped for blocking the swelling demographics of a place like India—exceeding 1.4 billion today—as it would a tsunami. With the prospect of employment for these numbers becoming bleaker by the day, the simmering rage and hunger of the people may likely erupt into an uncontrollable conflagration. A planetary future without mass employment is already underway with India becoming its test case. The news underscores what is already obvious: "There . . . need to be jobs. That's a longstanding deficiency for a top-heavy and at times gridlocked economy that must somehow produce 90 million new jobs before 2030, outside agriculture, to keep employment rates steady. Even in the years immediately before the pandemic, India was falling far short of that pace" (Mashal and Travelli 2023: A1). What a jobless mass portends for a city like Delhi is already not pretty. Rana Dasgupta mentions a 'compound' feel that has taken hold of that city. "No more those gentle practices of the past—those middle-class boys who took beds down to the street to sleep incautiously in the open air on hot nights. Such trust of the outsider and the street was put away, and middle-class families replaced their thigh-high walls with ten-foot spiked steel gates" (Dasgupta 2015: 337). Walled-off enclaves are fertile zones for fantasies of mass expulsion. If only those impoverished throngs could be removed, I could go for an urban stroll, thinks the Indian elite. Never mind the air pollution, too diffuse for focusing one's anger. Agoraphobia combines with claustrophobia for a general sense of unease. The new gated communities—little "islands of California in a sea of sub-Saharan Africa"—give an unexpected spin to the carceral archipelago of yesteryear (Drèze and Sen 2015: ix). In the grand hotel abyss, no flânerie is permitted.

3. *Let us now praise shopping malls.*

I witnessed the coming of the escalator-equipped shopping malls in New Delhi with a sense of bemusement, knowing that the escalator itself would provide ample entertainment on any given afternoon. But I sensed such occasions would be few for I could predict that the new malls would not include even on the mezzanine floor the bookstore I wanted to browse. Alas, there would likely be no bookstore at all in these spaces, or if there was one, it would be about as well stocked as the airport bookstand with the same bestsellers I saw on display in Amsterdam's Schiphol, or before that at SFO, or before that in the Great Mall in Milpitas (or was it somewhere in Newark?). Little does it matter. But one should not digress about such trivialities as books and their special out-of-the-way places when it comes to these impressive monstrosities, separating themselves from their workaday surroundings and old circular counterparts, the now dilapidated attraction of a bygone moment of modernity. More important things are on display in the ultramodern malls in order to give one a better sense of all that money can buy. One's entry into the new mall is at once onto the plane of the surface relations that the money-form sustains. One is momentarily lifted from the Indian surroundings and alights upon the generic gleam of a hyperreality that may be found just as well elsewhere. Money is the great leveler, if only at the level of appearances and symbolizations. This is because, as Marx noticed, "the money-form of the thing is external to the thing itself, being simply the form of appearance of human relations hidden behind it" (Marx 1867[1976]: 185). Money seduces us to ignore those relations, at least for the moment. The commodity that money can purchase secures the symbolization of human equality even for those who can ill afford it. The bling is the thing: shiny distractions from underlying realities and persistent inequalities. Not reducible to a mere symbol—though it may be replaced by symbols of all kinds—money, in the form of the evermore efficiently produced commodity, demonstrates a peculiar capacity to cover up social divisions. This aspect of the fetish even the most simple-minded are able to grasp. The significance of the overarching picture is that a common global pattern is taking hold in the shopping malls of the world. The de-differentiation of the disparate places on the world's map—for which the contemporary shopping mall is emblematic—follows on the heels of the neoliberal privatization of public space. This may be so obvious today that the consequences may be missed, which is, in the words of the architect and design theorist Rem Koolhaas, that "the situation is so logical that there is no space to change anything. That is the brilliance of this [late-capitalist consumerist] system: in spite of its patent insanity, it has established itself as the ultimate reality principle" (Koolhas 2001: 202). The entire world is crazy, but ever more in the same way. Nothing makes this clearer than the spatiality of the traffic jam in Delhi today, where you usually cannot even move. The full occupation of public roadways by private automobiles—that is, private spaces meant to be mobile—results in an acute incapacity for all to move. Yet a fancy car is de rigueur for the so-called upwardly mobile in 'Hell-hi'.

4. *Welcome to Parricide City!*

Let us turn to one of these fictional—but for all that no less real—hired drivers of one of these fancy cars. Some significant, if barely conscious, point is being articulated in Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* (2008), adapted to film in 2021 by Ramin Bahrani, regarding the city, parricide, and social transformation in contemporary India. The penetration of the money-economy into all sectors of society generates desires and fantasies that reach back into parricide—what Freud called "the principal and primal crime of humanity as well as of the individual" (Freud 1928[1997]: 240)[1]—and becomes the staging ground for a new round of

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[1] "Der Vatermord is nach bekannter Auffassung das Haupt - und Urverbrechen der Menschheit wie des einzelnen" (Freud 1963: 92).

what Marx called 'primitive accumulation'. The return of primitivity in this tale of murder is expressed broadly by animal metaphors; indeed, our protagonist himself goes from being a 'country mouse' to a 'rooster' before finally escaping the coup and ascending to the status of the eponymous 'white tiger'. In this transformation, which is at once individual and collective on various scales, the crucial turning point takes place in the city. For reasons not unconnected to the money nexus, Delhi becomes at once the site where our murderous driver, one Balram Halwai, experiences radical individuation (a breakdown of the social ties and the capacity to fashion himself as a purely self-interested subject) which goes hand in hand with a noticeable loosening of psychic constraints. In other words, the city is where the resentful dream-wish can have full reign and push the subject toward parricide and primitive accumulation. It is worth noting in this regard that the figure of the father is split into two in this novel. Balram's actual father, the source of much resentment for his weakness and social fall "all the way to the mud, to the level of a rickshaw-puller" is undone by tuberculosis. It is on account of him, Balram writes, that "I was cheated of my destiny to be fat, and creamy-skinned, and smiling" (Adiga 2008: 54). Though killed off by a tragic fate, this father is nonetheless a font of guilt for Balram, appearing hauntingly alongside him at traffic stops as ghostly ephemeron (in the film). Because the psychic binds of familial life in India can hardly tolerate such manifestations of parricidal dream-wishes, they must be displaced onto other, less charged objects. Hence, Balram confesses, "I could gloat that I am not just *any* murderer, but one who killed his own employer (who is a kind of second father)"… (ibid.). Yet the larger framework asserted by the novel and the film exceeds that of individual psychology and its Oedipal motivations (though these are certainly intact). The resentment against the father operates at the level of the nation. Gandhi and other national founding figures are ensnared by innuendo in its infernal machinations and implicitly blamed for the penury and impeded desires of Balram and his like. Again, it will take killing them all off to accumulate capital in the primitive manner befitting the trope of parricide. The new Indian cityscape combines the modern and the primordial in unexpected ways. The rise of the new man in the Indian city as a 'white tiger' necessitates such moral harm, otherwise how else is India to catch up with its neighbouring Asian tigers?

5. *Rebel City (Manqué).*

> It refreshes me to hear her talk. She too is part of this city. She reminds me of what I love in the friends I have here: a fierce intelligence searching for a better arrangement of the world. This too is Delhi culture, but it is what you could call the city's minor culture. It rarely rises to the surface of things. (Dasgupta 2015: 255)

Where does all the anger from the daily grind of the city go? Does it somehow get shed into the ambient noise of evening traffic, and dissipate before sunrise, only to build up again the following day? Those raucous bus rides from the city centre to my erstwhile neighbourhood in the southern extensions of New Delhi give me some indication. The rhythmic beating of metal, the pounding of feet, and the collective yelling of a recent pop hit seemed to suffice to tune out the screeching of brakes and the blaring of horns. But did it expunge the collective soul of its anger? For the noisome qualities of the city—the extreme decibel levels, and not just the smells—do seem to have the swirl of anger about them. Or does the anger get deposited in some out-of-the-way urn buried underground so no one else can see it? Is there an invisible city somewhere below or to the dark side of the flyovers—some faintly visible stretch of urban expanse for the gentle dispersal of one's anger? These marginal zones are worthy of more attention, and I will have to find again those uncanny streets that drew me to them, though I intended to go another direction and thought all the while that I was reaching a different destination. In fact, one does not have to go far. If one does not already inhabit them, a mere mistaken turn in one's guesthouse could lead to the cramped hovels of the servants' quarters where a hospitable, slightly embarrassed curiosity may welcome one for a short while. Such

spaces demand longer periods of loitering than I was able to afford—or was granted—on those occasions. The city's heterogeneity emerges from these liminal locales. As several observers have pointed out, the city itself is a product of their numerous hands, brought in from afar in the morning and pushed back out by nightfall. Without their coordinated labours, the city would unravel. Exploitation is never very convenient, but the sense of being deprived of rights to the very city where it takes place inevitably generates massive indignation. Yet the fantasy of murdering one's superiors merely keeps the same structure in place. This is a point made in passing in *White Tiger*: If only we had the courage to exert our aggression against a guard blocking the way to a shopping mall, as one poor man does, then we, says one of the drivers, "we'd rule India, and they would be polishing our boots" (ibid.: 126). Such expressions are symptomatic of an atavistic breakdown of the socius at several levels in the contemporary Indian city, if not across a wider urban swathe. The fact of class domination reveals the deeply embedded heterogeneity of the work that comes into play, the spatial separations that the neoliberal order imposes, the uneven geographies that the city reproduces and takes advantage of. The struggle and cunning of working people just to get to work on a daily basis exceeds all the feats of the so-called great men of history. Such acknowledgements remind one of what has been collectively forgotten in the workaday routines of the masses today, namely that, as Benjamin recognized, "along with the growth of the big cities there developed the means of raising them to the ground" (Benjamin 1974[2023]: 85).[2]

6. *Waste and Money, or the Body of Filthy Lucre.*

> Ragpicker or poet – the refuse concerns both, and both go about their business in solitude at times when the citizens indulge in sleep…(Benjamin 1974[2003]: 80, slightly revised)

> Lumpensammler oder Poet – der Abhub geht beide an; beide gehen einsam ihrem Gewerbe nach, zu Stunden, wo die Bürger dem Schlafe frönen… (Benjamin 1974: 79)

A note must be inserted regarding the dialectic of capital as money and waste, as industrial captain and ragpicker, as pure movement and as toxic ground, as glorified display in the city centre and as a sea of refuse displaced onto the margins of the city. If keeping capital up and running takes metabolizing nature into garbage, whether as commodities to fill tract houses, or later as refuse to feed landfills, then we must see money as no longer simply the measure of value, the means of circulation of commodities, as means of payment, as a hoard of savings, but rather as the expression of toxic trash. The finitude of the earth's surface indicates the limits to a spatial fix when it comes to waste. This aspect of money gives new meaning to the phrase 'filthy lucre'. The scatological dimension of money is no longer containable but is now writ large. As is money – fungible, interchangeable, amassable – so is its counterpart, waste. The social and perhaps even biological distinctions upon which the economy depends – whether of species, class, caste, gender, or religion – become nearly indistinguishable in the excreted materiality that the system generates. This is the natural-historical corrective to the social hierarchies and divisions. But the spatial ordering on the surface is what still matters. At the extreme of the city, the nature of capital becomes the wasted body, the body of the indigent subject bereft of her own energy, the waste-body. There is no longer a guarantee that the miseries of capitalist ecology can be sequestered and meted out to only the downtrodden. A poetics of the waste-body is now needed to wake up those citizens indulging in sleep, lest

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[2] "Und wie wuchsen seither mit den großen Städten die Mittel, sie dem Erdboden gleichzumachen" (Benjamin 1974: 85).

their dreams too become not just contaminated but inhabited by the refuse of filthy lucre (cf. Gidwani and Maringanti 2016: 112-133, Gidwani 2018: 187-207).

7. *The solution is the city.*

> . . . in establishing our city, we aren't aiming to make any one group outstandingly happy but to make the whole city so, as far as possible. (Socrates in Plato 1992: 95)

In a moment of authoritarian occupations of the city upon the heels of their long vilification—the moment from which I write—it must be noted that the city is today the site of solutions, possibilities, and pathways into a more sustainable, liveable future. The massive demographic shifts into the cities, especially in southern zones, demand this to be the case: global humanity, and much else, depends on the fulfilment of the city (as the city of fulfilment) (cf. Rem Koolhaas et al. 2000: 2-7, 24-29). Despite the neoliberal evisceration of urban life and its replacement with ersatz substitutes in recent decades, the urban realm remains the domain of futurity. This is most telling in the way the weak fascists of our times are threatened by the city's obliteration of their future. The city refuses. In doing so, it embodies spontaneously the beauty that was always a latent potentiality within its fissured sociality. This is revolutionary beauty—the modern καλλίπολις (*kallipolis*, beautiful city) (Plato 1992: 199). Both Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey have been correct in insisting that the future revolution must be urban, or not at all (Lefebvre 1970, Harvey 2012). One aspect of this beauty is the zone of cosmopolitan becoming and belonging that it affords for those who claim a right to it. World cities are ideally ones that provide wide access, shed restrictions, and allow an imagination of worlds to come. Against the grain of nationalist chauvinisms and exclusions, today's beautiful cities present experiences of interchangeability, uncanny refraction, overlapping memories, and sensoria of terrestrial belonging. The city of the future which has already begun to take shape is one that strives for the harmonization of collective aspiration and spatial distribution.

Part 2 City as Network of Encounter: Situations of Desire, Memory, and Movement

> Cites are an ensemble of so many things: of memory, of desires, of signifying systems; cities are sites of exchange, as all books of economic history prove, but these exchanges are not only exchanges of commodities, they are exchanges of words, of desires, of memories. (my translation)

> Le città sono un insieme di tante cose: di memoria, di desideri, di segni d'un linguaggio; le città sono luoghi di scambio, come spiegano tutti i libri di storia dell'economia, ma questi scambi non sono soltanto scambi di merci, sono scambi di parole, di desideri, di ricordi. (Italo Calvino 1993: x)

8. *A Short Manual on How to Enter Cities*

A) Before it is too late and you have already entered the city fully armed with maps and a stuffed fanny pack, take everything off. Bare yourself to your desires, strip your protections down to a minimum, and step into chance. The city wants you porous, not buffered.

B) The more one gives into the city's desire of you, the more it gives back in the way of raw experience. That is why an entry by tunnel or bridge is optimal, as is always maintaining some mobility. The city wants you on the move so it can take you into its passageways more easily. Darkness should never be feared in cities, only observed. Memories should illuminate the obscure corners in the near distance.

C) It may be worth noting which body of water is nearby; that it is the Persian Gulf and not the Red Sea, for instance, or the East River and not the Hudson. The most basic geography will do. Let the patterns of skyscrapers maintain your equilibrium. Nothing more than sound should be your compass.

D) Recall as you stroll along water that in antiquity the cosmos gave signs of pliability to human will and that the polis strove for correspondence, the overcoming of distance, and the scent of attractions. One must bring one's most capacious sense of belonging to urbanity's edge. Also never forget that eudaemonia must never negate the aleatory ἡδονή (*hedone*, pleasure) of the city.

E) Among the encounters along one's way will be death. It is permitted to not know whether you are pursuing the recently deceased or they are pursuing you. A beaming light reflecting like a sudden flash through your path must never be denied for the memory it bears. Flashes are your friend's smile, now deceased. Their lightning speed is a record of his thought, now imparted to you.

F) Consider the bump you tripped over as a sprinkling of the unknown under your nose. Some scrapes must naturally be endured, but make sure they are on concrete and not on other living beings. A decent level of inebriation is required by nightfall, meaning that some stumbling is in store for you. Make sure that whatever underworld you fall into has elevators at the end of each corridor.

9. *No to de Certeau*

If one could generalize for a moment, the Indian city demands a distinct set of theoretical coordinates other than those on offer in the urban thought stemming from Western locations. For instance, Michel de Certeau's now classic ruminations on walking in the city may very well apply to New York City, with its towering observation decks and grid-like formations below, but such a geometry rarely applies to the more daunting intricacies and dangers of the Indian urban scene (De Certeau 1984: 91-110).[3] Even if there is an observation deck, such as the Pramod Navalkar Viewing Gallery in Mumbai, it is rather more horizontal than vertical, hardly affording the abstraction of the gaze from the maze of traffic below. One learns from immersion into the noise downward how to form cognitive maps of the tattered, discontinuous urban fabric. Walking is disrupted, never so straightforward, always tinged with peril, rarely encouraged by the those doing the designing. Social hierarchies map onto modes of transportation, with the foot being so disparaged as to not even count. Thus, de Certeau's strategies of administrative control from on high and tactics of disordering down below seem to fall into the gaps of the Indian sidewalk, as do so often those who need to stroll to their destinations. The strategy, if one can call it that, appears one of purposeful neglect, not administrative competence (Kolatkar 2010: 140).

> Aren't these blocks of concrete wonderful?
> Let's not forget to thank
> Whoever it was that invented them.

And accordingly, the tactics of those on the street—for the sidewalks often end abruptly and leave one on the precipice of oncoming traffic—do not amount to an avoidance of the geometries of the urban planners in fanciful or idiosyncratic ways as de Certeau imagines, but rather a will to survive. Wherever one can stand seems fit for setting up a stand for anyone

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[3] This was originally published as "Marches dans la ville" (1990). In *L'invention du quotidien, tome 1: Arts de faire*, pp. 139-164. Paris: Gallimard.

hawking wares or services. Never mind one might need a tactic for just getting by the obstructions. If only vines descended conveniently into concrete jungles. So much for theories and models of urban existence stemming from Paris or Chicago; much more instructive for the theorist of Indian cities would be to join and track the movements of those who must move by foot. The understandings of urban space embedded in their movements would open new vistas of conceptualization rarely dared by the ethnographer: the timing of crossings, the manipulation of light and shadow, the momentary assertion of presence against the onslaught of vehicles, the chase before deadly urethane. These denizens of the crumbling streets and sidewalks are not so averse to order, structure, and totalities so long as they are included, and their safety is a concern. All lead to mental maps and practical skills that do not translate well onto paper. Once one is again at a standstill, one might realize that this discontinuity, like that of death, suggests metonymy as the master trope of the Indian stroll. Rather than giving itself to a continuous stream of recollection, one is jutted from memory to flashing presence, dreamscape to hellscape, desire to disgust. I for some reason have been dreaming of a rush of boars through the gutters of some Indian city, as if provoked by some gash in the urban scene from a peculiar distance, or a cry of coyotes outside my bedroom window. De Certeau had never made it this far into the wilds of survival by foot in contemporary India, and, alas, could hardly be expected to dream of a riposte from an unexpected angle.

10. *In Memory of Asad Haider*

Little did I imagine that in these cities of ever more unfamiliar faces, I would encounter yours at so many turns even though you had just died. Perhaps it was the unusual mix of urban scenes—New York City and Abu Dhabi, a curious layering of the familiar and the unfamiliar—that brought you into my field of vision from an unusual distance of recollection. When you left Santa Cruz a few years ago, communication tapered off to a long silent goodbye. I heard you had gone down a treacherous stretch, but the news of your death as I was on my way to the airport was too unexpected to be absorbed right away, perhaps for being too incongruous with your seemingly indomitable cheer for life, or for being too much at odds with the pleasant California warmth pouring through the windows. I put the thought out of my head as soon as the phone call ended. Too unreal to ponder, too out of step with reality, surely. New York was where we were to meet again—you already seated at the far end of the bar, upright with a negroni at hand, laughing with the bartender as I made my entrance. You would have the libidinal energy of the place already mapped out in your mind. But instead, your passing could barely be mentioned on account of the presence of children. When we, your mutual friends, walked to the wine store the city seemed momentarily empty. And the silence too was unwarranted. We could do no more than acknowledge that you were no longer among us in the time before we were back with the children. That same night I made my way to another airport in a dark, nearly empty bus. Nothing is worth recalling of the transfer, except being seated next to a Palestinian family who were happily on their way back to Abu Dhabi where they had taken refuge decades ago. They were so cute that I was distracted from the devastation that had fallen upon their relatives and friends back home in recent years. This too was no moment to talk of the mounting deaths. The daughter pulled down the shade on the window when it came time to descend. Gaggles of lights shown against the dark gulf below us and the desert on the horizon. I needed a drink when I got to the hotel, but none was on offer. But the next day, you seemed somewhere in the vicinity, especially once the sun was setting. I caught the sunset from the seventy-fourth floor of a tower, thinking about Michel de Certeau while taking in the Persian Gulf, the islands connected by freeways, the palaces changing colours, a strangely even skyline on some boulevards, mosques with fluorescent green minarets, the Cornish with its walkway extending back to my hotel along the beach, luring me down, as did the salty warm breeze. People were coming out of their sarcophagi, and the babel of languages haunted the dusk, including the Urdu of your ancestry. We could have discussed

Marx and urban theory, I thought, slightly disoriented by the signs coming at me. Shouldn't Dubai be in the other direction, and what is the way to Al Ain, anyway? Why is Sharjah spelled with a *qaf* instead of a *jim*? Some opium would have helped slow the pace of the people down to a death crawl. Is that you over in the umbrous distance, looking out at the water? The distance seems not to dissipate as I near. Soon I will be back in my palatial room, looking out at the orderly streets below, where nothing seems to be happening. Soon I will be back at my desk writing these lines, thinking about Marxism, about the city, about the desert, and about the memories we were supposed to have.

11. Dérive *from City to City*

> For the sake, therefore, of witnessing, upon as large a scale as possible, a spectacle with which my sympathy was so entire, I used often, on Saturday nights, after I had taken opium, to wander forth, without much regarding the direction or the distance, to all the markets, and other parts of London, to which the poor resort on a Saturday night, for laying out their wages. (Quincey 1841[1850]: 64)

Let this essay wander far into the distance, perhaps into another city, even without noticing one has stumbled upon another region of the world entirely. Such a *dérive* across seamless urbanscapes is a marker of an enlivening interconnectivity that cities offer today, produced no doubt by the rush of human immediacy and the mediacy of commodities and services (Debord 1981[2006]: 62-66). At moments the points of intersection extend outward and encompass oneself, as when one becomes the spectacle one is watching. Along the way, the dialectical possibilities must be noted, especially the one about being at once cosmopolitan and tribal: the former in the sense of global partnerships and a commitment to a collective transnationality, the latter in the sense of local belonging, identification with sports teams, a jealously guarded reputation of the entire city. The tensions between these extremes generate a dynamism of structure and anti-structure. In the interim, between the oppositions, we come across a zone of eros and friendship, of reconnection and possibility, all because of the poetics that wandering the city affords. In the excitement that the image magnifies, I am reminded of the lightning storm that extended along the horizon for hundreds of miles on my flight back from the Middle East. The randomness of the flashes, the unpredictability of their movement, the wonder that they struck me with, the fact that it went on for so long—all produced a cautious hope, a renewed awe looking down at Cairo, and a sense of the future affordance of an open-hearted, collective self-abandon in the city…

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Research Article

A City in Time: Urban Imaginaries in Colonial-era Historiography of Lahore

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Syad Muhammad Latif's *Lahore: Its History, Architectural Remains and Antiquities*, *with an Account of its Modern Institutions, Inhabitants, their Trade, Customs, &c*. published in 1892, provides extensive documentation of Lahore's history, buildings, culture, and the lifestyles of its residents. In this essay, I undertake an analysis of Latif's *Lahore* to understand how he constructs Lahore as a modern city through its historical narrative, imagining the city to be a temporal entity rather than a spatial one. Though he describes the spatial features of the city like its buildings and monuments, he remains more concerned with the city's place in the scheme of time, from its 'ancient' period to its arrival at 'modernity'—a movement enabled through the narrative logic of colonial historiography. The paper contrasts Latif's work to that of his contemporary Noor Ahmad Chishti to understand what alternative temporalities could look like in the historical imagination of Lahore.

Lahore, *colonial*, *historiography*, *modernity*, *guidebooks*

Introduction

Syad Muhammad Latif's *Lahore: Its History, Architectural Remains and Antiquities*, *with an Account of its Modern Institutions, Inhabitants, their Trade, Customs, &c*. published in 1892, provides extensive documentation of Lahore's history, buildings, culture, and the lifestyles of its inhabitants. Little is known about the immediate success or reception of the book when it was published. Humera Alam, a former research officer at the Lahore Museum, notes that "though the writings of Latif are almost a century old, these have stood the test of time," and have become "standard for historical research" on Lahore (1987: 348). Her observation suggests the enduring legacy of Latif's work which still forms the foundation of most contemporary scholarship on Lahore (see Glover 2008, for instance, as discussed below), and yet this book has received little critical attention.[1]

Syad Muhammad Latif was born in Lahore in either 1847 or 1851.[2] His father, Muhammad Azeem, founded the *Lahore Chronicle*, an English-language newspaper in 1849, and

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[1] There have been some minor attempts to problematize Latif's book. Talbot and Kamran note that Latif perpetuated the idea that the walled part of Lahore city was inward-looking and closed off. He contrasted 'modern' parts of the city with its 'traditional' parts i.e. the walled city (Talbot and Kamran 2017: 1, 17). Manan Ahmed Asif also engages with Latif's text in his recent book, but his treatment of this work is brief and cursory. He mostly describes Latif's praise for British rule. In fact, Asif notes in his critique of a later historian, Muhammad Baqir's, work on Lahore from 1952 that it reproduces the colonial history narrative that includes James Mill's periodization of Indian history. He has, however, not noted the same phenomena in Latif's writing (Asif 2024: 81-83).

[2] Citing from Syed Mohammad Minhajuddin who wrote in 1956, Shafique identifies Latif's year of birth as 1851 (2018: 9). Alam on the other hand notes that according to the Civil and Military Gazette of 1892, Latif was born in 1847 (Alam 1987: 358).

afterwards, *Punjabi*, an Urdu-language newspaper. Latif received a Western-style education at the University of Calcutta, where he was trained in law (Alam 1987: 350). He began working for the British government in India, first as a translator and then as a Reader at the Punjab Chief Court before progressing to the role of Assistant Commissioner at Hoshiarpur in 1880 (Shafique 2018: 9). When his *History of the Panjáb* was published in 1891, he was working as Extra Judicial Assistant Commissioner of Gurdaspur. He was also a fellow at Panjab University. In 1898, he was appointed Divisional Judge of Lahore and Hoshiarpur and went on to serve as District and Sessions judge in various districts of Punjab until his death in 1902 (Alam 1987: 351). In 1892, he received the title of 'Khan Bahadur' in recognition of his services to the British government in India. Latif is the author of historical works on Punjab (1888, 1891), Multan (1891), Lahore (1892), and Agra (1896). He is best known for his work *History of the Panjáb* (1891) which was recommended by the Punjab Government to be presented to Queen Victoria, who presented an award to Latif for this book in 1897 and bestowed him with the title of *Shamsul'ulamā* [Sun of the Scholars] (Shafique 2018: 10).

As noted earlier, Latif's *Lahore* has been foundational for scholarship on Lahore, including William Glover's seminal work: *Making Lahore Modern* (2008). Glover shows how the British government re-designed parts of colonial Lahore with the belief that material objects had the "power to shape human conduct" and so, the "moral state" of the city depended on its "physical state" (2008: xxi). According to this paradigm, filth, congestion, and disorder affected morality, and that new, reformed spaces like the Model Town would create reformed colonial subjects. Glover focuses on the imagination of the 'modern city' in 19th century urban discourse, especially on the "relationship between spatial organization and moral development" (2008: 29). He argues that functional changes in the city like zoning, administration, sanitation and commercial activity, were believed to inculcate a modern ethos among its inhabitants to make them more rational, moral and orderly subjects (2008: xxi, 54, 187). According to this rationale, place structures the inhabitation of modernity for residents of the city; it shapes them in physical, material terms.

In this paper, I analyse Latif's *Lahore* to understand how he constructs Lahore as a modern city through its historical narrative. Despite the seemingly locative logic of Latif's *Lahore,* framed around this city as a place, I argue that Latif imagines the city primarily in temporal, rather than spatial terms. Though he describes the spatial features of the city like its buildings and monuments, he remains more concerned with the city's place in the scheme of time, from its 'ancient' period to its arrival at the modern moment, enabled through its inclusion in the British empire. For this, I focus on the historical sections of his book, which are key to understanding the descriptive sections. For Latif, the city achieves modernity not because of certain infrastructure or cultural attainments, but primarily through its place in a historical narrative. For anything to be 'modern', it must display a decisive break with its past.[3] This break from the past constitutes a vital feature of the identity of a colonial city. As such, the historiographical discourse gives the city its identity. Taking my cue from Glover that "any city is constituted as much imaginatively as it is physically" (2008: xv), I highlight that Latif's constitutive imagination of the city is temporal; it is only through Lahore's placement in linear time that it can gain its modern identity. This modern identity can only be 'seen' through textual representation, and as such, reading replaces visual perception as the primary mode of knowing the city. I also contrast Latif's depiction of Lahore with that of his contemporary, Noor Ahmad Chishti, to show how Lahore and its temporal imaginary is very different in other textual traditions.

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[3] See Reinhart Koselleck and Jean-François Lyotard's ideas regarding modernity and its discourse in the 19th century as summarized in Esposito (2024).

Writing about the city: Colonial Historiography and the Travel Guidebook

What is the genre of Latif's book? In his own words, he intends for it to be a "guide-book for the information of travellers", and to fulfil the "want of a history of this Imperial city" (1892: ii-iii). The two genres that Latif outlines for his work warrant some attention as they constitute two of what have been described by Bernard Cohn as the primary 'investigative modalities' of colonial forms of knowledge i.e. history and travel-writing (Cohn 2009: 118). Guidebooks became a popular form of Orientalist writing after railways substantially increased European travel to India in the mid-19th century. Initial guidebooks were published in Britain, but later Indian guidebooks written in the style of their British predecessors, entered the market (Mukhopadhyay 2014: 658). This form of writing was also taken up by Indian nationalists such as Bharatendu Harishchandra, Navinchandra Sen, and Surendranath Ray. Travel guides became popular not just among European travellers visiting India but Indian tourists and travellers as well, who benefitted from the rail system and were literate. Such books were also important from a nation-building lens as they created a "panopticon of a single and coherent India" (Dutta 2019: 20).

Latif writes his book with both a foreign and a local audience in mind. He expresses hope that the "young reader" will not "suffer himself to be an unconcerned spectator of the great improvements…but will learn such lessons as will make him a better citizen and a better subject" (1892: xiii). The lessons of history are thus aimed at his fellow countrymen, and yet the language of the text suggests that he anticipates a foreign audience as well. In many parts of the book, he explains Indian geographies through comparisons to Europe. For instance, he calls Delhi "the Rome of Asia", the Jama Masjid in Lahore the "Mohamedan Cathedral" and the marketplace of the Moti Mahal, the "'Regent Street' of Lahore" (Latif 1892: i, 92). This form of comparison was not uncommon in colonial writings wherein the 'represented' India existed as a translation of Europe. Through these comparisons, "Rammohun Roy [was] the 'Luther of Brahmanism,' …Vyasa was the 'Indian Homer,' and Kalidasa the 'Indian Shakespeare'" (White 2013: 186). Such comparisons were also not unique to Latif's guidebook as the colonial travel modality helped Europeans navigate colonial spaces by "seeing the sights in predictable ways" (Cohn 2009: 120).

Guidebooks also relied on colonial history-writing practices to narrativize Indian spaces. For instance *Cook's Indian Tours* (1882) by Thomas Cook, like many later guidebooks "relied on the colonially constructed history of the Punjab contained in the official gazetteers to recount Lahore's past…the official history juxtaposed a magnificent, but decayed, monumental past with the modernity of imperial rule" (Talbot and Kamran 2017: 71). Before 19th century guidebooks, the British travelogues of Delhi had created a similar narrative as they contrasted the magnificent past of the city with a state of ruin preceding British rule. Such descriptions laid the groundwork for the expanding colonial power to draw a picture of "an Orient whose heyday was a thing of the past and whose future belonged to the British" (Pernau 2013: 163). This is no different to Latif's narrative of Lahore, which follows the same plot. Latif narrates Lahore's story from the "the rise of the city during the Mughal period, after which it fell into a period of decay" and then "after centuries of misrule and anarchy, the British, …became the masters of the country" (Latif 1892: viii).

The 'historiographic modality' of colonial knowledge production, as explained by Bernard Cohn was premised on "the ideological construction of the nature of Indian civilizations, as typified in the major historical writings of Alexander Dow, Robert Orme, Charles Grant, Mark Wilks, James Mill, and James Tod;" these works partook in "the formation of a legitimizing discourse about Britain's civilizing mission in India" (Cohn, 2009 119). In part, this was achieved by undertaking a periodization of South Asian history. James Mill's seminal work *The History of*

British India (1817) divided Indian history into three volumes. While the first volume was about the British East India Company, the second was about the Hindu period, and the third was about the "Mahomedans". His book thus split Indian history into three eras: the ancient being Hindu, the medieval being Muslim, and the modern being British. Gyanendra Pandey has noted that this periodization of Indian history within colonial historiography superimposes the European trajectory of having an 'ancient', 'medieval', and 'modern' period, and divides Indian history into religious categories up until the British rule. Further, this "historical reconstruction was characterized by an emptying out of all history—in terms of the specific variations of time, place, class, issue—from the political experience of the people, and the identification of religion, or the religious community, as the moving force of all Indian politics" (1990: 24). This periodization had tremendous impact as Mill's book became the standard textbook for training British civil servants who were going to serve in India, and was also taught at Oxford and Cambridge universities (Singh and Maheshwari 2024: 7).

Latif's imagination of Lahore is primed by a notion of periodized time in colonial historiography. This periodization or fragmentation of time allowed writers like Latif to imagine that a city can both have a past and, simultaneously, break away from it. The Lahore of his time is imagined as the successor to a once-great city, which is configured as past. The city's 'modern' identity is thus constituted by its ability to move through multiple eras and arrive in the present moment of glory. This is reflected in the way Latif structures his book, dividing it up into 'The Ancient Period', which includes everything until the end of Ranjit Singh's empire, and the 'The Modern Period', which starts after the British annexation of Punjab in 1849. Chapter 1 is titled *Lahore: Historical* and it begins with the earliest mentions of Lahore in the Sanskrit epic Ramayana, or what Latif calls "myth" (Latif 1892: 1). This 'historical' chapter ends with the British annexation of the Punjab in 1849. Chapter 2 is titled *Lahore: Descriptive (The Ancient Period)*. This chapter describes important sites in the city that date before British rule began in Lahore. Chapter 3, *Lahore: Descriptive (The Modern Period)* is about contemporary lifestyle, buildings, culture, amusement and–most recurrently–the 'improvements' made to the city post-British rule. The *Modern Buildings and Institutions* section of this chapter includes a description of museums, hospitals, schools, colleges, transport, railways, telegraph offices and such. Chapter 4, the last chapter, is titled *The Antiquities of Lahore*. This chapter is mostly dedicated to describing the artefacts kept in the Lahore Museum, which was in established 1865.

Like guidebooks and travelogues, colonial histories also served to legitimize British rule. James Mill proposed in his book that until colonial rule, India was a pre-civilization society, ruled by despots (Travers 2007: 6); a notion mirrored by Latif in his history of Lahore (1892: x-xi). Mill further believed that the British needed "to civilize the Indians" and "push them into history" (Van der Veer 2001: 6). Mill's work also affirms the Hegelian notion that Indians were outside of history. Hegel believed that Indians did not possess historical consciousness because of which they had "remained stationary and fixed" (Hegel 1899 [2001]: 156, 180). According to this discourse, it was the British who gave India historical consciousness and thus, a place in history. Such discourses found its way into 19th century urban writing such as Thomas Metcalfe's *Reminiscences of Imperial Delhi* (1844) which propounded that "following a long period of chaos, the history of the city was now safe in British hands. The implication was that the British had assumed responsibility for the Indian past and present and had made a much better job of it than the indigenous rulers were either able or willing to do" (Pernau 2013: 166).

Similarly, Latif also takes pains to prove that colonial rule was beneficial for Lahore and its residents and that the new order was not based on the destruction of the old, but rather on 'salvation from' the old. He portrays the coming of British rule as a reprieve from "rapacious invaders from without, or tyrannical despots within" (1892: viii). The notion of despotism was long used by Orientalist writers to characterize Islamic rule and justify colonial occupation, as

Edward Said shows in the case of Egypt (Said 1978 [2003]: 32-33). As stated above, Western historians such as James Mill had made the same case about India that it had "always been steeped in despotism and superstition" (Asher and Metcalf 1994: 1). In fact, this was a dominant theme of colonial historiography; colonial scholars needed to foster this view to justify British control of India, which is why colonial writings were so dedicated to demonstrating the failures of the civilizations they studied (Tartakov 1994: 17). Unsurprisingly then, Lahore emerges post its annexation by the British, as a site of "modern changes and improvements" with vegetation, gardens, canals, and metalled roads (Latif 1892: 252). 'Improvement' is the key word in his text. Latif makes British rule to be the telos of Lahore's history, which brought "triumphs of peace, of law and settled order" (Latif 1892: 382). However, it is no surprise that Latif's *Lahore* displays a "Western historiographical consciousness" (Goody 2006: 14) since the book was made possible due to the conditions of colonialism: its intellectual discourses, record-keeping practices, and its administrative institutions. Latif had access to these records and institutes because he was part of the colonial administrations' elite circles, as he states in his acknowledgements (Latif 1892: vii):

> the Provincial and Educational Reports, and other public correspondence and documents [were] kindly placed at my disposal by the Heads of Departments concerned…My acknowledgments are also due to J. L. Kipling Esq., C. I. E.. Principal of the Mayo School of Arts, Lahore, for the invaluable aid I received from him in collecting materials for this work from the Central Museum... to D. G. Maclagan, Esq., C. s., and to Rai Bahádur Ganga Ram, Executive Engineer, Lahore, Provincial Division, who, with the kind permission of E. E. Oliver, Esq., Superintending Engineer, 3rd Circle, most courteously placed at my disposal, the official records relating to the construction of modern buildings which materially assisted me in compiling an account of them.

Latif's acknowledgements affirm Sadhana Naithani's observations about 'colonizer-folklorists' whose position as colonial administrators was built into their research methodologies. Colonial intellectuals had state resources at their disposal which could be mobilized for purposes of knowledge production (Naithani 1997). Though he was not European like R. C. Temple about whom Naithani writes, Latif was certainly enabled to produce this work because of his attachments to the colonial state.

Latif thus squarely positions his work within the tradition of Western historiography. He envisions his work as a successor to T. H. Thornton's *A Brief Account of the History and Antiquities of Lahore* (1873). Thornton was also a colonial judge like Latif (Latif 1892: iii), and Latif took pains to distinguish his work as distinct from other vernacular or "local chronicles" and other "works extant on the old buildings of Lahore" (1892: iii, v). He dismisses the latter as either "containing little that is new" like in the case of Rai Bahadur Kanhaiya Lal's *Tārīkẖ-i Lahore*, or as full of discrepancies and errors, as in the case of Noor Ahmad Chishti's *Taḥqīqāt-i Chishtī*. He does not even categorize them as history, and instead calls them 'works on old buildings'. Latif further claims that "local chronicles, such as, *Khazinat-ul-Aulia*, *Sakinat-ul-Asfia*, *&c*.," give "very exaggerated accounts" of the lives of saints while "the general histories of India, such as, *Tabakat-i-Akbari*, *Ikbalnámá Jahángiri*, *Muntakhib-ul-Tawárikh, &c*., [sic] are devoted to describing wars, bestowing high panegyrics on individual persons in power or authority, or deprecating the conduct of others less favoured" (1892: iii). On top of his contentions with their content, he notes a more recurring trouble with these texts (1892: iii):

> Matters of local detail are enveloped in hazy diction and tedious hyperbole, and the difficulty of gleaning materials scattered over innumerable pages of voluminous books written after this fashion, with no index, and nothing to guide the reader to

their contents, and, in not a few instances, without even headings of the subjects treated of, can be better conceived than described.

Latif's critique of 'local chronicles' mirrors the British-colonial critique of the Indo-Persianate aesthetic and literary tradition.[4] The Anjuman-i Punjab, founded and presided over by G.W. Leitner, of which Latif was a part, was actively working towards reforming Urdu on the model of English language and prose, and removing the "highly poetic and abstruse terms associated with Persian verse" (Diamond 2009: 167). In what follows, Latif articulates a writing practice which closely resembles a European model. He writes that "Superfluities which abounded in [these] works have been carefully avoided in reducing into shape the present account, and it is hoped that the historical notes are as full as is compatible with precision for a work of reference like this" and that "brevity [has been] kept in view" when writing his work (1892: iv). His work contains all the indices, subheadings, and footnotes that these other works do not. He thus places his historiographical work within a different aesthetic-literary category, marked distinctly by principles of organization. Even though Latif's own work bestows "high panegyrics" on colonial rule and does "depracat[e] the conduct of those less favoured" such as those of "our countrymen [who] do not seem to have abandoned the ideas of primitive life" (1892: 261), he does not seem inclined to accept such similarities between himself and the chroniclers he criticizes. Instead, he uses the appeal of a distinct mode of rhetoric to set himself up as firmly belonging to the mode of historiography espoused by the colonial state.

Lahore's Temporality

Latif writes about modern Lahore that (1892: 87):

> …immense changes have also taken place since the annexation of the country in 1849, and the regions once waste and desolate, or covered with crumbling remains of old tombs and gateways, have been now transformed into fine gardens, grassy plains, metalled roads, lined on either side with shady trees, canals, public offices and picturesque European houses.

The changes made to Lahore's space may not have been as 'immense' as Latif suggests. Important buildings continued to crumble as pointed out by Noor Ahmad Chishti when describing the decaying state of Madhu Lal Hussain's tomb (1867: 89). Further, many new institutions in colonial Lahore were housed in existing Mughal and Ranjit Singh-era buildings, such as the Punjab Public Library, as discussed below. And yet, Latif's description is not so much a matter of material changes to space as it is about the dichotomy between the past and present. The city's movement from decay to development is a result of its movement from the 'ancient' to the 'modern' period. This movement—or in other words, the journey through time—is the organizing principle and the central motif of Latif's book. Latif imagines Lahore to have been tested by the passing of time since it was time that brought with it 'despotic rulers' and 'destruction' and eventually the triumph of British rule. Lahore is subjected to (Latif 1892: iv): "…the invisible effect of time—that mysterious, slow, and silent, but sure, worker…of which the German poet has fittingly said: Can aught on earth's vast place e'er hope to stand? Since Rome has sunk beneath Time's conquering hand? H. E. Lloyd."[5]

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[4] Muslim reformers, writers and nationalists adopted this critique of Indo-Perisan aesthetical practices and attempted to rid Muslim-Urdu culture of its effects, in favour of a Western-styled literary method. For more on this, see Khan 2021: 89-92.

[5] Latif took this quote from H.E. Lloyd's *Travels in India, Volume 2* written in 1845, which in turn was a translation of Leopold von Orlich's German book.

The emphasis on time is counterintuitive since a city is usually conceived in space or territory. And, indeed, Latif's book does map Lahore through its many buildings which demonstrates the spatiality of the city. Yet, Latif also brings to our attention that "many a monument of surpassing beauty and elegance has been totally destroyed" (p. iv). These buildings, which once constituted Lahore, are no more. Thus, Lahore's space is treated very fluidly in Latif's schema. He reminds his readers that the geographical parameters of the city had never been consistent. He quotes from a traveller named Thevenot that in the 17th century, the city "extended to a length of three leagues," (Latif 1892: 92) and then borrowing from Moorcroft's account from 1820 that the city "was once much more extensive than it is at present," because in the period preceding Sikh rule "the once mighty city reduced to a walled township" (Latif 1892: 98, 100). Latif does not determine Lahore's ontological status through its spatiality because the space it occupies keeps changing. Lahore's temporal perseverance is its identity; unlike Rome which sunk beneath Time's hand, Lahore triumphed, albeit (according to Latif) through colonial benevolence. And yet, to keep standing unchanged is not temporal triumph for Latif—that which remains must also be 'improving' with time—evidenced through the image of fixedness he attributed to those objects and practices which have not 'improved' by adopting to Western modernity.[6] In fact, Latif's terminology is replete with Orientalist tropes of Indian history and practice, for instance when he calls the practice of sitting on the floor on a carpet 'primitive life' (Latif 1892: 261). When he writes about the lifestyle of Lahore's residents, he says about the craftspeople who use traditional methods of work that (Latif 1892: 260):

> A brazier, or tinker, makes his utensils in the same fashion, and with the same rude tools, as his forefathers used five hundred years ago. The winnowing basket is the same as it was in the time of *Bikarmajit* of ancient fame, the pan the same, the huge candelabra (with dull light, giving out quantities of disgusting smoke), the stand for the lamp the same. The same bed-steads with stout legs are used to this day, on the like of which Alexander's Macedonian followers probably slept after crossing the ancient Hydrates. An old woman to this moment plies the same ugly fashioned spinning machine which the members of her sex used centuries before the birth of Christ.

Latif suggests through his references of Bikramjit, Alexander, and Christ that Indian people and their practices are static. He calls such people 'conservative' since they "show little inclination to try experiments, or to improve their knowledge," and despite witnessing "the great advantages of the pursuit of useful arts introduced by European civilization, [they] show no disposition to follow it" (1892: 260). Latif's perception of such 'temporal stasis'—to use Mark Rifkin's phrase—implies that the existence of such people and practices in the contemporary moment does not qualify as a movement through time. This is also what scholars have called the 'orientalist' way of looking at things in which, a space—in this case, a practice—is constituted as "inherently timeless or confined to its past" (Breckenridge and Van der Veer 1993: 18). For Latif, these craft practices are designated as a-historical because to have a historical past one must always be moving towards a future.[7] Only that which is modern can have a past or a history. Studies of Indigenous history in North America show this to be a recurrent feature of 'colonial time' in which "temporal boundaries are constructed between 'an 'advancing' people and a 'static' people, locating the latter out of time'" (Rifkin 2017: 5). Similarly, when Latif claims that "modern Lahore is situated among the *debris* and ruins of the

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[6] This resembles Edward Said's analysis of Orientalist representations of the Oriental as 'fixed', 'stable', and 'inert' (Said 1978 [2003]: 302).

[7] Rama Sundari Mantena has made a similar argument for the colonial study of languages wherein the effort to recover the past of a language was simultaneously tied to projecting a future on to it. She suggests that this was due to the notion of progress in Western history. Languages thus only had a future if they displayed 'improvement' by 'modernising' (Mantena 2005).

ancient capital" (Latif 1892: 87), he can make an ontological distinction between Modern Lahore and an older Lahore because one has moved forward in time while the other has not. This clear disjuncture between the past and the present is the hallmark of Lahore's modernity.

And yet, Latif's reproach of traditional practices also betrays the anxiety of Lahore's modernity having not yet been fully achieved. If modernity was a condition only made possible "through the practice of periodization," that is, by drawing "a temporal boundary fence" between the past and the present (Esposito 2024: 323, 322), then the presence of the not-new in the current moment threatened the periodization on which the experience of modernity impinged. The 'production of the past' in early 19th century Western discourse was achieved through a "restless iteration of the new… [and] the past was conceived more and more as something bygone and lost, […] and although partially accessible, always remote" (Fritzsche 2004: 3, 5). And yet, in colonial Lahore, the past had not yet become inaccessible, that is if such craft practices were considered as remnants of a 'past'. The anxiety of traditional practices existing in the 'modern' moment calls attention to the didactic introduction of Latif's book; he wanted his fellow countrymen to "weigh former events with the existing state of things" in hopes of adopting the "enlightenment" and foregoing the "age of ignorance" in India (1892: ix).

So, for Latif, only things that display 'improvement'—as colonial Lahore does—seem to be moving while all else remains still and fixed. Latif's language regarding colonial changes to the city also verifies this. He says about the Jubilee Museum and Technical Institute building that was begun to be constructed in 1890 that it "may be regarded as the outcome of a *movement* towards the development of the arts and industries of the Province" (Latif 1892: 273, emphasis mine). This colonial building which did not exist before 1890 is temporally dynamic for Latif but the practices of craft that have been around for many hundred years are static and fixed. Just as Latif believes that colonial rule was the teleological endpoint of Lahore's historical progress, he espouses a similar view with which to view buildings in Lahore as well. He writes about the *bārādarī* (pavilion) which was built in 1634 by Wazir Khan, Mughal emperor Shah Jahan's governor in Lahore, that (Latif 1892: 188):

> Having then been successively used as the Settlement and Telegraph Office, it became the home of the museum, it has been *finally* utilized as the Panjáb Public Library [sic]. A nobler aim it could not have served. The founder of the building was himself a patron of learning and a profound scholar, and the association of his name with an institution pregnant with such significant results for the rising generation of the Panjáb [sic] may be regarded as a happy coincidence (emphasis mine).

Despite calling it a coincidence, Latif's narrative seems to suggest that that the building has arrived at its destiny and fulfilled its purpose through the use that the British government has put it to. And because this building is 'pregnant' with promising results for a 'rising generation', colonial rule had not just seized the past and present, but propelled India into a future as well.

Seeing Time in the City

Lahore's identity as a modern city is not constructed through space, but through the discourse regarding the city's temporal development, so it becomes just as essential to read the city as traversing it, if one wants to 'know' it. This is why Latif often conflates the reader of the book with the seer of the city. The emphasis on seeing seems counterintuitive at first since visuality is linked to a physical place, not temporality. However, Latif's formulation suggests that instead of being enamoured by the visual spectacles of the city (since Lahore has many precolonial architectural splendours), readers should instead 'see' the marvels of 'improvement' in things that—he believes—are temporally dynamic. Of course, this requires some work on his part, as

one cannot immediately see time in the same way one can see space. In that effort, Latif writes (1892: vii):

> It must, however, be understood that I have laid a panorama of the city before the reader with an object far more important than the mere gratification which the study of a new work on a subject…may afford. It is to give a useful lesson to my countrymen, that they may, by its study, *be enabled to look* impartially around them and see of Lahore that which is really worth seeing in it, seeing and carefully weighing (emphasis mine).

Impartiality or objectivity was an interchangeable term for rationalism in post-enlightenment discourse, explicated below. The 'panorama' that he has laid out for the reader spans across linear time, which makes its 'improvements' clear especially as one can "weigh former events with the existing state of things" (1892: ix). Such comparisons are temporally located. Here, eyes serve a dual function: one must see/experience the city as one sees/ reads it in by the book: as fundamentally temporal. The optical lessons Latif wishes to impart are those of a historical consciousness in which the native viewer and resident of Lahore sees himself as being part of Lahore's teleological progress, its modernity. In his preface, Latif quotes the Quran chapter 49 verse 2—though he does not provide a full citation of it perhaps to secularize his book—which says, "take warning ye who have eyes" (1892: vii). He then insists that this 'Arabic saying' is "so instructive, so full of meaning, that it would be well if all our young countrymen who have read the pages of this history, should take it to their hearts" and that it should be "inscribed in letters of gold on the frontispiece of every book on Indian *history*" (Latif 1892: vii, emphasis mine). The unmistakable correlation between 'eyes' and reading history implies that historiography enables a view of temporality which is otherwise hidden to the unaware seer. Latif fears that all the temporal changes of the modern city would be lost to the native viewer if he did not learn what to *see* through an "investigation of the past" (1892: ix). The book, thus, endows meaning to the city. There are resonances between this idea and the ideas of Manan Ahmed Asif's expressed in his recent work on Lahore as well, wherein he observes that texts or books can render significance on to physical spaces. He notes about Ali Hajweri's monumental shrine in Lahore and his seminal book, *Kashafulmaḥjūb*, that "the shrine and the text each exist because of the other. You read the text and you see a long-lost history. You peer into the shrine and you see other worlds" (Asif 2024: 35-36). But while Asif is reflecting on the enduring legacy of the book which memorialized its author, Latif expects his readers to endow importance to certain spaces because of the value he places on them in his book.

The conflation between experiencing/seeing time in the city and reading it in the book is not incidental. Without ascribing it to the narrative of improvement, one which relies on the idea of progress, the developments taking place in the colonial city are unimpressive. One can see this clearly in the poetry of Akbar Allahabadi (d. 1921)—a vocal critic of colonial modernity—who wrote about Delhi in 1911, at the height of its colonial glory. Like Lahore, Delhi had also been the seat of the Mughal empire, after which colonial narratives stated it had lost its glory (Pernau 2013: 163) and then the British took charge of 'improving' it. Allahabadi writes about what he witnessed (*dekhā*) in colonial Delhi (2010: 872):

> *Kerosīn aur barq aur paṭrolīyam aur tārpīn*
> *Moṭar aur airoplen aur jamghaṭe aur iqtadār*
> *Mashriqī patlūn men̲ thī k̲h̲idmat guzārī kī uman̲g*
> *Mag̲h̲ribī shaklon̲ se shān-i khudpasandī āshkār.*

> Kerosene and electricity and petroleum and turpentine

Motor and aeroplane and crowds and control
Dressed in Eastern pants were hopes of servitude
Western faces displayed the glory of self-adoration.[8]

Allahabadi's vision of the 'modern' city is polluted, congested and most importantly, racially hierarchical, which is perhaps closer to what the late 19th and early 20th century experience of these cities would have been. Lewis Beverley has explained how racial and class-based hierarchies were paramount in shaping colonial urbanism (2011: 483, 488). This is even reflected in the use of space in Lahore where "up to 100,000 Indians lived in the space surrounded by the city walls, [while] literally a handful of Europeans occupied an area which was much larger in size" (Daechsel 2004: 23). However, racial inequality is treated very differently in Latif's book. When describing the new wing of the Mayo Hospital in Lahore, which was added in 1890 on the occasion of Print Albert Victor's visit to Lahore, Latif writes (Latif 1892: 292):

> …no memorial would be more acceptable to His Royal Highness himself, or more pleasing to Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen-Empress, who took so great an interest in anything which tends to help the condition of the sick, than one which should have for its object the relief of human suffering and prove a real charity to many poor and suffering people.

The new wing was built for 'native patients' and "the poorer classes of Europeans and Eurasians" (ibid). Racial and class-based discrimination between Indians (whether rich or poor), poor Europeans, mixed race individuals, and upper-class Europeans is narrated in terms of imperial charity and a dedication towards alleviating human suffering. Similarly, in his description of the Lahore Central Jail, Latif writes that the "Jail is capable of accommodating about 2000 native and 10 European prisoners" only (Latif 1892: 302); clear evidence of race-based discrimination in incarceration. And yet, Latif guides his readers' vision so that they can "see on every side brilliant examples of improvements effected by modern sciences" (Latif 1892: 260), and overlook the oppression that the spectacle of urban development was masking. Latif further impresses upon his plea to see Lahore's brilliant improvements by invoking his readers' ability to reason. He claims that only a 'reflecting mind' can learn the lessons of history to realize that "Lahore was not ever a garden as it is now" (1892: ix). His emphasis on the mind suggests the use of European Enlightenment's rationalist discourse. He writes that the Indian subjects "have been attached to the British Crown by a conquest over their minds, which is by far the most durable, as well as the most rational, mode of dominion" (Latif 1892: x). The importance of rationality and perception to Latif's project is evident on the cover page of the book which contains a quote from Thomas H. Dyer (d. 1888), another historian, stating (Latif 1892):

> What exhibition could be found more interesting than a Camera-Obscura, which could reflect past incidents of historical or private interest, and recall, with the vividness and minuteness of life, at least, the external characteristics of long past ages!

The prominence given to this quote on the title page warrants our attention. In the 18th century and after, the camera obscura had become a metaphor for "ideology, consciousness and knowledge" as a symbol for both eye and mind (Walker 1997: 40). As a symbol, it rose to importance within the Enlightenment discourse of rationalism and objectivity: "by implying a vision unmediated by subjective response, the camera obscura-as-eye could function as a

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[8] All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

paradigmatic vehicle of empirical observation endorsed by the truth value of a neutral eye" (Walker 1997: 44). John Locke also famously characterized the mind as camera obscura (ibid). Relatedly, Hegel, an early 19th century German philosopher also believed that History writing required the "power of looking at an object in an independent *objective* light, and comprehending it in its *rational* connection with other objects" (1899 [2001]: 180, emphasis mine). With this discourse in view, the quote from Dyer presents the value of historical reflection on a perceptive and discerning mind. While the 'exhibition' and 'camera obscura' lead the reader to believe that they will be seeing the history of Lahore through this book, it is in fact, hinting at the mind's ability to process this information 'impartially' (1892: vii), or 'rationally', because Latif believes that "it is upon the reflecting mind that the deepest impressions are produced by such studies" (1892: ix). Such impressions are, of course, made through comparisons of a past with the present. It is through Latif's historical narrative that "the young reader [can] be convinced" of Lahore's development and, through this book, the reader will learn to "not behold with indifference, the vast changes that have been brought about in the city of his birth or suffer himself to be an unconcerned spectator of the great improvements that have been effected in it" (Latif 1892: xiii). Both 'changes' and 'improvements' are epistemological categories here, made possible through a comparison located in time as they require a comparison between the past and the present. This shows what Markus Daechsel has noted in his explication of representational space that the 'conceptual' (progress/ improvement) is "made effective in the concrete" and because such concretization brings "concepts to life in an immediately accessible way, such spaces ensure the ultimate 'reality' of the former" (2006: 129). Latif was thus ensuring that the concepts of temporal progress (change/ improvement) would be materialized through the meaning he endowed to physical spaces.

Alternative Temporalities: *Taḥqīqāt-i Chishtī*

What did alternative imaginaries of Lahore from the same period look like? To demonstrate this, we can compare Lahore's temporal depiction in Latif's work with that of his contemporary, Noor Ahmad Chishti. Chishti published a work called *Taḥqīqāt-i Chishtī* (Chishti's Investigations) in 1867 about Lahore, which recounts the histories of individual buildings and the lineages of families in charge of those buildings. Chishti was also associated with the colonial state, albeit more loosely than Latif. Maulvi Noor Ahmad Chishti was born in 1829. His father, Maulvi Ahmad Bakhsh Yakdil was a scholar and writer. During the period of Ranjit Singh and his successors' rule, Chishti worked as a teacher to the sons of many notables of Ranjit Singh's court including Raja Dina Nath's son Divan Amar Nath (Chishti 1975: 56).[9] In 1849, Chishti began working as a teacher at a British institution where he taught Urdu, Persian and Arabic to many military and civil government employees. By 1864, he had taught as many as two thousand British officers. Some of his students included Richard Temple (Commissioner of Lahore), Robert Eyles Egerton (Deputy Commissioner of Lahore), Edward Thornton (Commissioner of Punjab), George Edward Wakefield, William Coldstream (Deputy Commissioner of Hoshiarpur), Lord Lawrence (Lt. Governor of Punjab), and C. U. Aitchison (Chishti 1975: 57-58).

Chishti wrote *Taḥqīqāt* upon the request of William Coldstream (d. 1929) (Chishti 1867: 31). Coldstream had asked him to write about the buildings, shrines, mausoleums and mosques of Lahore, about the family trees of those buried there, their descendants if alive, their *qaum* (caste/ ethnicity), and their surviving children. Chishti was supposed to include details of whether these mausoleums were registered with the current government, with information on their land in possession, the '*urs* taking place there, pensions allotted, and about what became

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[9] Dina Nath was Ranjit Singh's finance minister.

of these pension in case of conflict.[10] He was to furnish information on the events organized at these institutions, on what kind of food was distributed, on how big the crowds were that these institutions drew, and how many graves were in the territory of the shrine or mausoleum, along with their identities, and the identities of those who constructed them, and so on (Chishti 1867: 33). Chishti's book thus seems to be part of colonial officials' effort to gather information on the interior, or older parts of the city which would be useful for enumeration and administration especially because the inner city was thought to be "difficult to observe and fathom" (Glover 2008: 28). This was an ongoing practice: Mirza Sangin Beg's work on Delhi, *Sairulmanāzil*, commissioned by Charles Metcalfe also seems to have been commissioned for creating a "a store of knowledge for future use" (Pernau 2013: 177).

Chishti's book is a lithograph, written in Urdu and in the modified Persian script. It is an amalgamation of 19th century writing practices introduced through Western book-models and the print market that laid premium on including a contents page, while amalgamating Indo-Persian literary practices such as the inclusion of a Persian poem by the author which lists the spiritual lineage of the Chishti *silsilā*, and a *qaṣīdā* (poem) in praise of Ali, the fourth caliph, and the first Imam in the Shiite tradition of Islam, in the Preface.[11] This shows the influence of his training in the Sufi Chishti order, both in his ideas and writing style. He writes in his family history that his ancestors immigrated to India from Iran during Humayun's reign, and one of his ancestors became a disciple of Khawaja Nizamuddin Aurangabadi, a saint of the Chishti order who lived in the late 17th and early 18th century (1867: 6-7). His ideological leanings might explain why there is very little documentation of non-Muslim sacred sites such as the *mandir*s (Hindu temples), *gurudwara*s (Sikh temples), or *shivala*s (a special Hindu temple dedicated to Hindu deity Shiva), which were quite common in Lahore.

The book contains details of over 200 buildings, which seem to be placed neither in chronological order nor in a spatialized one. Although in many parts of the book, buildings in geographical proximity are written about together, the order is not followed consistently. There is no semblance of a chronology; Chishti writes the history of Mughal rulers towards the very end of the book, and about Ranjit Singh and his successors somewhere in the middle, when describing the mausoleum of Ranjit Singh (Chishti 1867: 816, 564). He outlines his writing method in the preface (1867: 44):

> for instance, if the *ḥāl* (condition, circumstances, or the present) of Dera Guru Arjun Sahab is being told, then the entire *ḥāl* of all ten Sikh gurus, along with the *tārīkh* (history, date) of their births and deaths, and *ḥāl* of their inhabitance is told therewith, and after the gurus, how did the Sikhs become successful and the *ḥāl* of Ranjit Singh, along with his ancestors from ten generations, and the *ḥāl* of his rule in Punjab, and after that the *ḥāl* of Dalip Singh and the *ḥāl* of the English government with the *tavārīkh* (dates, histories) of its initiation in Hindustan has been written.

Though it is clear from this description that Chishti intends his work to provide a history of India that pertains to Lahore, he uses Lahore's buildings as fulcrums to pivot into its history. Through this structuring of writing, every building experienced its own individual history. This was unlike Latif's treatment of Lahore whose history he tells independently of its buildings, which as he claims, do not always stand the test of time (Latif 1892: iv). For Latif, these parts are coalesced into a singular whole through a unified imagination of the city, which moves cohesively through

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[10] *Urs* (literally, wedding or union) is an annual celebration held at the saint's death anniversary, usually at the shrine.

[11] For a discussion of Ali's importance in Persianate and Sufi literary traditions, see Moin 2012: 502-504.

time. Chishti's writing method also suggests linearity at first, as his history moves from one event to the next, but this is overridden by his constant use of *ḥāl*: a word that implies the state of things, but which is also a term to describe the present time. Even as these events are listed chronologically, the intercession of the *ḥāl* descriptor disrupts linear imagination, and suggests a concurrence of events which trumps hierarchical ordering, particularly as these events are not periodized. This is not the only time in Chishti's book when events are displaced in time. Right as he finishes up on his section of the British takeover of Punjab, he goes on to describing the *ḥāl* of a Syad Jaan Muhammad, whose story of arrival and settlement in Lahore has no date or era attached to it. The reader is suddenly thrown into a temporal blackhole. That is, until it is revealed a couple of pages later that Jaan Muhammad passed away in 1064 A.H (1654 A.D), thereby sending the reader back into a period that was 200 years before the last stated date of 1849 (Chishti 1867: 588).

When Latif and Chishti's works are compared, two very different visions of Lahore's identity emerge. Latif privileges the logic of British imperial historiography, while Chishti relies on his Chishti-Sufi training to create a narrative of Lahore. Syad Latif describes Chishti's *Taḥqīqāt* in his book's preface as being "full of stories of supernatural powers supposed to have been possessed by local saints, whose tombs are still so numerous in the neighbourhoods of Lahore" and "is full of discrepancies and errors" (Latif 1892: v). His criticism conveys a rationalist dismissal of the "indigenous view of the past" in which the "present is an extension of… a historic and timeless mythic past" (Asher and Metcalf, 1994: 5).[12] Partha Chatterjee's study of national/nationalist historiographies in colonial Bengal notes the prevalence of alternate historical imaginations in Mrityunjay Vidyalankar's history of India, written in 1808, "dynasties are founded by the grace of divine power" and "Myth, history, and the contemporary—all become part of the same chronological sequence" (1993: 81, 80). This was a tradition of writing that was later abandoned by historians "in favor of rationalist historiography" (ibid: 81).

Much like Vidyalankar, Chishti places 'myth, history and the contemporary' in one concurrent plane of action. For instance, Chishti writes about Madhoo Lal Hussain, the 16th century poet and saint, "it is said that Lahore remained safe from Ahmad Shah Abdali due to [Hussain's] mercy" (Chishti 1867: 85). Abdali invaded India in the 18th century but according to Chishti's retelling, Hussain was still present and possessed intercessory power at the time, so much so, that he could undertake Lahore's defence against an imperial power. Pernau also notes that because of saintly graves, "no distinction or contrast was made between the supernatural and the natural, …giving the supernatural its place somewhere beyond time and space" which allowed the city to be simultaneously a place of the living and the dead (Pernau 2013: 156). This is in stark contrast to the Latif's vision of Lahore in which the city moves swiftly through time to arrive in the modern moment after effecting a break from the past. This movement requires him to desacralize Lahore's history and identity because "the diminishing significance of the intercessory function of the saints and the loss of their co-presence with the pilgrims lent greater emphasis to the boundary between past and present" (Pernau 2013: 161). Latif desacralizes and secularizes his *Lahore* by calling saintly miracles erroneous "*stories* of supernatural powers" (1892: v, emphasis mine), designating this part of its history to the realm of fiction.

To get a clear sense of the way that different forms of historical retelling change how the city's identity is constructed, we can compare how the same event is narrated in Latif's and Chishti's

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[12] The Chishti Sufi order originated outside of India, but it developed and progressed in India and was integral to the development of Indian Islam.

books. This can be glimpsed in the example of the story of how Ali Hajveri, the saint popular by the title of Data Ganj Bakhsh, arrived in Lahore. Latif writes in *Lahore* (1892: 179):

> His real name is 'Ali Mukhdúm, Hujweri of Ghazni. His father's name was Usman, son of Ali Jaléli Ghaznavi, and he was a disciple of Sheikh Abul Fazl bin Hassan Khutbi. He followed the arms of Masúd, the son and successor of Mahmúd [sic], to Lahore where he settled in 431 A. H. (1039 A.D.).

Masūd I was a sultan of the Ghazanvid empire. In Latif's narrative, Data Ganj Bakhsh's arrival in Lahore is a consequence of Masūd Ghazni's imperial campaign. Thus, Lahore's history is linked to imperial powers, making the British rule a teleological end to its progress. However, Chishti writes about Data Ganj Bakhsh's arrival in Lahore (Chishti 1867: 157):

> …here in Lahore, Hazrat Hussain Zanjani, his *pīr*-brother, was the *quṭb* of Lahore but his *pīr* [Sheikh Abul Fazl bin Hassan Khutbi] told him to go to Lahore.[13] Data Ganj Bakhsh said 'my brother, Hussain Zanjani, is already there, what good will it do if I go there.' But his *pīr* insisted and so he went there only to find that Hussain Zanjani had passed away the very morning he entered the city.

In Chishti's retelling, Data Ganj Bakhsh came to the city to fill its need for a spiritual guide in Zanjani's absence. Data's *pīr* knew of this need based on a knowledge of the *ghaib*, an unseen realm beyond the limitation of time and space, where lies "the reality of the world beyond the senses and beyond discursive reason which gnosis (*maʿrifa*) experiences" lies (Macdonald and Gardet 2012). This is a form of knowledge and experience which does not fit into Latif's rationalist schema, but one which directly impacts the experience of time in this episode. In Sufi conceptualization, the notion of time or *vaqt* "combines a temporal dimension with a spiritual experience" (Thibon 2022: 92). Data Ganj Bakhsh, who was the writer of the first comprehensive Persian manual on Sufism, stated that *vaqt*—the combination of temporality and a spiritual state—"is what makes man independent of the past and of the future by holding him in an eternal present" (qtd. in Thibon 2022: 93). In this eternal present, events are not limited by their linear unfolding, making it possible to have the knowledge of an event before it manifests in the physical realm. Such divergent experiences of time have also been noted by scholars in other contexts such as North American "native peoples' varied experiences of duration [that] can remain nonidentical with respect to the dynamics of [colonial] temporal formations, indicating ways of being-in-time that are not reducible to participation in a singular, given time—a unitary flow" (Rifkin 2017: 3). Unlike Latif, Chishti's narrative of Lahore is not centred on a linear conception of time, either in terms of the structure of the book or in terms of its narrative. His account also suggests a persistence of varied experiences of temporalities—of which there were many—that resist the modern/ ancient binary in colonial-era historiographies, even while he engaged with the colonial project of knowledge formation at the same time.

Conclusion

Despite significant differences between Chishti's and Latif's narrative of time, teleology and Lahore, they should not be seen in opposition. They both produced work that was—in some way—in the service of the colonial empire. While Chishti's may have been contributing to the empire's early knowledge-gathering endeavour, Latif's contributed more directly to colonial knowledge by reaffirming a narrative that legitimized British rule. Neither of them was trying to write a book that was exclusively a history of Lahore, but in both works, historical narrativization

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[13] *Quṭb* is a high-ranking Sufi saint, responsible for divine communication and guidance in a certain time and place.

plays an important part in the conceptualization of the city. They did, however, rely on different intellectual traditions that provided their works with narrative logic. Ultimately, it was the narrative that Latif adhered to that remained dominant, at the expense of many alternative intellectual traditions such as the one Chishti wrote as part of. And consequently, Latif's work continues to be the basis of scholarship on Lahore.

In Latif's text, the historical narrative of Lahore draws its coherence from temporal linearity. This temporal linearity also allows for a unity which makes Lahore into a 'whole'; a singular entity that can move through different periods of time. And yet, Latif's temporal focus on Lahore does not make the city an abstraction. Instead, this temporal focus gives meaning to the shifts that take place in space—the 'changes' and 'improvements'—which are otherwise immobile objects. My article adds on to the existing literature on Lahore's imaginary. While existing scholarship has focused on the social imaginaries of Lahore, very much rooted in its space (Glover 2008, Asif 2024), I locate time to be the pivot of Lahore's shifting identity. As such, this article demonstrates how the processes of history-writing and urban reconfiguration are interlinked and simultaneous.

Lahore's constitution as a temporal entity continues to inform the way that inhabitants and administrators interact with the city today. This is evident in the way the areas surrounding the Walled City are referred to as 'Old Lahore', even on the Walled City of Lahore Authority's official website.[14] At first this sounds intuitive, as this part of the city was established before some of the other parts, but this space is also home to businesses, residences, and infrastructure that are new and ever-changing. The use of the 'old' for these parts makes them available for 'preservation' drives which involve disrupting the lives of inhabitants to make infrastructural changes that cater to tourists. The linear-temporal logic of the city that enabled Latif to disparage traditional practices in the 'modern' city is ironically the same that labels local industry established in 'historical' spaces as 'dysfunctional industrial/ trade' that needs to be removed to 'preserve' the old (The Aga Khan Trust 2019: 38). Thus, the temporal identity of the city continues to inform the way that its sites and spaces are given meaning within larger urban reconfiguration.

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[14] The website describes the Authority's purview as: "Established in 2012 by the Government of Punjab to preserve the living cultural heritage of Old Lahore" https://walledcitylahore.gop.pk/ (accessed on 25.09.2025).

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Research Article

New Cities and Old Poetry: Straits-Settlements Urbanity in Tamil Poetry, 1872-1914

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While descriptions of cities and urban life have formed a part of Tamil literature from its inception in the early first millennium, these consisted largely of conventionalised and hyperbolic verses praising a city's greatness as an extension of the poem's hero. This paid only limited attention to realistic elements and excluded any reference to negative and insalubrious aspects of city life. Realistic imagination of cities and cityscapes is usually connected with the transformation of Tamil literary culture under the impact of colonialism and the elements borrowed from English literature. But the colonial period also saw transformations in the way cities were depicted in more 'traditional' styles of literature. This article traces how 'traditional' Tamil poetry in the colonial period imagined cities by focusing on poems composed in and about the Straits Settlements between 1872 and 1914. In this article I argue that rather than remaining focused on the conventional, these poems realistically map the cities of the Straits Settlements by having characters walk or otherwise traverse the space. But in the process, they also concentrate on the exotic, and occasionally scandalous sights provided by these cities. In turning cities into assemblages of consumable novelties and unfamiliar experiences, these poems imagined and presented an ideal member of the social class that produced and consumed such poems. These people ultimately formed the real city of the poem, a section of society united by their capacity to enjoy the novelties of the Straits city and live to write about it.

cityscapes, middle-classes, poetry, Straits-Settlements, Tamil

Introduction: Describing Cities in Tamil Literary History

Life in the city has long been seen as a mark of sophistication and refinement. From the *nāgaraka*, the 'man-about-town' of the Kamasutra, to the celebration of 'urbanity' as a synonym for politeness and polished manners, city-life has been understood as producing specific kinds of persons. That production of 'urbanity', however, has often been accomplished less through the actual experience of city-life, than its depiction in literature and other forms of writing. Nor was the 'man about town' simply an individual. His urbanity marked him as part of a social class that was partly constituted through social gatherings in which this literary production was reproduced through its recitation and discussion (Ali 2004: 60-68). In such contexts, transformations in the manner the city is imagined are also transformations in the social constitution of urban elites, as well as in the values and mores propagated by them. Sometimes, such transformations produce uneven social landscapes as models of urbanity diverge. One example of such a divergence is found in Tamil literature around 1900: on the one hand, a 'modern' manner of imagining cities based on realism and the communication of 'sound sentiments' (cf. Ebeling 2010: 167), that consciously drew on English models, and on the other hand, a continuation of 'traditional'[1] forms of poetry, albeit with hitherto little-noted twists. What

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[1] In this article, I utilize the terms 'premodern' and 'traditional' interchangeably to refer to styles and patterns of producing literature according to literary theory and poetics formulated in precolonial Tamil

caused such a divergence in the imagination of the city, and what does it tell us about its creators and consumers?

The description and praise of cities in Tamil literary culture is almost as old as that literary culture itself. The earliest corpus of Tamil poetry, the so-called *caṅkam*-poetry, dating to the early first millennium of the Common Era, already contains descriptions of cities. This is particularly true of several of the long poems collectively known as the 'Ten Songs' (*Pattuppāṭṭu*), in a genre that is known as 'obtaining the way' (*āṟṟuppaṭai*), where one poet directs another one to a wealthy and liberal patron. Over time, descriptions of cities were not only included in poems at appropriate points, but a description of the hero's city also came to form a conventional chapter at the beginning of many longer, narrative poems. This chapter, known commonly as the *nakarappaṭalam* ('chapter about the city'), first appeared in the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* ('Jīvaka, the Wish-fulfilling Gem') towards the end of the first millennium, but was soon established as a standard element in all longer, narrative poems in Tamil, not least through the influence of Kampaṉ's version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the 12th century. Especially in the genre of the *talappurāṇam*, which narrates the myths, geography, and distinctive holiness of specific temples, the chapter describing the temple town became a popular, though never quite a universal element of the opening chapters of such poems, as Ofer Peres argues (Peres 2024; see also Buchholz 2023: 42-45).

The prime aim of describing cities in older Tamil literature was a panegyric one. The descriptions served mostly to extol the city and establish it as a touchstone of urbanity, an ideal of a city and urban life that is, unsurprisingly, highly hyperbolic. This is nowhere more visible than when authors describe aspects of urban life that might force them to confront the negative side of the city, like unsanitary living conditions. Consider this description of the city of Madurai from the late first-millennium anthology *Muttoḷḷāyiram* or 'The Three Times Nine Hundred' (*Muttoḷḷāyiram* 1943: verse 59):[2]

> Everywhere, there is slipping and sliding in the slush of saffron and cool sandal,
> Cast off by the women who had rubbed it [on their bodies], sulking with the young
>   men:
> This is the condition of Madurai of the Pandya king,
> With many-storied mansions.

Compare this depiction with another take on the sanitation of the streets of Madurai from almost a millennium later, found in Parañcōti's 17th-century *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* ('The Old Lore of the Sacred Sports') (*Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* 1907: verse 1.3.41):

> Jewels discarded by sulking [women], and snapped necklaces
> Of [girls] playing ball with [shouts of] *ammāṉai*, and the pearl collars
> Broken by [girls] grown weak as they shed tears of pearl from angry eyes,
> Along with [the boys] who kicked over the sand-castles with their feet: [that's] the
>   garbage.

Both stanzas turn the very real problems of city life concerning water-logging and garbage disposal into hyperbole by suggesting that Madurai residents are so wealthy that all they discard are jewels and valuable substances, and that too as a result of the elite activity of refined lovemaking. Neither dirt nor stench, neither poverty nor coarseness find any place in Madurai's streets. In a similar manner, any negative aspect of urban life is either elided or, as in these

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treatises rather that in English models, even if produced in the colonial or postcolonial periods. While neither of these terms are ideal, they are helpful in distinguishing this literature from the self-consciously 'modern' styles of writing that developed in Tamil from the 19th century onwards.

[2] All translations in this article are my own.

examples, inverted into hyperbolic praise. This is not to say that realistic descriptions do not occur in premodern descriptions of cities in Tamil poetry. When poets described cities that they and their audiences were familiar with, rather than distant or legendary locations like Indraprastha, Ayodhya, or Mecca, poets were actually referring to the actual geography of these cities (Peres 2024). At times, it is even possible to use these descriptions to solve questions about the text, as two poems composed by Kuññumūcu Leppai, the *Cayitattuppaṭaippōr* ('The Campaign of Lady Sayyida',1798) and the *Iṟavuculkūl Paṭaippōr* ('The Campaign of Raʾs al-Ghūl',1818), demonstrate. Editors later in the 19th century identified the town of Kuḻantai, which is mentioned in *Cayitattuppaṭaippōr* 33 and *Iṟavuculkūl Paṭaippōr* 1.33 as the poet's hometown, with the town of Poovar, located in Thiruvananthapuram District (Kerala). Yet, the description of the town as having a river mouth to the west identifies it as Thengappattanam in Kanniyakumari District, Tamil Nadu, about 15 kms further to the southeast on the coast (Mīrāṉ Piḷḷai 1999: v).[3] Thus, realistic descriptions of cities were a part of literary culture, but subordinate to the main panegyric aim of such descriptions.

True realism in descriptions, where depicting reality became an end in itself, did not enter Tamil literary practices until the 19th century. Usually, this is associated in scholarship with the spread of European aesthetics and modes of writing under the impact of colonialism. Colonial policy makers and educationists lamented the preponderance of what they dubbed "frivolous and perverse artifices in the construction of words and sentences" and the dominance of poetry in Tamil literature, as well as the prevalence of "legendary and superstitious nonsense" and graphic eroticism (George Norton, Advocate General of Madras, quoted in Ebeling 2010: 167). Through interventions in the educational system and through the promotion of texts that embodied the elevated prose style favoured by British observers (and later, the policing of publishers and censorship), the colonial government reinforced such developments in textual production. Changes had already begun to take hold earlier with the introduction of such forms as newspaper writing. Most notable was the development of prose as the preferred form of writing for both literary and non-literary purposes. With it came a disdain for poetic and difficult expressions that could only be parsed by the initiated. This heralded a turn towards easy comprehensibility and avoidance of descriptions exaggerating certain qualities of a character, object, or site, as was common in the description of cities just surveyed. This transformation of Tamil literature in the colonial and early postcolonial period has received a good deal of attention (e.g. Annamalai and Sriraman 2022: 487-490, Bate 2021, Ebeling 2010, Mani 2022, Venkatachalapathy 2012).

What has not received attention, however, are the transformations that occurred in earlier styles of writing during the same period. It seems often silently assumed that these writings remained largely unchanged, unaffected by the transformations occurring in other fields of literature and wider society. If the composers of Tamil poetry in the traditional mould simply continued with received practices, which, if any of the transformations and novelties occurring in colonial cityscapes, were captured by this poetry? Were descriptions of the colonial city subjected to the same panegyric imperatives as those of older cities, or did the changes in wider society also affect the received aesthetic canon, and if so, how? Far from simply portraying 'ideal' colonial cities in the same way as precolonial townships, it turns out that Tamil poets of the colonial period engaged with change and novelty in unusual ways. This belies the idea that literary change occurred solely through a direct borrowing of European literary aesthetics, forms, and values.

This article engages with the manner in which novel cityscapes and urban transformations were expressed and imagined in 'traditional' Tamil poetry before the First World War. For this

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[3] In contrast, the river mouth at Poovar lies to the east of the town, and is described as such in a poem dating to 1830 (*Ipulīcunāmā* 1874: verse 26).

purpose, I analyse the poetry composed about urban centres of the Straits Settlements,[4] especially Singapore. Though the Malay Peninsula had been within the ambit of the wider Tamil world through mercantile and political links for centuries, the development of the British colony of the Straits Settlements initiated significant transformations in the manner Tamil-speaking communities engaged with the region. By the late 19th century, a Tamil publishing industry emerged in the Straits Settlements, printing newspapers as well as books in Tamil, thereby extending the language and its literature to new localities (Tschacher 2024). As much of the Tamil literature produced in and about the Straits Settlements prior to the First World War utilized older genres and styles rather than the literary forms favoured by colonial elites, both Tamil and British, this body of literature provides an ideal case for studying how the transformation of cityscapes was engaged with in Tamil literature. More generally, I argue that far from becoming obsolete, traditional literature served certain groups in the cities of the Straits Settlements to imagine themselves as a 'community' through the shared experience of unfamiliar cityscapes. Traditional Tamil literature provided authors and audiences with a means to imagine themselves as a community through their common experience of consuming the city. This literature served to distinguish their predominantly mercantile social formation from their compatriots who aspired to a career in colonial administration and who favoured more 'modern', Anglicized modes of expression. The manner in which 'traditional' Tamil literary culture responded to the transformations of the colonial period is a necessary complement to the study of literature that drew more directly from the literary culture favoured by British colonial modernity.

Tamil Poetry and the Straits Settlements

The Tamil language was certainly established in the Straits Settlements prior to the 19th century through the sojourns of Tamil-speakers, as evidenced by its occasional use in inscriptions, official documents, and private correspondence (Tschacher 2024: 312). Yet clear evidence for Tamil literary activity in the region only emerges at the very end of the 18th century, when the Straits was already being integrated into competing British and Dutch spheres of influence, and when important ports were under British control. It was these ports— Penang, Malacca, and from 1819 onwards, Singapore—that ultimately came to form the British colony of the Straits Settlements. Encouraged by the opportunities provided by both the trade passing through the Straits and the plantation economies that developed along its shores, South Indians as British subjects, soon grew into substantial populations in these ports. It is in this context that we first encounter local Tamil poetry that is not simply transmitted from South India, but actually composed in the Straits Settlements from the early 1870s onwards. Prior to the First World War, most of this literary production favoured traditional forms and aesthetics.

The First World War constitutes a watershed in Tamil literary history in the Straits Settlements. Prior to the war, literary activity was limited to a small number of local poets and print entrepreneurs, the majority of whom were Muslim, as well as a few dominant-caste mercantile Hindus. Muslims had formed the majority of South Indians in the region for centuries before labour-migration in the late-19th century transformed migration patterns and brought a large number of mostly lower-caste Hindu labourers into the Straits Settlements (Amrith 2013: 101-143; Rai 2014: 67-131). Through their close familial and business relations with the local Malay Muslim majority, Tamil-speaking Muslims pioneered the composition and printing of Tamil literary and other publications by piggy-backing on the much more economically viable Malay publishing sector (Tschacher 2024: 318-320). While the composition and publication of Tamil literature in and about the Straits Settlements remained low in the period leading up to the First World War, there is still a significant corpus of texts from the period that engaged with the

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[4] The territories of Penang, Province Wellesley, Malacca, and Singapore, which apart from the latter today are all part of modern Malaysia.

urban landscapes of the Straits Settlements, a geography filled with people, sights, and sensory experiences unknown to earlier Tamil literature, if not always to earlier Tamil people. And unlike earlier poets, who imagined the similarly unfamiliar cityscapes of Ayodhya or Jerusalem solely through the established imagery of ideal Tamil cities, colonial-period authors actively tried to engage with the novelty and unfamiliarity of other cityscapes.

Apart from weekly Tamil newspapers, the main products of Tamil publishing in the Straits Settlements prior to the First World War consisted of poetry collections, usually in genres intended for singing and dance performance popular in the 18th and 19th centuries (Tschacher 2024: 316-317). While these are sometimes labelled as 'folk' or 'popular' genres (Zvelebil 1974: 200-201), they should not be mistaken as being part of everyday social life of the Tamil-speakers in the Straits Settlements. On the contrary, all of them were composed by locally settled poets, among them some figures of renown, most prominently Kulām Kātiṟu Nāvalar (1833-1908). Nāvalar was a disciple of Mīṉāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai (1815-1876), possibly the most important Tamil poet of the 19th century,[5] and not only composed substantial works of Muslim devotional poetry and one of the most popular prose hagiographies of Shāh al-Ḥamīd of Nagore, the most important Muslim saint in the Tamil region, but he also participated in the activities of the ongoing revival of Tamil learning and literature, especially the so-called Fourth Madurai Tamil Sangam, a scholarly association founded in 1901 under the auspices of the Zamindar of Ramnad (Ebeling 2010: 127). Nāvalar was a resident of Penang in the 1880s, where he also published a Tamil newspaper. Another poet of repute who was settled for some time in the Straits Settlements was Cevatta Maraikkāyar (Comeau 2016), one of whose compositions I will analyse more closely below. That the authors of the texts discussed in this article were members of the local Tamil elite with a certain amount of learning, who also engaged in more 'modern' prose genres such as newspapers and prose hagiographies, should be kept in mind when reading the poems they composed. They were not simply 'leftovers' of an earlier age.

A significant number of poems, and poetry collections, from this period reveal how local Tamil poets at the turn of the 20th century depicted the cities of the Straits Settlements to both local and Indian audiences. The majority of the poems, much as in the literature of the immediate precolonial period in general were devotional in orientation, usually collected into anthologies grouped around one theme or another. Given the preponderance of Muslims among publishers, it is unsurprising that devotion to Muslim figures—the Prophet Muhammad, Sufi masters, saints—dominates, apart from some other poems that are dedicated to particular Hindu deities and temples. On the Muslim side, the collections *Muṉājāttuttiraṭṭu* ('Collection of *munājāt*'; Singapore, 1872) and *Kīrttaṉattiraṭṭu* ('Collection of *kīrttaṉam*s'; Singapore 1896) feature some material on local shrines.[6] Of particular interest for their descriptions of local cityscapes are two other publications that include longer sections detailing the geography and notable sights of several cities of the Straits Settlements. The first, Cevatta Maraikkāyar's *Malākkā-p piravēcattiraṭṭu* ('Collection on a Journey to Malacca'; Singapore 1886), consists of a main poem describing the journey of a Singapore-based Tamil Muslim gem merchant to the shrine of Pulau Besar off the coast of Malacca, as well as a couple of shorter poems in praise of the same merchant, thereby blending devotionalism with praise of the patron, an aspect commonly encountered in 17th- and 18h-century Tamil poetry. The second, the *Piṉāṅku, uṟcava tiruvalaṅkāra-c cintu* (*Tiruvalaṅkāra-c cintu* regarding a Festival at Penang"; Penang 1895) consists of a single poem in the *alaṅkāra-c cintu* genre,[7] detailing the procession taken

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[5] Regarding Mīṉāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai, see Ebeling 2010: 33-102.

[6] *Muṉājāttu* and *kīrttaṉam* are two genre-like types of devotional poetry in Tamil that are usually intended to be sung. The former is peculiar to Islamic literature; cf. Uwise 1971: 185-187, Zvelebil 1974: 221-222.

[7] The term *cintu* refers to a genre that is divided into several subgenres, or a cluster of genres. These had become popular between the 16th and 18th centuries, just prior to colonial rule. In general, a *cintu*

through George Town by the local Penang branch-shrine of the Nagore *dargah*, the most important Muslim saint shrine dedicated to Shāh al-Ḥamīd at Nagore in Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu.[8] Poems and collections of poetry in praise of local Hindu temples are called *Ciṅkai Murukēcarpēril patikam* ('Hymn in the name of Murukēcar of Singapore': Singapore 1893), *Taṇṇīrmalai Vaṭivēlar periṟ tutikavi* ('Praise-poem in the name of Vaṭivēlar of the Water Hill'; Penang 1894), and *Ciṅkai Civacupramaṇyar tōttiramañcari* ('Garland of eulogies for Sivasubramanyar of Singapore'; Singapore, 1914), all of them dedicated to Murugan.[9]

Beside this devotional literature, there are some other more unusual poems composed about the Straits Settlements in a traditional mode. *Ciṅkaiyantāti* ('*Antāti* on Singapore'; Singapore 1887)[10] describes the journey of a couple from rural Tamil Nadu to Singapore. This poem was long (incorrectly) considered the earliest Tamil poem composed in Singapore. Somewhat later, Iraṅkacāmi Tācaṉ published his *Ativiṉōta-k kutirai-p pantaya lāvaṇi* (Singapore 1893), which is a *lāvaṇi* poem on the 'many wonders of the racecourse' in Singapore.[11] Ṣeykumuhammatu Pāvalar's *Ciṅkai Juhar pirayāṇa-k kummi* ('*Kummi* on a journey to Singapore and Johor'), published at Nagapattinam in 1910, is the only poem that is analysed here, which was published in India. It presents a travelogue of Singapore and Johor in the form of a *kummi*, a song to be sung alongside a children's ball game. Finally, in the period postdating the First World War, note should be made of Ciṉṉaiyā's *Ciṅkainakar vēcikaḷiṉ mēl ciṅkāra lāvaṇi* (Penang 1924), a *lāvaṇi* 'on the prostitutes of Singapore'. I unfortunately had no access to this last-mentioned poem for this article. Yet judging by its title, it seems to exemplify the tendency towards imagining the Straits Settlements as a site of novel and often titillating experiences that we encounter in many of the earlier Tamil poems from the region. On the whole, while there were also a fair number of publications that contained more general devotional poetry, as well as one or two works dedicated to important places in India, a fair amount of the Tamil poetry published in the Straits Settlements prior to the First World War actually engaged with the cities of the Straits Settlements and their sites, both religious and secular. This gave poets ample scope to describe cityscapes and their inhabitants, and forced them to come to terms with places that were rather different from the cities of the Madras Presidency that had hitherto formed the main subject of Tamil poetry about cities.

Mapping Cityscapes in the Straits

The city is everywhere in these early Tamil poetic works from the Straits Settlements. Even when the subject of a given poem explored a specific shrine, temple, or other locality, poets seldom missed the opportunity to provide a more detailed glimpse of the sights and geography of the cityscape surrounding the central action of the poem. While none of the extant poems belonged to one of the long narrative genres that commonly included a separate chapter

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is a musical composition meant to be sung, consisting of refrain (*pallavi*), secondary refrain (*aṉupallavi*), and a varying number of stanzas. By the 19th century, the genre had developed into a number of subgenres that were often dependent on the subject of the song, the differences between which were unclear as they were never standardized. The *cintu* genre(s) are often labelled as 'folk' or 'popular' compositions, but by the 19th century, many were actually complex in terms of language and meter, indicated through the designation of *alaṅkāra-c cintu* or 'ornamented *cintu*' (cf. Zvelebil 1974: 220-224).

[8] On the Nagore shrine, see Saheb 2014; for the Southeast Asian branch shrines of Penang and Singapore, see Alfieri 1997.

[9] Murugan temples are among the oldest Hindu temples in the Straits Settlements, and the processions surrounding Murugan's festival at *taipūcam* (late-January to early-February) play an important role in local Hindu practice (see Clothey 2006: 58-77, Collins 1997).

[10] An *antāti* is a poem in which the last word of a stanza forms the first word of the subsequent stanza, and the final word of the poem is also the first word of the poem (Zvelebil 1974: 195).

[11] The *lāvaṇi* is a Marathi genre of erotic poetry associated with dance performances, borrowed into Tamil via the Maratha court at Thanjavur (Kulkarni 2022: 49-50, Sundaram 1994)

describing the city, opportunities for poetic evocations of local sights and cityscapes were readily exploited by poets to produce thick and aesthetically pleasing depictions of what happened along the roads and alleys of these familiar yet foreign territories. In doing so, many poets drew on similar rhetorical strategies to present descriptions of cityscapes, strategies that will help us gain a better understanding of how poets dealt with encountering the Straits-Settlements city. Consider the following lines from the *Ativiṉōta-k kutirai-p pantaya lāvaṇi* 1893: verse 13:

> When we passed the post-office, praised in all directions, we saw the bridge contrived of iron,
> In [whose reflection] we perceived ourselves, and on the great bank beyond the Europe Hotel;
> [We glanced] with desire upon the white people, who built it within a single year,
> Upon the lovely people, junctions, and open spaces, o bejewelled lady, *nirccākōr* girl![12]
> On the western side of Beach Road,
> A bazar is visible, behold, the novel workmanship,
> Arduous North Bridge Road, halls spread alongside;
> We saw streets of young *Makkākkāri*s,[13]
> Of Japanese women, praised by the wicked; o girl,
> Observe their skill in placing make-up on their cheeks, acknowledged by the whole world.

The poem, like many others, preserves the convention of Tamil song and dance genres in that the speaker addresses a female companion, often referred to as his wife nowadays, but who in the premodern period was usually conceived of as a courtesan. The semi-dialogic form makes translation sometimes difficult, as imperatives and addresses to the companion are interspersed with more general descriptive passages ("we saw…", repeated several times in the verse). An important aspect of this and of similar poems is that the couple literally maps the city as they are walking through it, either along a procession route or, as here, en route to their destination, the Singapore race course. The poet refers to the specific route they are taking and the sights to be found there in ways that follow the style of earlier realism in presenting cityscapes that are already encountered in the earlier *talappurāṇa*s. Where this poem differs from the *talappurāṇam* genre and other precolonial poetry, however, is in the specific nature of the sights encountered along the way. In the first half of the verse, these sights are markers of a secular, unequivocally European, colonial order: the shining iron bridge over the Singapore river connecting the two halves of the main city, and the Europe Hotel on the spot now occupied by the Former Supreme Court of Singapore. Alongside these landmarks, the poem also notes the white inhabitants who brought about this city-scape. The novelty of these sights in the context of Tamil poetry is still moderated by the fact that, like the temple-towns of old, they are still depicted in an unambiguously positive and panegyric light. But shifting further along North Bridge Road, the second half of the verse depicts a far seedier side of the city, for example, the red-light district in the lanes off North Bridge Road surrounding Malay Street. Here, the denizens are decidedly more Asian: Japanese and Chinese prostitutes plying their trade (Warren 2003: 39-42), the praise of their skills acquiring a far more ironic and almost mocking tone.

There are two main points regarding the literary strategies used to describe cityscapes in this kind of literature. The first, as just noted, is the representation of the process or experience of 'walking the city'. As mentioned, this strategy is found in many other Tamil poems from and

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[12] This word is unclear to me.
[13] I assume that the term *makkākkāri* refers to 'women from Macao'.

about the Straits Settlements from this period. In the '*alaṅkāra-c cintu* of the Paya Lebar Bungalow' (*Pāyālēpār paṅkalāviṉ alaṅkāraccintu*), a poem praising the bungalow of his patron Mira Sahib, a Singapore gem-trader, contained in the *Malākkā-p piravēcattiraṭṭu* (1886), Cevatta Maraikkāyar, the poet, similarly offers road directions to a woman towards the rural suburb of Paya Lebar which is to the east of Singapore city (*Pāyālēpār paṅkalāviṉ alaṅkāraccintu* 1886: verse 3):

> In Kampong Glam, in auspicious Singapore,
> he reaps the crop in the world of the gem-trade;
> [This is] the house of dignified Master Mira Sahib,
> […]
> This is the place where bright lights are lit in crystal,
> And this before the tomb of the Bugis giving strength,
> Spreading stench everywhere are the hide-godowns,
> The mill for paddy that all eat, and this is the iron bridge,
> […]

The verse continues in the same vein for several lines. In the *Ciṅkai Juhar pirayāṇa-k kummi*, a versified travelogue of Singapore published in 1910, the walking is augmented by more modern forms of transport, in this case the tramway line from the Tanjong Pagar docks to Crawford Street, opened in 1885 (*Ciṅkai Juhar pirayāṇa-k kummi* 1910: verse 39-40):

> See Kuala Selat, called Pulau Brani,
> The beauty of the blossoms in the flowering gardens,
> And on the height of the black hill
> The mausoleum of the late Turkish consul.
> Passing Kampong Brani, we may
> With enthusiasm get into a coach
> Of the tramway espied before, and obtain a glimpse
> Of Sayyid Nūḥ Walī's holy dargah.

Such peregrinations across the city are a fundamental part of this literature, whether they take place as part of a person's travels, pinpoint the exact location of a particular destination—such as the race course or a bungalow—or follow the procession route of a chariot on a festival day. In the course of traversing the city, they offer poets ample opportunity to describe sights and sites along the way. Following an actual travel route was not really a new poetic technique for describing places. Rather, what is new is the manner in which sites, sights, and modes of transport that were unknown to earlier Tamil poetry were integrated, and indeed, actively sought out by this poetry. After all, it would have been sufficient for poets to confine themselves to descriptions that had been part of Tamil literature for centuries, such as generic descriptions of markets, pleasure gardens, mansions, or the praiseworthy qualities of the inhabitants of the city. Instead, we encounter all sorts of novelties, such as iron bridges, tramways, or Japanese prostitutes. Oddly, the conceit of narrating this movement to a female companion, which seems to introduce a level of immediacy and indeed, realism, is actually one of the most unrealistic elements in these descriptions. South Indian society in the Straits Settlements at the time was overwhelmingly male (Amrith 2013: 152-153; Rai 2014: 27). Elite members of Tamil society were more likely to take a second wife from amongst the Malay or other Southeast Asian communities rather than bring their Indian wives to the Straits Settlements. Sauntering through the city in the company of a sex-worker was also rather unlikely—nor were the primarily Chinese and Japanese women, who made up the majority of prostitutes in the colony, likely to appreciate Tamil poetry. More often than not, the movement through the city also provided poets with the opportunity to utilize the second important literary strategy to describe the city in this type of literature. This consists of long lists of categorized entities: plants, foodstuffs,

illuminations, buildings, people. Cevatta Maraikkāyar (1886), for example, provides a list of the foodstuffs available in his patron's bungalow (*Pāyālēpār paṅkalāviṉ alaṅkāraccintu* 1910: verse 8):

> For those who come all kinds of biryani,
> Fragrant *Koḻumam* Pulao, excellent chicken meat,
> Sugared rice-dishes, beginning with sweet firni
> All kinds of curries, kurma and kichadi,
> Crores of varieties, countless types,
> For those who come searching with their hearts,
> Wonderful korma, kofta, and pachadi,
> [Everything] from Murghi Khasa onwards, with mouth-watering pulses,
> Syrup, rock-candy, and fruits making the mind rejoice,
> Sweet palm sugar, juice and sherbet,
> To delight in, enough to push
> A wasted disciple into heaven,
> […]

People were another frequent subject for such lists, as evidenced by this list of worshippers at Singapore's Friday Mosque (*Ciṅkai Juhar pirayāṇa-k kummi* 1910: verse 48-49):

> How many nations has this city?
> It is said, with Arabs and Turks,
> People from Lanka, Hindustan, Persia, India,
> Iran, Kabul, and Abyssinia
> More yet, Chinese, Malays,
> Javanese, [people from] Dabo [Singkep?] and Riau,
> Those called Mandailing, from Penang, the Gawo[?],
> Sura[?] people, and Boyanese, o girls![14]

Rather than shying away from engaging with novel people and goods, for which no established ways of depiction existed in Tamil literature, the poets seem to have paid special attention to such novelties and 'exotic' entities for enumeration and description, leading us to the peculiar manner in which these descriptions operated within the texts.

The Task of Novelty

What fundamentally distinguishes the poems discussed here from their precolonial predecessors in regard to the descriptions of cities and urbanity is the role played by the novel, exotic, and unfamiliar. In a convention-driven literary culture such as the premodern Tamil one, these elements are potentially disruptive, in that they lack generally-accepted valuations and associations. Yet rather than avoid such unfamiliar literary territory, poets in the Straits Settlements seem to have actively searched out such elements. Thus, in the list of foods available at Mira Sahib's house quoted above, we find few dishes that would have been commonly encountered at a Tamil home: there are neither *dosa*s nor *idli*s, nor *sambar* either. And while some of the more general ways of preparation have made it into the text, such as *pachadi*s (roughly comparable to North-Indian *raita*s), even the humble curry is spelled here as *kari* rather than the normal *kaṟi*, revealing that the dish in question was considered a novelty, a reborrowing of the English 'curry' rather than the day-to-day Tamil fare referred to as *kaṟi*

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[14] I was unable to identify the final two groups, apparently from the Malay-Indonesian world, called *kāvō* or *āvō* and (*kula*) *cūrar*, respectively.

(from which the English word 'curry' originated).[15] These were the special dishes served by a successful man of the world, not the staples offered by housewives and simple eateries.

A central term encountered frequently in these descriptions is *putumai*, literally 'newness, novelty' and, by extension, 'modernity'. We encountered the term above in referring to 'novel workmanship' (*putumaiyin vēlai*), a phrase that could arguably also be translated as 'modern times'. In other poems, it is used to describe objects as 'novel' or 'modern', such as mirrors in *Pāyālēpār paṅkalāviṉ alaṅkāraccintu* 5. The partial overlap with the notion of 'modernity' here should not obscure that what these poems were praising was not 'modernity' as a particular mindset or orientation to the world, but 'novelty' as a surprising feature of a particular object that was being described. The central association of the term *putumai* is thus not *navīṉam*, 'modernity', but 'wonder' (yet another meaning of *putumai*). This links the term with the emotional experience of 'amazement' (Sanskrit *adbhuta*, Tamil *aṟputam*, *maruṭkai*, or *viyappu*) in Sanskritic literary theory (Schuler 2022: 74). The unfamiliar elements of life in the Straits Settlements could be aesthetically tamed by marking them as part of the sensational and wondrous. And this wondrous world is not threatening; rather, it is presented as an attractive diversion, as 'fun' or 'amusement' (*vēṭikkai*), another term of importance in Straits-Settlements Tamil poetry (e.g. *Piṉāṅku, uṟcava tiruvalaṅkāra-c cintu* 1895: verse 5). This is also a common term in newspaper reports of the period, which increasingly used the term to capture the experiential aspects of public rituals and celebrations (Tschacher 2010: 200-205).

This focus on novelty permitted authors to evade one of the central limitations on urban descriptions encountered in earlier literature, namely, the avoidance of the negative sides of city life, the shady or outright unsanitary aspects. While precolonial Tamil authors could refer to garbage and muck only in hyperbolic terms, by pointing out how in 'their city', these unappetizing facets of life would consist instead of discarded gems and unguents, their late-19th century Straits-Settlements counterparts had the liberty to directly point out unsanitary conditions, provided that it occurred in the context of mapping the wonders of the Straits city (*Pāyālēpār paṅkalāviṉ alaṅkāraccintu* 1886: verse 9):

> […]
> [Here is] the jungle-hospital where the sick scream,
> And this is the station holding policemen full of heat,
> The stench of shit in the latrine of the honourable Mr. Sawyer,[16]
> That troubles the mind, leaving that behind as well,
> [We reach] the noisy stone-kilns where masonry is made,
> […]

It would have been unthinkable for earlier poets to include 'the stench of shit' (*valattiṉ vīccal*) in the description of a city, even if in jest. Neither were field hospitals with screaming inmates nor noisy stone-kilns part of the ideal Tamil city. They contributed, however, to evoking the novelty of the landscape much as they, almost paradoxically, made the place recognizable to the poor souls among the audience familiar with Mr. Sawyer's odorous latrine. There is certainly an element of humorous inversion in the passage, no matter whether the poem referred to a Mr. Sawyer or an anonymous customs officer (*cāyar*), as the passage traces the way that the speaker of the poem and his imaginary female companion have to take back to central Singapore from Mira Sahib's bungalow in Paya Lebar. This serves to highlight the opulence of

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[15] While it is not uncommon to see the letters -r- and -ṟ- mixed up in manuscripts and even prints, it is by and large used correctly in this and other Straits-Settlements prints at the time, making it unlikely that this is a simple spelling mistake.

[16] *cāyar* also simply means 'customs officer', so it may be that a more anonymous translation might be intended, but the use of *kaṉa*, 'honourable' does suggest a name is intended. 'Sawyer' was suggested to me by Dr. G. Vijayavenugopal, Pondicherry.

the bungalow and contrast it to the inhabitations of lesser folk, among whom were apparently also Englishmen. At the same time, the British and their creations usually served as models of urbanity and as sources of positive amazement. As Singapore's South Indian merchant class was not known as a hotbed of anticolonial sentiment, it is unlikely that the reference had any larger intention of critiquing the colonial order as a whole. But this does not change the fact that the reference to filth and discomfort in the description of a city was a clear innovation. This passage, as well as many others that listed the novelty and unusual sights of Singapore or Penang, ultimately underscored the degree to which the matters described in the poems constituted things that could be experienced, and, more centrally, consumed by an individual of the class to which these poets, patrons, and imagined audiences belonged. The poems are filled with lists enumerating sights, smells, people, and, most importantly, exotic goods—foodstuffs, mirrors, fruits, lamps, clothes, plants—that the ideal member of the social class addressed by these poems could access.

This is particularly true also of an additional element that forms less of a transformation, but instead, constitutes a surprising continuity from earlier Tamil poetry: the noticeable interest in prostitutes and local women. Prostitutes formed one of the more commonly encountered denizens of Tamil poetic worlds in the 17th and 18th centuries (Narayana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 1992: 123-124, 316). But the Victorian revulsion for 'obscenity' in Tamil literary culture quickly made them a literary element that any would-be poet and writer from the colonial elite would do well to avoid in his writings (Ebeling 2010:187-192). Admittedly, the passage from the *Ativiṉōta-k kutirai-p pantaya lāvaṇi* (1893) quoted above heaps only the fake 'praise of the wicked' (*tuṣṭarkaḷ pukaḻ*) on the Chinese and Japanese women working in the 'difficult' (*kaṣṭamāy*) environment of North Bridge Road. But these women are nevertheless included in the description and list of sights to be experienced en route to the Singapore race course. In fact, already the very first poem that describes a local Singapore site, a short poem praising the shrine of Sikandar Shah included in Mukammatu Aptulkātiṟuppulavar's anthology of devotional poems of 1872, asks the saint to protect him "from the deceitful nets of those ladies covered with garlands that surround their breasts" (*Muṉājāttuttiraṭṭu* 1872: verse 19). Other poems were less shamefaced in their sexualization of local women. In his preface to Kōca Maraikkāyar's *Piṉāṅku, uṟcava tiruvalaṅkāra-c cintu* (1895), Cevatta Maraikkāyar praised Penang as "the city much embellished by the beauty of Malay women, who are like swans due to the burden of the beautiful form, carrying breasts smeared with excellent sandal paste, with dolled-up hair" (*Piṉāṅku, uṟcava tiruvalaṅkāra-c cintu*, *Ciṟappuppāyiram*). While this is a phrase worthy of 18th-century Tamil poetry, it is hardly in line with elite mores in the Tamil world of the Victorian age. What these verses point to is the ambiguous role played by local women in the life of elite Tamil men from the Straits Settlements. For centuries, Muslim and Hindu traders had taken secondary wives and concubines from among the local populations as a means of integrating them into local society, but it was also a practice that came under increasing criticism by the end of the 19th century. In the more 'Western' genre of the newspaper, the same elites voiced their unease with relations between 'Tamil cupids' and 'Malay goddesses of lust', as the gender hierarchies implied in these relationships as well as the property regimes they undergirded became increasingly strained ("*Tamiḻ maṉmataṉum malāy ratiyum*", *Piṉāṅku Ñāṉācāriyaṉ*, 9th and 14th of June 1913: 3; Tschacher 2018: 79). The sexual politics of Tamil poetry about the Straits Settlements point to the role played by the depiction of the Straits city as an assemblage of consumable experiences in creating a matrix for the formation of a novel urban class.

In Praise of the City (Still)

As mentioned earlier, descriptions of the city in premodern Tamil literature were of a predominantly panegyric character. As most descriptions of cityscapes concerned the home of a poem's hero, often a deity, nothing less than an ideal city would have done justice to the

greatness of a poem's central character. In turn, this also meant that descriptions of cities, especially when they concerned identifiable, known localities in South India, also turned into panegyrics of the city itself, whose pre-eminence among cities the poem reinforced and (often) exaggerated. It is not as if this image of the 'ideal city' was absent from the poetry considered in this article. In fact, whereas earlier literature imagined whichever city formed its subject as the ideal one, it is even possible to name the ideal locus of novelties for Straits Settlement authors. At the close of his *Pāyālēpār paṅkalāviṉ alaṅkāraccintu* (1886), the poet Cevatta Maraikkāyar turns to his imaginary companion and requests her to thank his patron, Mira Sahib, whose bungalow they had just visited, by stating that it was "like a quick stroll to pearl-filled Calcutta" (*muttu niṟai Kalkattā muṭuka payaṇam eṉa*; *Pāyālēpār paṅkalāviṉ alaṅkāraccintu* 9). Looking at poems composed in the Straits Settlements in the decades before the First World War, the panegyric function is thus still discernible in likening the patron's bungalow to a residence in the capital of British India and to the foremost city of southern Asia. As argued, it creates the Straits city as a space of novel and exotic experiences, in which the discerning connoisseur of Tamil poetry could savour the taste of mangosteen and rambutan, admire globe-lamps, take the tram, and catch a salacious glance at a Japanese prostitute's make-up on his way to the race course. Much as the eulogizing of cities in earlier literature had not been about the city itself so much as it had been about its inhabitants, so the lists of consumable novelties in the Straits Settlements served to extol those who were able to experience, savour, and enjoy these novelties—the class of men (exclusively men) to which the poets, patrons, publishers, and targeted audiences of this literature belonged, or at least, aspired to.

In doing so, the poetry under discussion achieved something long in the making, but in its specific shape also startlingly novel: the arrival of a mercantile, quasi-bourgeois middle class in the field of Tamil literature. Most of earlier Tamil literature had been the domain of courtly and religious elites. Only among Muslims had merchants maintained a continuous involvement in literary pursuits from the late-16th century. The changed economic and technological conditions of the colonial period enabled larger sections of society to engage with the creation and consumption of literature. In the Straits Settlements, this middle class did not primarily consist of clerks, lawyers, and teachers in the colonial government who had begun to create Tamil literature after English models in India and Ceylon, despite a small number of mainly Ceylonese and Malayali translators, clerks, and engineers making it to the Straits Settlements (Rai 2014: 96-100). Rather, the local Tamil middle class was predominantly a more 'vernacular' and moneyed class of merchants, businessmen, money-lenders, and shop-keepers composed largely of Muslims and Hindus from dominant landed and mercantile castes, such as Vellalars or Chettiars (Rai 2014:104-107). These individuals, who came to Penang or Singapore in the hope of making a fortune, or at least, a good income, braved the confusing experiences of an unfamiliar world, in which their main social anchors were other men of their own social background, especially as their wives overwhelmingly stayed back in India. This experience of novelty was fundamental to the life-experiences of these men, even if their families had maintained ties with Southeast Asia for centuries. The novelty of Straits urbanity thus formed a core part of their social identity, both as experience and as desire. Literature thus helped imagine a social class by expressing its experiences and aspirations.

The degree to which city descriptions formed community through literature is particularly visible in yet another kind of list, forming another geography of urban space that is commonly encountered in the poems. We caught a glimpse of this in the somewhat unfortunate notoriety provided to Mr. Sawyer by his smelly toilet: the Straits-Settlements city of Tamil poetry formed a personalized network of individuals. Line after line enumerates the gentlemen living along the way or joining in the procession, men the author expected his audience to know—indeed, men he expected his audience to consist of (*Pāyālēpār paṅkalāviṉ alaṅkāraccintu* 1886: verse 2):

> O Golden One, reach [the bungalow];
> [Where lives] wealthy Mira Sahib,
> Muhammad Ali Maraikkayar, who has propriety,
> Sayyid Ahmad Makhdum Sahib, called the 'Lion',
> Muhammad, resplendent in excellence, Muhammad Ibrahim,
> Brilliant Abdurrahman Muhammad Imam,
> Dignified Qazi Tambi, who passes authoritative judgment,
> Fakir Ahmad Capitan, the saffron blossom,
> Noble Periyatambi Ismailtambi,
> Darkness-dispelling Yusuf, Fakir of Vanjur,
> Honourable Maraikkar Sheykh Sahib Abdulqadir,
> Dignified Muhyiddin Abdulqadir,
> Muhammad, pure of religion, who unifies minds;
> Our Chidambaram Chettiar Mutthiah,
> Who makes the wealth of the Ganges in Singapore's shops
> And practices glorious trade without any want,
> Illustrious Subrahmani; to many prospering shops,
> Nobody will come at this time, the rich man
> Will not seek wealth; Daud Sahib,
> Sayyid Ghani here, with pleasant Hamid, and joining with Ghulam,
> They reached [it] with the help of Chinnatambi Lebbai,
> The Ceylonese crowd joined with Chinniah,
> Went to Paya Lebar, and left just now.

Similar lists of names are found in other poems, such as the *Piṉāṅku, uṟcava tiruvalaṅkāra-c cintu* in 1895 (Tschacher 2010: 205-206). While most persons mentioned in these lists are now lost to the flow of time, unidentifiable for the modern reader, these lists formed a striking contrast to the other lists found in Tamil descriptions of Straits urbanity. In contrast to the unfamiliar novelties encountered in the Straits Settlements, these names were intimately familiar, so familiar that only a terse reference was necessary to render them recognizable to the poet's audience. These were the men who formed the real city for the producers and consumers of Tamil poetry in the Straits Settlements. Imagining the city meant imagining the space experienced by them, and to participate in Tamil literature about the city was to therefore become a part of their community. It is this combination of the evocation of generalized, consumable novelties and a personal community consisting of identifiable individuals that characterizes and enables the transformed character of late-19th century traditional Tamil poetry against its precolonial models in the Straits Settlements. In how far this was also the case in India, only further research can answer.

But why was this class imagining itself through the medium of traditional literature, rather than the modern modes being developed at the same time? Part of the answer certainly lies in the differential exposure to the values and ideas propagated by the colonial state. It has often been observed that Muslims in the Tamil-speaking regions of the Madras Presidency were highly literate, but generally lacking in what colonial officials deemed as 'higher education', a situation that may have been similar for dominant-caste, mercantile Hindu communities active in the Straits Settlements, who were the main Hindu producers of Tamil literature in the Straits Settlements (Francis 1902: 76-77). But it is also central to keep in mind that continuing with traditional literary forms was a choice and not a foregone conclusion. After all, the same individuals who produced Straits Tamil literature were also engaged in publishing newspapers. Some, like Kulām Kātiṟu Nāvalar, were active in the Tamil literary revival, and contributed 'modernized' traditional poetry to the revival rather than novels or modern poetry. Choosing the traditional with a contemporary twist over the colonial-modern helped this class to distinguish itself from those of their compatriots aspiring to fill the ranks of the colonial

administration. That was a group that was more heavily composed of Brahmins and Christians, and in the Straits Settlements additionally of Ceylonese Vellalars, rather than of Muslims and Chettiars. In expressing and imagining themselves through the medium of traditional poetry, with its openly panegyric style and sexual innuendos, and by the open celebration of consumption—from foodstuffs and modern gadgets to prostitutes—this social class demarcated its independence from the colonial state and from those who served it. Given the resources it already provided to imagine this consumption—including the ubiquitous presence of prostitutes—traditional Tamil poetry presented itself as the natural choice over a 'modern' literature that was heavily burdened by colonial didacticism and Victorian values. As much as those espousing 'modern' Tamil literature may have been engaged in imagining a unified Tamil public, and thereby ultimately, a Tamil nation (Bate 2021: 38-41), these texts enabled the formation of counter publics. These counter publics consisted of those whose success did not derive from the largess of the colonial state, but from taking advantage of the business opportunities that British colonialism provided.

Conclusion

The transformation of the relationship between urban life, literary practices, and emerging monied middle classes explored in this paper, complicates our understanding of literature as a social practice in colonial South Asia. Firstly, it complicates the relationship between traditional South Asian literary forms and the impact of colonial modernity. Rather than producing a stark dichotomy between inflexible, unchanging tradition and vibrant, transformative modernity, traditional Tamil poetry transformed along sometimes unexpected lines during the period. The patterns partly agree with some of the developments that Kedar Kulkarni outlines for developments in 19th-century Marathi literature more generally, where 'new' literary genres like the novel both drew on and rubbed shoulders with more 'traditional' forms of erotic and epic poetry. There are also parallels between the transformations wrought by the new economies and ecologies of print, which turned performance-based literary cultures into script-based ones (Kulkarni 2022: 234-240). I argue that the focus on consumption discussed for the urban descriptions of the Straits Settlements could be extended to the literary work, and to the book itself, increasingly turning into a commodity collectively financed by the local elites who constituted themselves through this poetry. Already the first Tamil publication in the Straits Settlements, *Muṉājāttuttiraṭṭu* in 1872, was financed through the contributions of 144 subscribers from all over Tamil Nadu, Ceylon, Burma, and the Straits Settlements, who were moreover duly noted in the publication (Tschacher 2018: 39-40, note 4). Given that publication by subscription became the norm in Tamil India only by the 1880s and 1890s, there may be some ground to see the Straits Settlements as an important laboratory for new forms of Tamil literary patronage, brought back to India by Chettiar and Muslim businessmen (cf. Venkatachalapathy 2012: 30-34).

But in addition to these transformations in the economies and ecologies of print, the adaptations and changes to literary conventions within this body of poetry are equally striking. Despite adhering to generic conventions, there are slight but noteworthy changes to the subjects, contexts, and occasionally, as in the focus on 'negative' experiences, to imagery that allow this literature to operate as an archive of social history reminiscent of the decidedly 'modern' genre of the Hindi novel in colonial northern India (cf. Dalmia 2017). It is in this regard that the importance of the context of the Straits Settlements becomes visible, because many of these transformations actually facilitated the mapping of urban contexts that differed considerably from the cities of South India that had long provided the standards of description in Tamil literature. In many ways, the Straits Settlements forced poets to find new ways of expression if they wanted to remain relevant to the social class that gave rise to this literature in the first place. While from a superficial reading, it appears to me that similar works from South India show similar transformations, the heightened difference encountered in the Straits

Settlements made these all the more visible. But they also raise the question as to why Tamil poets in the Straits Settlements chose traditional forms at all—would a more 'cosmopolitan' form of literature have been more suitable to map the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural environment of the Straits Settlements? There is certainly much scope in further probing the importance of the literary periphery for developments in colonial-period South Asian literatures in general. But what this article highlights specifically is the manner in which distinctions such as 'vernacular' and 'cosmopolitan' fall short to describe this and possibly similar cases. It was precisely the distinctive and intimate character of traditional Tamil poetry that made it more suitable as a socially defining practice for a particular section of society contextualised by intense heterotopia (cf. Green 2018 for the term). Cities were reconstituted in poetry as consumable experiences that helped to define the aspirations of an upwardly mobile social group, while simultaneously making sense of the chaos and diversity of colonial modernity for audiences in the familiar language of traditional poetry.[17]

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[17] I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their detailed engagement with this paper. I hope that the published article at least partly answers their suggestions and queries.

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Research Article

'Sensitive Witnessing': Vital Materialities and More-than-human Urban Assemblages in Arun Kolatkar's *Kala Ghoda Poems*

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This paper studies the poetry, and persona, of the 'Bombay Poet' Arun Kolatkar. Though Kolatkar was bilingual and wrote both in Marathi and English, my paper specifically explores his English poetry cycle, *Kala Ghoda Poems*. Studying how the 'social' unravels through an interplay of urban associations and materialities, my first section locates the city in 'Bombay Poetry', illustrating specific modes through which Kolatkar's poetry cycle embodies a poetics of placemaking. Using Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the 'complete artist', the poet's gaze is reframed through an analytic of 'sensitive witnessing', thus moving beyond the focus on 'the ordinary' and the 'visual' that prior interpreters' of Kolatkar's work have maintained. Drawing from the poet's 'ethnographic' style, this analysis emplaces Kolatkar within a post-humanist framework, rather than as a 'modernist' poet. Bennett's (2010) conceptualisation of 'thing-power', 'vital materiality', and 'distributive agency' is instrumental in reading the evolving, and continuously changing urban landscape of 'Bombay' in the collection, described within a complex of 'more-than-human' vitality. This liberates Kolatkar's text from a binary discursive relationship between 'human' and 'non-human' beings. In terms of an anthropological intervention, my analysis deepens extant 'literary' readings to suggest a 'political ecology' of human and more-than-human vitalities. In the last analysis, the paper raises the question of what it means for an artist—a poet—to witness an 'urban assemblage' with sensitivity, and how the space of the text, and the city, is transformed through this witnessing.

urban, Bombay, poetry, materiality, Kolatkar

Introduction

A few months before his death in 2004, the bilingual Indian poet Arun Kolatkar (1932-2004) published his landmark English collection of poetry, *Kala Ghoda Poems*. His friend, poet Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, observes that by the time of the launch of this collection, "he was terminally ill with stomach cancer and did not have long to live" (Mehrotra 2012: 77). He had started composing these poems, decades before their eventual publication in the form of a compilation. By 2004, Kolatkar already exerted considerable influence through his publishing initiatives,[1] collaborative creative activity, and the crafting of an aesthetic of innovation that was embodied in the work of the community of 'Bombay Poets' that gathered around him. But much of the acclaim for his English and Marathi language work—which has been considerable— emerged only posthumously. At the time of publication, and during the launch of the collection at the National Centre for Performing Arts, Mumbai, in 2004, before he died, Kolatkar had not achieved the legendary status that he commands today. Now, his status as a 'Bombay Poet' is

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[1] Including the *Clearing House* Publishing Collective. For more on 'Bombay Poetry' and the publishing collective, see *The Worlds of Bombay Poetry*, an introduction to a double special issue in the *Journal of Post-Colonial Writing* by Laetitia Zecchini and Anjali Nerlekar (2017: 1-11).

near-iconic, and the physical place of 'Kala Ghoda', and even the Fort Area in Mumbai, is often associated with him.[2] Kolatkar had been writing in both Marathi and English since the late 1950s. However, no less than 6 books of his poetry were published in 2004 alone, the year of his death. His posthumous publications include (in English) his *Collected Poems*, edited by A.K. Mehrotra (2010), *The Boatride and Other Poems* (in 2009), and (in Marathi) *Arun Kolatkarchya Char Kavita,* (in 2006*)* and *Jejuri* (in 2011). His lifelong aversion to publishing practices and contracts might have been the reason his publications came out in spurts, with long intervals in between each bouquet of poetic offerings. Even though Ashok Shahane's *Pras Prakashan* published most of his poetry collections in book form while he was alive, his poems were often published first in little magazines, literary journals, and anthologies, as well as one book in English (*Jejuri*), in 1976, by Clearing House.

This paper explores the different ways in which the English poetry cycle, *Kala Ghoda Poems* (KGP) unravels the urban through an interplay of 'ordinary enchantments'.[3] The first section locates the city in 'Bombay Poetry', illustrating and isolating some specific modes, among others, through which KGP embodies a poetics of placemaking. Using Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the 'complete artist', this paper frames Kolatkar's aesthetic gaze through an analytic of 'sensitive witnessing' to move beyond the focus on 'the ordinary' and the kind of witnessing that prior interpreters' of Kolatkar have maintained. Further, drawing from Kolatkar's 'ethnographic' style, thickened with description, myth, history, and 'cultural' allusion, this paper attempts to move beyond the familiar literary characterisations of the poet as a modernist poet, to place him within a post-humanist framework. Recognising that the anthropological domains of Object-Oriented Ontologies (OOO), and New Materialisms reframe the human subject within a continuum of things—objects, animals, and 'matter'/material—I have read and analysed KGP along the conceptual contours of 'thing power', 'vital materiality', and 'distributive agency', as proposed by Jane Bennett (2010). This reading, I suggest, rather than imprisoning the text in a binary discursive relationship between "human" and "non-human", proposes a way of thinking about the evolving and continuously changing urban landscape of 'Bombay' described in the poetry cycle in a formation of 'more-than-human' vitality[4] In the last analysis, this anthropological intervention harmonizes the ethical import of my argument with Bennett's 'Vibrant Matter'. This analysis deepens extant 'literary' readings of Kolatkar to suggest a – 'political ecology', that is inspired by Bennett's methodological assertions which locate publics as human and more-than-human entanglements "provoked into existence by a shared experience of harm" (Bennett 2010 : xix). In response to Timothy Morton and Graham Harman's assessment of Bennett's ideas (pioneering thinkers who have proposed theories of more-than-human 'objects'), she invokes an ethical charge—a politics—while endorsing a "turn to things in contemporary theory" (Bennett 2010). She asserts that this turn—of which her own work is a significant part—"might help us live more sustainably, with less violence toward a variety of bodies" (Bennett 2012 : 232). These ideas reinforce what it means for an

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[2] Personal communication in July 2025 with a poet and translator, who has translated Kolatkar's Marathi poetry into English, and is well known within the cultural milieu of Mumbai. We discussed how a 'Kolatkar Walk' or a 'Kolatkar-themed' event could be organized regularly every month in the Kala Ghoda/ Fort Area in Mumbai. Kolatkar has become an 'empty signifier' for everything to do with 'Bombay Poetry'.

[3] "Enchanted by the ordinary, Kolatkar made the ordinary enchanting" (Mehrotra 2012: 90). Cited further in the paper as well – I rework this articulation into a conceptual category to foreground critics' readings of Kolatkar's engagement with his 'subject matter'.

[4] Bennett highlights the concept of 'more-than-human vitality' to foreground "a philosophy of human agency that accounts for both its assemblage-quality *and* its capacity to add something qualitatively new to the world." Bennet in *Q & A with Jane Bennett* Duke University Blog: https://dukeupress.wordpress.com/2020/06/03/qa-with-jane-bennett/ (accessed on 01.07.2025).

artist—a poet—to witness an assemblage with sensitivity, and how the 'space' is transformed through this witnessing.

Kolatkar's Poetics in *Kala Ghoda Poems*: The "Complete Artist" as 'Sensitive Witness'

Kala Ghoda Poems (KGP) is a poetry cycle that brings alive the cityscape with an orchestra of characters who live amidst its burgeoning *material* infrastructure. The collection is eponymously set in Kala Ghoda, a place in South Mumbai ('Bombay' in the 1960s)[5] that got its name from a bronze equestrian statue of King Edward VII. The area is known for numerous art galleries, museums, educational institutions (including the Bombay University campus), libraries, and heritage colonial buildings. These fixtures are maintained, today, by a civil society collective of architects, financiers, anthropologists, and urban planners, alongside the state, that give the place its reputation of being the city's 'art quarters' or cultural centre.

KGP, however, focuses attention on figures who inhabit the edges of these elite establishments. The picture it paints is compellingly real, punctuated with details of place, thing/object, creature, and feeling. The poet is a witness to the everyday activities of an evolving community that he can never be a part of. As he sits and writes at a café that overlooks a "traffic island" (Kolatkar 2004: 17), his poetry transforms the city he is witnessing. The eclectic protagonists of this poetic narrative include, among others, pi-dog(s), ragpickers, prostitutes, drug peddlers, lepers, pimps, lavatory attendants, and street cleaners; but also, coconut fronds, garbage mounds, pinwheels, old bicycle tyres, and a café wall against which a Poster Standee for rat poison leans. The collection crystallizes thematically through the 'poetic voice', birthing a notion of the city that is in a continuous state of becoming.

In the last decade or so there has been a renaissance in the critical reception of the 'milieu' of 'Bombay Poetry' during and post the *sātthotari* (Marathi for the '60s'). Two comprehensive books by 'Kolatkar scholars' writing about this period have renewed attention towards his role as a catalyst in this important time of ferment that transformed the cultural landscape of writing in the city of Mumbai ('Bombay' then): Laetitia Zecchini's *Moving Lines: Arun Kolatkar and Literary Modernism in India* (2014) and Anjali Nerlekar's *Bombay Modern: Arun Kolatkar and Bilingual Literary Culture* (2016). Both scholars have consolidated much of the literary scholarship on Kolatkar, and in their introduction to a double issue on *The Worlds of Bombay Poetry* they speak of this complex entity that they call 'Bombay poetry'—"the poetry of the place… of Bombay through the urban space—and its different linguistic and creative contexts—that made the writing and the publishing of this poetry possible" (Zecchini and Nerlekar 2017: page 1).

In an essay entitled *The Experience of Urban Space in the Poetry of Arun Kolatkar* that is part of an introductory volume that reinvents the 'Postcolonial' through the conceptual category of the 'metropolis', Rajeev Patke draws attention to this phenomenon of 'Bombay Poetry' by outlining various characteristics in Kolatkar's unique poetics, espousing this in terms of Lefebvre's abstraction of a "sociology of the everyday" (Patke 2016: 194). Patke identifies the poet's lateral gaze that portrays 'lower case' characters in a carnivalesque idiom attuned to everyday existence, where 'casual' mundanities are expressed through the affective tonality of 'joy'. Perhaps it is this context of 'everyday existence' that provokes Kolatkar's friend, poet Mehrotra (who also edited the definitive edition of Kolatkar's English 'complete poems') to pay homage to the quality of attention he brings to inanimate objects, things and beings that live at

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[5] The city's official name was changed to Mumbai in 1995. In all his English poetry Kolatkar however refers to the city as 'Bombay'.

the 'edge' of vision and the other senses: "Enchanted by the ordinary, Kolatkar made the ordinary enchanting" (Patke 2016: 90).

The 'ordinary' is a framing principle for Patke, who observes how characters and things are 'enclosed' within it, turning the space of the city into 'place' in KGP. The poet gestures "towards ordinariness" (ibid.: 192), an arena that is characterized by "the stray, the abandoned, the desultory, the solitary as well as the lonely, the inconsequential, the insignificant, and the unprepossessing" (2016: 192). The 'ordinary' as an analytical frame shadows Kolatkar's writing practice—scholar Laetitia Zecchini invokes Georges Perec's notion of the 'infra-ordinary' (ibid.: 92), and its concern with the quotidian and the banal, the 'anti-event', the background noise, and the habitual. Kolatkar's view of the real and the material, Zecchini argues, opens up the reader's vision, salvaging an 'ordinary' whose domain is "invisible, inaudible and undifferentiated" (ibid.: 92). Both these notions of the 'ordinary' (Patke and Zecchini) foreground an intuitive methodology of witnessing that is attentive to the hackneyed and the peripheral, the detritus that makes up everyday life. Zecchini likens Kolatkar's attention to 'micro-events'—everyday objects caught in routine moments and happenstances—to a 'staging' of the ordinary (ibid.: 98-104). She uses the various expressions of looking and seeing, calling out to the reader to 'watch out' – to frame the poetry as an implicit invitation for the reader/viewer to reinvigorate their *seeing* mind with the sensibility and subjectivity of an attentive audience member. But perhaps this suggestion of 'staging' reframes and changes the very nature of this 'ordinary', turning it into something else?

Consider, for a moment, the possibility that there is a dual experience of both the insider and the outsider in Kolatkar's poetics of observation—that the notion of 'witness' is deeper than that of an informed bystander. Kolatkar's friend A.K. Mehrotra reports a conversation in which Kolatkar states that his 'stance' in KGP "had been that of an observer; he was on the outside looking in" (Mehrotra 2010: 36). Yet, while Kolatkar's poetics is one of careful, measured observation, pre-figured by concentrated visuality, I argue that it is also alert to all the other senses and constructs a non-linear plot through inhabited space. Perhaps the kind of visuality suggested here is not reduced to a 'staging'—an exteriorized modality of witnessing—as Zecchini suggests.

Mehrotra marks a 'secret' in this kind of observation—a quality of "making completely impersonal a scene that he was imaginatively engaging with" (Mehrotra 2012: 95). This impersonality is girded by a precision of detail, a sensory alertness that is ironically distanced, and accompanied by a referential canvas of observed and archival details, historical fragments, and sometimes, even mythic narratives. In Kolatkar's own words, the poetry becomes a 'disappearing trick' (Mehrotra 2012: 95) that is infused with the gravitas of authorial presence. But at the same time, this impersonality is untethered, characterized by the freedom of poetic description. The disappearing act within the imagined and real city of KGP becomes significant as a way of foregrounding place—through character and through material 'ingredients' that are in a constant state of becoming, and flux.

Let us turn to a poem from the collection that reflects Kolatkar's particular form of writing into the city. In *Lice*, we are first introduced to a young girl 'who hasn't been a woman for very long' (Kolatkar 2004: 56). The male gaze is inescapable here—the 'cinnamon stick' girl sits on a concrete throne whose backrest fits perfectly in the space between her shoulder blades. She jabbers away, animated, and laughing, because they let her 'no-good lover' out of jail that very morning. Her hands, like 'sparrows' flutter excitedly as she holds forth, and he listens with rapt attention, his arms around her legs. The description is drenched in a sense of quiet calm, and the scene, like a painting, comes alive in a profusion of etched details—her mustard coloured sari and red bangles, his foot on the fender, and his elbow on the bonnet of a parked Fiat.

Amidst all this brouhaha, she has not forgotten the job at hand—"her lover's lousy head/ pillowed on her thighs/ has become a harp in her hands" (Kolatkar 2004: 57). It is in that moment of everyday intimacy that the first volta appears (p. 58):

As fairy fingers run through his hair,
producing arpeggios of lice,
and harmonies of nits,

as bangles softly tinkle over him,
he drifts off and dreams
that he's holed up in a mossy cave

behind a story-telling waterfall
booby trapped with rainbows…

Perhaps this surreal phantasmagoria—what seems like a temporary escape from the 'ordinary' (but is it really?)—throws even the reader into a reverie, only to be brought back in one fell swoop. The youth is thrown into an ominous reality with an occurrence that is likely to drum fear into his soul. In the last line, we are made aware of the sound of 'the distant bark of police dogs' (Kolatkar 2004: 58).

The scene is visceral, real, and tinged with the tenderness of young love, even in that final disappointment (for the reader). For most Mumbaikars who spend a considerable amount of time on the streets of the city, the sound of the 'police dogs', like the arrival of the BMC vehicle (Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation) that prosecutes hawkers for 'encroachment', are an ominous marker of the precarious existence of the homeless. The girl's act of caregiving is not melodramatic. She goes about her business nonchalantly, and her lover settles into the familiarity of her body, as if it's home. The entire scene occurs in broad daylight, and the reader cannot remain a passive audience. Like the poet, they are seized by this moment, snatched out of everyday life.

But the everyday is folded into the ordinary here. The ordinary is not, in this case, simply the marginal, the solitary, or the inconsequential. Its contours expand to interweave the habitual with the suddenness of the 'event' (not the micro-event). The mere suggestion of a looming systemic phenomenon (the impending arrival of the police) threatens to shatter the routine— the 'everyday'—but not quite. Kolatkar leaves it open—the reader, as much as the characters feel the chaotic harmony of people and things, who are about to be dislodged and rearticulated. Even systemic structures such as the judiciary, and forces that 'keep the peace' in the urban sprawl, settle into the pockets of this ordinary. They co-exist with the habitual and the routine. The poem's dramatic soaring into dreamscape only serves to make that imminent (and immanent) life-altering presence more real. The everyday activity of a woman picking lice out of her lover's hair is folded into an ordinary that also contains a systemic threat that could destabilize their world.

We see how this poem exemplifies themes explored in the scholarship of Zecchini and Patke. But while the poet's pen moves like a painter's eye,[6] starting with the static framing of the cinnamon-stick' girl, only to then reveal, in a slow movement, the object of her affection,

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[6] As part of my fieldwork, I spoke with Kolatkar's publisher, Ashok Shahane. When I called Kolatkar an artist (and not a poet), his wife Rekha Shahane said excitedly, without correcting me: "He was an artist only! Words are just the medium. Those verses are actually pictures (*chitra*) in textual form" (trans. from Marathi). This informal conversation took place at Ashok and Rekha Shahane's residence on 23.04.2024.

Kolatkar's world-making uses the senses, along with sensation, in its poetics. It is just another day on the pavement of the Kala Ghoda "trisland" – "traffic island" (Kolatkar, 2004 : 15). The With the gradual widening of the frame, through the granularity of detail, and the corporeal dynamism of the female protagonist's interaction with her surroundings – the reader connects with the associative environment of the scene. The lover's lousy head is "pillowed" (Kolatkar, 2004 : 58) on her thighs, it has become a "harp in her hands" – her "fairy fingers".

Each shade, each contour and shape, each texture and movement, each carefully *sensed* object of 'dead matter' stains the warp and weft – this entanglement of people and things – woven together, on the loom of the ordinary. The poet's words transform the everyday space of the city into a register infused with a charged fervour of affective intensity that animates material, animal, and human actants, rendering the city as a vibrant arena of thriving, and finally, of survival.

To further explore the deepening of the 'eye' to all the senses in KGP, and especially to the 'beings' of sensation, I invoke a passage from *What is Philosophy,* where Deleuze and Guattari analyse the work of the artist through an analogy with an Australian rain forest bird (1994). The bird creates its own stage, and then performs a complex song, all the while recruiting the environment into its performance-making. They describe this bird as a "complete artist" (1994: 169). Speaking of the role of the artist, and their process of creation through this 'being' of sensations, they describe how the 'complete artist' "pass[es] into the landscape and are themselves part of the compound of sensations" (ibid: p.169). They explore this landscape of sensory qualities through the illustration of the bird's immersive 'art-making' (p.184):

> This is not synesthesia in the flesh but blocs of sensations in the territory—colors, postures, and sounds that sketch out a total work of art. These sonorous blocs are refrains; but there are also refrains of posture and color, and postures and colors are always being introduced into refrains: bowing low, straightening up, dancing in a circle and lines of colors. The whole of the refrain is the being of sensation. Monuments are refrains. In this respect art is continually haunted by the animal.

This invites us to see Kolatkar's witnessing in new terms, as 'sensitive', and his emplacement within the scene as a transitional moment of becoming wherein he inhabits the space completely by falling into the landscape. This 'sensitivity' resurfaces in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where they cite a passage from Virgina Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) outlining the main character's walking and her movements through the everyday : "She sliced like a knife through everything…" (1987: 263). This affective presence within the space embodies a position that is both outside, and within, without beginning or end, origin or destination, always in the middle, made up of lines, not dots; in short—a "rhizome" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 263). While the position of the 'witness' is exteriorized—(from the "outside, looking in"), his 'sensitivity' materialized through precise 'sensory' descriptions, and articulations of the "blocs of sensation" (across human, material and "animal" presences), emplaces the persona of the witness within the scene as multiplicity, rather than as an 'identity'.

One could compare Kolatkar's poetry with the work of 'Dalit writers' such as Prakash Jadhav or Namdeo Dhasal, whose visceral poetics of rupture is rooted in experiences of humiliation and violence; a poetics that explodes, even language, with the fire of rage – a rage that is often 'written on the body', that curates 'identity', and that brings an unequal social system to its knees. We could read the works of these Dalit writers through Aniket Jaaware's reframing of 'Dalit Literature' as 'Destitute Literature'.[7] Jaaware's argument about the resurgence of

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[7] Cf. Jaaware (2012) on *Destitute Literature*. Mumbai: University of Mumbai.

autobiographies and a certain kind of 'Dalit' writing clearly locates its subject position within the function of 'truth-telling' (which relates to 'testimony'). But that position appears to be different from the ethical (and political) position of the "sensitive witness". The reception of that kind of "distant" (Jaaware 2012: 31-32)[8] moral writing might be understood in the light of Jaaware's regret about a Marathi audience that encounters the body of the 'Dalit' writer as a site for 'suffering' or 'destitution': "It is a very sad truth that the truth of suffering was thus elicited from those who suffered" (2012: 32).

Unlike the narrators of Dalit autobiographies, Kolatkar is not the one who 'suffers'. Instead, I propose that he is a 'sensitive witness' who observes and expands the violent dualism of ordinary association—and the bittersweet fracas of everyday life. He is not insensitive to suffering. The poetic persona's sensitivity manifests in a reading of Mehrotra's claim about how Kolatkar's clarity of observation and attention comes from "an abundant sympathy for the person or animal or even inanimate object being observed" (Mehrotra 2012: 122). This is an important insight into the poet's style whose 'sympathy' translates into the 'narration' of an image that is built on sensory and synesthetic details. It finds life in objects, and non-human beings—monkeys, dogs, crows—sympathy is the bridge that both connects and separates the witness from the object/scene that is being witnessed.

Writing the City: Urban Placemaking through Naming; Things, Objects, and More-than-Human Inventories

In the ethnographic mode,[9] while reading into the 'social' of Kolatkar's KGP, one encounters the creation of a vacuum of sensitivity, where the persona is replaced by the substance of that which is 'sensed', and brought into being through the narrative. Poetry, as testimony, here, reverses the notion of the human being at the top of the hierarchy of things, suggesting instead, a 'flat ontology'. New Materialism theorists and OOO scholars speak of this notion as a plane that 'horizontalizes' the historical hierarchy of 'active' human domination over inert 'nature'. Bennett's citation of John Frow in this context is appropriate (Bennett 2010, 9-10).

> I agree… that these differences need ...to be flattened, read horizontally as a juxtaposition rather than vertically as a hierarchy of being. It's a feature of our world that we can and do distinguish… things from persons. But the sort of world we live in makes it constantly possible for these two sets of kinds to exchange properties.

She goes on to suggest that this leads to an 'ecological' sensibility. I re-cast this sensibility, perceived in Kolatkar's poetics, to a 'sensitivity' to things, objects, and more-than-human vitalities.

The setting of KGP is a place where characters, in their ever-changing avatars cannot be conceived of only from the lens of the 'marginalized' or 'homeless'. Speaking of Kolatkar's authorial relationship with the people he describes, his contemporary, the poet Eunice Desouza, comments, (De Souza 1999: 18): "The woman washing the baby, and the boy in 'The Ogress' emerge as complete human beings." While each character surfaces through the text as layered, and inhabiting a world that is completely their own, the poems characterize them in such a way that they cannot be separated easily from their environment. The breadth of everyday life is more than that which is ignored, or commonplace. It is larger than the tacit

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[8] Jaaware clarifies that he uses 'distant' in a Tardeian sense as exemplified in his *Laws of Imitation*.
[9] In their essay on trauma, 'event' and the 'everyday', provocatively entitled *Genres of Witnessing*, Clara Han and Andrew Brandel invoke Richard Rechtman's notion of 'ethnographically fictional' writing: The "Subjectivisation of experience can be understood as a 'construction' or 'performance' that comes in the form of a chronological narrative…" (2020: 15).

resistance of the subaltern that is implied in critical literary scholarship. It is a world within itself, completely immersed in the quotidian, but also caught in the precarity of social, economic, and cultural structures. This 'double life' is laid bare through sensation, through movement and intersubjective interactions. Even objects and things emerge as complete in themselves, but complete, also in the space of their 'association'. They move through the urbanscape while traversing from static presence to dynamic absence and it is in this niche space that the reader plants their affective participation. *The Wayside Inn* wall, like many other non-human objects and characters in the poems, has a voice and a reverberating presence (Kolatkar 2004: 137):

> It remembers Babasaheb sitting all by himself
> with a pot of tea and scribbling notes,
>
> dreaming with an audacious pencil
> of a society undivided by caste and creed
>
> It remembers an obscure poet munching on Welsh rabbit,
> and thinking of rats dying in a wet barrel.

These lines are part of a poem that forms the last quarter of the poetry collection, *The Rat-poison Man's Lunch Hour*. Here, 'Babasaheb' Ambedkar, the anti-caste political thinker who wrote a radical theory of sociality and B. S. Mardhekar, the popular Marathi poet whose poems expressed despair about the exploitative and dysfunctional social world, are brought together on a table in a café, embedded in the city's architecture for more than half a century.[10] This singular portraiture of figures writing at a café—writing the city as it were—is literally a 'wall's eye' view of political and cultural processes. Kolatkar traces this non-linear temporal journey through the subjective 'gaze' of an otherwise nondescript café-wall, a subtle but important shift in perspective. Is this the speech of the city itself? Or is it about the writers who made and unmade the city through their words? The authorial pivot allows for an acute attentiveness to things, objects, and space, locating the act of 'writing' as an 'urban' activity that moves the cognitive to the corporeal. The wall's testimony is as much of a homage, as it is a self-reflexive comment on the composition of KGP – the wall witnesses the writer writing about writers who came before him. The imagery oscillates between the material and human, fragmenting the past, as it traces an arc from object to place to person. The poem marks the historical ethos of the place through personalities working, and interacting with everyday objects in the same space, while straddling different temporalities. The wall, and other objects are set on the same plane as the human inhabitants of that space.

Speaking of the Bombay Poets' impulse towards urban placemaking in different forms, Mehrotra, in an interview with Zecchini, observes: "…to be able to name the familiar was, for us, to defamiliarize it. We were like cartographers, mapping the city, much as Google maps does." (Zecchini 2017: 199). This impulse recurs again and again, in different forms, across the writings of various poets. In Mehrotra's own 'single' *Bharatmata*, he references the 'Jehangirs' and the 'Chemoulds', the 'INDIA COFFEE HOUSE' and the 'Grand Bazaar'. Similarly, In *Hiraeth, Old Bombay*, Imtiaz Dharker pays a tribute to 'Naz Café', to 'Eros Cinema', to the 'Stock Exchange', the 'Taj Mahal' Hotel, the Sassoon Dock and the Gateway of India. He starts the poem with *Bombil, Bumla, Bummalo* (different 'local' names for the popular fish

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[10] Both the interior and exterior of the *Wayside Inn* features throughout the collection. Kolatkar famously spent many afternoons there during the decades of writing the KGP poems. Poets and other friends (often from the world of advertising) joined him there every Thursday afternoon (Mehrotra 2012: 105). The café has slipped into the mythology of 'Bombay Poets' much in the same way that cafés in Paris are an integral part of the historical cultural movements birthed in the city.

known in English as "Bombay Duck" – a delicacy often associated symbolically with "Bombay"), and by referring to the legendary Britannia Café on Ballard Estate'. This simple act of "naming" places become a poetic and cartographic device, that deepens associations with the city, that exceed the empirical reality of the place/object/entity name. In this way, a host of Bombay poets writing since the *sātthotari* period (1960s) to the present, use names of places and landmarks as the title of their poems, thrusting their readers into a 'mood' that goes beyond the physical contours of that particular place, and often unravelling some 'urban' theme of association, survival, or relationship recruiting things and objects, (alongside 'human' presence) in their placemaking - 'tetrapods', 'wheels', 'bus-stops', 'red-lights', 'boats', and (like Dharker's reference) even the 'Bombay Duck'. The list includes Kersey Katrak's *Colaba Causeway* that he uses to mark the southern limit of the city, Gayatri Majumdar's *Versova Beach*, Ranjit Hoskote's *Marine Drive* and *Haji Ali*, and Amit Chaudhuri's *At Churchgate Station*. Arundhati Subramanian's *5.46 Andheri Local* speaks to the experience of the 'women's compartment' in a Bombay Local Train. She cleverly uses a zeugma to employ a flat ontology in the volta that puts humans and things on the same plane: "When I descend/ I could choose/ to dice carrots/ or a lover" (Subramanian in Moin, B. (Ed.) 2025: 103) . Namdeo Dhasal's iconic *Kamatipura* recasts the place using the vivid imagery of a reclining 'nocturnal porcupine'. The poem that viscerally maps the red-light district unravels with metaphorical intensity, and is unabashed and evocative at the same time: "This is pain wearing a dancer's anklets" (Dhasal in Moin B. (Ed.), 2025: 108), embodying the dark world of sex-work. A passage from Melanie Silgardo's *Beyond the Comfort Zone* similarly uses the body as a cartographic lyrical device that measures change with the description of how a "mighty bridge... stretched its sinewy body/ from Bandra to Worli, Gulliver in the land of Liliput/ Bandra, just half a lifetime ago you were a village" (Silgardo in Moin, B., Ed., 2025: 105). Chitre, in his iconic *The View From Chinchpokli* draws up a litany of names that the persona "shall smoothly go past": "The Institute of Art, Anjuman-e-Islam, The Times of India, The Bombay Municipal Corporation, and Victoria Terminus." even "Flora Fountain or the Bombay High Court" (Chitre in Moin, B., Ed., 2025: 166-167).[11]

Kolatkar does something similar in his poem *Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda* that rests close to the centre of the poetry cycle, bringing together various characters from individual poems. He draws up a different kind of list, an astounding line of interconnected food-joints and watering holes across the city. The poem diagrams a shared 'breakfast' temporality of Bombay that traverses religion, ethnicity, caste, and class, by identifying dishes and culinary spots from a variety of urban landscapes (Kolatkar 2004: 87):

> They're serving khima pao at Olympia,
> dal gosht at Baghdadi,
> puri bhaji at Kailash Parbat,
>
> aab gosht at Sarvi's,
> kebabs with sprigs of mint at Gulshan-e-Iran,
> nali-nehari at Noor Mohamadi's
>
> baida gotala at the Oriental,
> paya soup at Benazir,
> brun maska at Military Café,

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[11] All the 'city' poems discussed here are anthologized and referenced in *The Penguin Book of Poems on the Indian City* (edited by Bilal Moin in 2025). The full text of A. K. Mehrotra's *Bharatmata* has gone out of print. Some excerpts can be found here: https://poetly.substack.com/p/i-am-so-used-to-your-cities-with (accessed on 05.10.2025).

upma at Swagat,
shira at Anand Vihar,
and fried eggs and bacon at Wayside Inn.

For, yes, it's breakfast time at Kala Ghoda
as elsewhere
in and around Bombay

- up and down
the whole hungry longitude, in fact;
the 73rd, if I'm not mistaken.

The poet uses the geometric logic of mapped space, only to break it up by simply 'naming' the places whose presence in the list is decided by their offerings. Each item on the menu is a marker of the distinct and different food culture, and the patterns of migration that make up the city's mixed character. This 'line' of travel and food transforms the physical map of Mumbai, anthropomorphising abstract space and geographic measures into 'the whole hungry latitude'. While these elements coexist, they also form distinct individual spaces that are not additive in the way that a harmonious whole is. We see the city being formed as a temporary patchwork of bodies feeding themselves and each other, forming unique, overlapping, and non-linear intertwined pathways of association across human, nature, and matter.

Zecchini has mentioned the various ways in which the 'list' operates as a formal device in Kolatkar's poetics. The list is a part of the toolbox of the *sātthotari* Bombay Poets, whose poetic techniques, distilling a fascination with the everyday, were mirrored in the visual artists of the time. The list defies narrative linearity, and through juxtaposition and simultaneity, it mirrors the erratic and multi-pronged dynamic that characterised Bombay of Kolatkar's time. It betrays the presence of a postmodern aesthetic wherein varied elements were brought together by the mere fact of existing on the same linguistic plane. The list has been theorized as being more than just a discourse in finitude. Foucault describes the list as a framework that foregrounds excess.[12]

Zecchini points to the "litany-like inventories of rubbish" (Zecchini 2014: 174) that become a means for "extending and suspending time", or for ways in which these lists explore 'cultural diversity' or the 'cosmopolitanism' of Bombay. She also makes a critical observation about the way in which this literary (and literal) enumeration interacts with 'matter' (Zecchini 2014: 114): "By juxtaposing, connecting and levelling things that belong to different realms, the litany-like inventories and parataxic enumerations of rubbish in Kala Ghoda Poems are almost a *materialization of metaphors*" [italics mine]. She uses Gyan Prakash's enumeration of old

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[12] In his *Order of Things,* Foucault talks about the characteristics of juxtaposition, simultaneity, and excess intrinsic to the list which became the starting point of his book. He argues that the list is as much about what it contains, as it is about what is left out, the 'etc.'. While citing a Borgesian list he points out (Foucault 2002: xvi):

> the fact that the common ground on which such meetings are possible has itself been destroyed. What is impossible is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible. The animals… where could they ever meet, except in the immaterial sound of the voice pronouncing their enumeration, or on the page transcribing it? *Where else could they be juxtaposed except in the non-place of language* (Italics Mine)?

artefacts in a Bombay Bazaar as a way of "describing the very essence of Kolatkar's poetry" (ibid.).

But perhaps the list is more instrumental than metaphorical in KGP. Most of the lists in the book are tight, precise descriptions, working as extensions of the act of 'naming'. Keith Basso's *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (1996), dedicates a chapter to the practice of 'speaking with names' describes how naming a place becomes a "call to memory and imagination" (p. 91). The 'knowledge' of a place is closely tied to the knowledge of the self and the location of the individual's place within a community. He describes how the practice of 'speaking with names' produces a "mental image of a particular geographical location" (p. 100) that has a 'moral' import, and that evokes 'prior texts' such as historical tales and sagas linked to the location. Kolatkar's litanies of 'names' and 'things' take this philosophical and ethical cartography forward, congealing an urban narrative of association across time, space, and material assemblages.

From 'Material Modernisms' to Associative Life

In her seminal book *Bombay Modern*, where she places Kolatkar at the centre of a sphere of influence and activity that radiates centrifugally across Bombay, Anjali Nerlekar discusses his particular brand of 'Material Modernism' (Nerlekar 2016: 168). Nerlekar's focus is on the design and materiality of book making and small press publishing, as she articulates Kolatkar's "desire to cross-breed the intellectual with the material" (p. 179). While she does note how objects, things, birds, and beasts, are personified across the poetic landscape of KGP, the conceptual extension of modernism she outlines is specific to publishing practices, with the book that is itself a material object. In the introduction to a collection of critical essays which she edits along with Laetitia Zecchini that consolidates an epistemic gaze that unravels the camaraderie and communities of practice of the Bombay Poets and Artists of the 1960s, this idea is reiterated: "We chart Bombay as a *material* (italics mine) location through multitudinous practices of *everyday* (italics mine) life as well as through the processes of writing, publishing and creating by which the city comes into being, and is continuously being (re)invented" (Nerlekar and Zecchini 2017: 1-11).Their work foregrounds discussions, visions, and the forging of a peculiar idiom of expression, that is best exemplified in the poetics of KGP.

Zecchini cites Kolatkar's informed use of the term 'assemblage' in a poem from *Jejuri* to illustrate his exploration of its aesthetic charge (Zecchini 2014: 125).

> each rectangle
> of the doorframe
> is an assemblage

Zecchini explains that Kolatkar would never have used this word (assemblage) innocently. She reads it as an artistic metaphor (ibid.):

> He is doing in poetry what others were doing in the visual arts, at the same time (see, for instance, the 1961 exhibition on The Art of Assemblage at the Museum of Modern Art in New York), converting junk into art and fitting together parts and pieces. The poem is similar to a cubist painting, which adjusts and combines different shapes, forms and structures: rectangles, frames...

The 'assemblage' as an anthropological and philosophical analytic is however better illustrated by turning to Deleuze and Guattari (1994), who broadened its meaning both through their aesthetic and 'social' engagement with texts. A particular complex of 'urban' themes emerge through the arrangement, the assemblage of visceral images in KGP, of people, things, beings,

and places. I also apply Bennett's invocation (2010) of 'assemblages' in this context to throw a different light on Kolatkar's poetics in KGP.

While speaking of thing-power, Bennett illustrates the power of the list in bringing together diverse things in an assemblage of vibrant matter; this assemblage is constructed by things she spies on the city streets one morning: "one large men's black plastic work glove, one dense mat of oak pollen, one unblemished dead rat, one white plastic bottle cap, one smooth stick of wood" (ibid.: 4). These random objects affectively conjure up the spontaneous presence of the city and its erratic organisation for her, even suggesting patterns of consumption. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari, she outlines a precise definition of 'assemblages', as a series of characteristics (2010: 23-24):

> Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts…living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within. …uneven topographies…power is not distributed equally across its surface…not governed by any central head...effects generated by an assemblage are…emergent properties…effects…distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone...each member…has a certain vital force…an open-ended collective, a "non-totalizable sum".

Bennett's characterisations of 'assemblage' appear like fluid captions to the 'scenes' and the 'constructs'; the tight, non-linear, ever-changing meshes of sociality in KGP.

In one of the poems in the latter half of KGP called *The Potato Peelers*, an ordinary night-time scene is described with the same kind of attention to visual detail that seeps seamlessly across character, setting, sensation, and *mise-en-scene*. Narrated like a drama, it is little more than the capture of a small passage of time, where, to external eyes, no major 'event' happens. Three workers at a "garage converted into a restaurant kitchen" (Kolatkar 2004: 132) sit peeling potatoes on "three upended wooden crates" (Ibid). But the poet-witness 'catches' a special movement that connects different participants even in that quotidian, dark back-alley (Kolatkar 2004: 133):

> The three-sided silence
> of the potato peelers makes
>
> a prism that seizes on
> a fleeting thought that crosses
>
> the mind of a bakery boy
> as he parks his bicycle

The thought does not stop there. It tears through the landscape, as a gnat, or a shard of light would (Kolatkar 2004: 133):

> and sends a freakish sliver
> of an illicit rainbow streaking across,
>
> to touch the mind of a half-witted woman
> who looks a bit like a laughing Buddha

Something lives in the streets of Kala Ghoda, permeating through the neighbourhood, through this momentary assemblage, that has a "finite lifespan, and a history of formation" (Bennett

2010: 24). Something moves between the characters; Something familiar. Something *animal?* Life—embodied as the 'compound of sensations'—is its refrain. It is sensed through movement and felt as an 'associative' entity, connecting the potato peelers with the half-witted woman, and the bakery boy. It has a quality of soaring, of a current running through circuits, taking shape even as a 'rainbow' in the rancid reflected light of the streetlamp. This inarticulate power—a movement that is always *in medias*—resonates with Jane Bennet's conception of "the vitality *of* matter and the lively powers *of* material formations" (Bennett 2010: vii) which she calls the 'vital materiality' of assemblages.

Spinoza's definition of 'conatus' and 'conative bodies' is a common root for diverse genealogies of theorisation around vital materialism and more-than-human 'life: "Each thing [*res*], as far as it can by its own power, strives [*conatur*] to persevere in its own being." (Bennett 2010: 2). This is the 'flattening of landscape'—the flat ontology—that proposes the knife that impales the person as being on the same plane as the human victim.[13] As Bennett notes, Conatus names a power present in every body. For Spinoza even a falling stone "is endeavouring…to continue in its motion" (Bennett 2010: 2). The line between animals, material things—non-human bodies—and humans is blurred, and we recalibrate our lens to detect what Spinoza terms as 'modes' of being, rather than subject positions. Bodies interact with each other in a complex heterogenous formation, "a network of people and things" (Cotterrell 2021: 18). What happens to notions of resistance, individual action, and subjectivity when we bring relationships between non-human and human 'actants' over the crafting of identities to the forefront?[14]

Tracing a genealogy that is different from Bennett's, I invoke a philosophical argument about the notion of the 'social' that has seen resurgence in contemporary anthropological scholarship[15]: I refer to Gabriel Tarde, an (in)famous philosopher and social theorist (infamous only because his view of the 'social' during the early years of the discipline of Sociology, was on the opposite end of the spectrum from Emile Durkheim's theorisations). Durkheim's theories and formulations became the foundation of contemporary sociological discourse and pedagogy, whereas Tarde grounds his theoretical impetus in a movement from the Heideggerian 'being' to a Tardeian 'having'. Speaking of the category of 'possession', Gabriel Tarde proposes a radical reversal (cited in Latour 2012: 15):

> So far, all of philosophy has been founded on the verb *To be*, whose definition seemed to have been the Rosetta's stone to be discovered. One may say that, if only philosophy had been founded on the verb *To have*, many sterile discussions …would have been avoided. From this principle 'I am', it is impossible to deduce any other existence than mine, in spite of all the subtleties of the world. But affirm first this postulate : 'I have' as the basic fact, and then they *had* as well as the *having* are given at the same time as inseparable'

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[13] Bennett uses the example of a 'knife' that could be punished for an unintended injury, the non-human actant 'put on trial' and placed on the same plane as a human actant that willingly commits crime. This idea is expressed as a 'deodand', a British law instituted in the 12th century and practiced until the 19th century till it was abolished.

[14] The word Bruno Latour is referring to, suggests a source of action and the capacity to act. Significantly, Latour builds an alternative vocabulary in his reassembling of the 'social' in his Actor-Network Theory (or ANT) through literary theory. He argues for the 'freedom of movement' that is more evident in the analyses of literary theorists "than any social scientist" (Latour 2005: 54).

[15] Bruno Latour is instrumental to the resurgence of Tarde's work. Tarde's *Monadology* has been invoked by Latour as a critical influence in shaping ANT.

This critical and contrary philosophical shift allows the flowering of a discursive domain wherein things and people work together in constructing, and reconstructing the social world. It conceives bodies, and the question of the social, purely through relationships (cf Latour [ibid.] who identifies this analytic as intersubjective, advocating for the replacement of 'social' with 'association'). This also marks a shift away from the Durkheimian idea of collective conscience and solidarity, leading us to a vibratory, associative materiality that is harmonized into effect through the rhythms of the urban. A philosophy of possession is found also in the chief characteristic of conative bodies that are seen as being 'associative'. An actant has the capacity to affect and be affected by other bodies. If we locate this discourse within the sociological domain of transaction, economy, and the gift, we arrive at Keith Hart's articulation of a central idea that drives Marcel Mauss's analytic of the 'soul' of things, through a compelling conception of companionship as an aspect of being human: "…we have to belong to others in order to survive, merging our identities in a bewildering variety of social relationships" (Hart 2000: 192). The body thus enters into associative life by belonging.

From Human Hubris to "Thing-Power" and Distributive Agency

Kolatkar's Kala Ghoda thrums with this philosophy of relationality. Louis Wirth's classical definition of urbanism "as a particular form of human association…, a distinctive mode of human group life" (Wirth 1938: 4) and a "typical pattern of human relationships" (Wirth 1938: 19) is expanded when we apply the framework of an assemblage of both human and non-human actants, interacting with each other, doing actions that affect each other, and entangled in transformative play.

The opening poem of the collection (*Pi-Dog*) writes the space with a wild empiricism that subsumes the miraculous within the everyday, while embracing this self-same attitude of play.[16] *Ugh* the pi-dog ("U as in Upanishad" [Kolatkar 2004: 20]) with an illustrious genealogy ("On my father's side/ the line goes back to the dog that followed/ Yudishtira" [Kolatkar 2004: 18]) maps the formation of the Kala Ghoda 'trisland' (traffic island) against a mythic and historical past in a wry, contemplative monologue. With roots in the Mahabharata, no less, Ugh (gh not silent.. as in ghost, ghoul, or gherkin' [Kolatkar 2004: 20]) compares the devotion that his legendary canine ancestor had for Yudhishtira with a sci-fi work, Harlan Ellison's *A Boy and His Dog* ("a cult-book among pi-dogs everywhere" [Kolatkar 2004: 19]) in which the 'boy' serves up his girlfriend as dogfood to save his starving canine master.

Notice the obvious dramatized role reversal taking place in the storytelling. The persona of the introductory poem—the scene-setter, so to speak—is not human. He is an anthropomorphized entity, a more-than-human being, that is neither 'talking' stray dog nor 'beastly' human being. His authoritative tone of control and sophistry is offset "with a pirate's/ rather than a cartographer's regard/ for accuracy" (Kolatkar 2004: 16). In a symphony of architectural dexterity, he unfolds the morning into a lived presence. The city wakes up (Kolatkar 2004: 23):

> As I play,
> the city slowly reconstructs itself,
> stone by numbered stone.

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[16] This is not to call this style 'magic realism' or 'mythic realism'; rather, humour becomes a trope to dislodge all set rules of 'realistic' translation of space. This style, perhaps, for critical commentators connotes a 'postmodern' outlook. I argue, however that its emergence is purely a complex of an urban cosmopolitan contemporaneity that is addressed by the past but only as backdrop. It is this same playful positionality which informs *Dron* (2004), Kolatkar's genre-defying mytho-poesis, that begins with a fictional party thrown by Ram after the defeat of Ravan, a party in which both monkeys and humans celebrate together.

Every stone
seeks out his brothers
and is joined by his neighbours

Every single crack
returns to its flagstone
and all is forgiven

Trees arrive at themselves,
each one ready
to give an account of its leaves…

…St. Andrew's church tiptoes back to its place,
shoes in hand,
like a husband after late-night revels.

The university,
you'll be glad to know, can never get lost
because, although forgetful
it always carries
its address in its pocket

In *Ugh's* perceptive vision, cement blocks, trees, buildings, statues, and monuments have characters. Their material vitalities emerge only in congress with each other, as equal and rich energies in the assemblages of urban life. The 'city as character' is more than metaphor in this passage. It translates as essence, birthed through urban monuments—solid objects, buildings, and natural beings—within the effervescent milieu. It has pace and energy, even consciousness, and, at times, intentionality. An uncanny picture emerges, in the reverberating silence of a dawn in which humans are absent, but non-human beings 'move' and 'feel'. Even though the 'bustle' of a workday has not set in, we feel its current. We encounter another kind of activity—the empty offices, places of work, and worship—gentle, imposing presences that all return to play their 'official role' (even the trees are ready to give an account of their leaves).

In a departure from other propositions of efficacy that provide a subject-oriented origin for action, intention, and even agency, Bennett details the workings of a 'distributive agency' where matter is 'vibrant' and at a deeper level, both human and non-human 'subjects' being composed of an entanglement of these resonant and dissonant energies. A theory of distributive agency, she argues, does not posit a subject as the root cause of an effect. "There are instead always *a swarm of vitalities* at play" [emphasis, mine] (2010: 31-32)*.* Many poems in KGP, including *The Potato Peelers* and *Pi-dog* construct a scene, with carefully detailed empirical markers that are enriched by 'invisible' affective forces. These 'more-than-human' forces, sometimes occur as imaginative constructions of archival significance (even humorous/ satirical takes). More importantly, they gesture to an urbanscape that is vibrating with 'thing-power'. The humans, animals and birds are contained in this mix (along with the 'props' such as watches, idli containers etc) that are composite of this 'thing-power'. Thing-power activates the agentic assemblage and this is how 'the city slowly reconstructs itself'.

Bennett's thoughts about distributive agency are firmly placed within the discursive moment of the Anthropocene, reversing the sociological gaze and freeing agency from the exclusive reserve of human consciousness, moving the emphasis from humans as authors who use nature as a resource (with the environment as backdrop for human actions), to a social form

that *traces* "the active role of *nonhuman* materials in public life" (Bennett 2010: 2). In this case of the narrative of 'fictional ethnography' for example, the Pi-dog is grateful for the absence of human beings. He speaks of the constructed environment with affectionate indulgence. His is the role of the *sutradhar,* or the story-teller who narrativizes, with a sense of ownership and care, a (soon-to-be) busy locality that is both a microcosm for, and an exception from the rest of the city (Kolatkar 2004: 15):

> This is the time of day I like best,
> and this the hour
> when I call this city my own;…
>
> when it's deserted early in the morning
> and I'm the only sign
> of intelligent life on the planet

This foregrounding of the *sutradhar's* narrative power, and refusal of human authority over nature is deliberate in its espousal of a politics of peripheral vision that sees resistance with the underdog,[17] and subverts a placemaking that otherwise converges with a top-down view, glorifying the creative pride of human actants on 'inert' materials. It is not merely a mockery of human design, but an ideological critique of mastery and the omniscient self-centredness of human action and governance that dominated the modernist reclaiming of self. In setting up the ethical project of the vitality of matter, Bennett borrows the literary trope of 'hubris' to point to how "the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption" (Bennett 2010: xi). This hubris does not allow us to detect a more complete range of more-than-human powers scaffolding and permeating human bodies.

Consider, as an ethnographic cross-section of sounds in the city, the 'three distinct themes' that make the 'triple sonata' composed by *Ugh* (Kolatkar 2004: 22):

> one suggested by a magpie robin,
> another by the wail of an ambulance
> and the third by a rockdrill.

Each strand represents a different temporality, but in juxtaposition to the others, colours a composite social formation that is produced by natural inhabitants, human trauma, and mechanized processes of development. It is the simultaneity of these different processes that constellates the city that belongs to each of the actants who are the sources of these sounds (the songbird, the driver of the ambulance and their patient, and the construction worker). Each of these are intrinsic to the 'making' or poesis of the city's ecology. In the same way that Ugh playfully *composes* the Kala Ghoda trisland, the reader apprehends sights, sounds and textures, vibrant more-than-human presences, and affective waves that run through matter. The city is conjured up, not merely by the human characters that accord it the privilege of nomenclature, but by the more-than-human ontological matrices that allow them to inhabit it.

Contrast this sensory exploration with the three-sided silence of the potato peelers, and – apart from Kolatkar's fondness for threes, we see how even the conspicuous absence of one sense (sound) is compensated by the presence of others: touch, and the visual, converting it into a prism. The material gains life through the synaesthetic, which works at times even in resistance

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[17] *This* peripherality could be associated with Patke's inconsequential and insignificant ordinary. But this is the inconsequentiality of 'things' and of vibrant matter and not of 'marginalized' people.

to human forces or to free itself, not following the rules of state policy (for instance) or the human desire to control.

In the last section of the poem, there is another evocative illustration of the Pi-dog's acute powers of sensorial detection, this time through the olfactory, revealing human presence (Kolatkar 2004: 24):

> My nose quivers,
> A many coloured smell
> of innocence and lavender,
>
> mildly acidic perspiration
> and nail polish,
> rosewood and rosin
>
> travels like a lighted fuse
> up my nose
> and explodes in my brain

The zeugma brings together two kinds of entities—sensation and material—human and more-than-human. The spontaneous discovery of smell follows a path that alights from things (acidic, rosewood, rosin) to their effects ('quivers', 'travels like a lighted fuse', 'explodes'). The narrative movement is from real material elements that are the inextricable ingredients of urban life to the relationship with people, and then, to the effects that it has on the people. This movement, acts like a parallax and recurs through the poetry cycle. It places the activity of the city as an entanglement, a complex network of bodies relating with each other through their vital materialities.

The takedown of human hubris reaches its crescendo in the last stanza of the poem, where the pi-dog acknowledges the rhetorical 'management', the people, and their place in the city (Kolatkar 2004: 24):

> …my idyll
> will soon be over
>
> …the time has come for me
> to surrender the city
> to its so called masters.

'So called'. While the notion of hubris is used by Bennett to conceptualize the reversal of positionality and power in the materialist turn,[18] it does not set the human and the 'non-human' apart in polarized opposition; it flattens the gaze, and places each 'thing' in a more-than-human smorgasbord. In Kolatkar's representation of more-than-human presences in the turn-of-the-century space of Kala Ghoda (Bombay), a seamless movement across concentrated 'ordinary' descriptions of things, characters, and historical personas, invokes elements from Bhakti poetry (Tukaram, for instance), and Hindu mythological elements (Yudhishtira and the Upanishads). The illumination of the more-than-human presence returns, at times, to a

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[18] Through this term, Bennett suggests the arrogance of Western Philosophy – a push towards 'conceptualisation'. She animates the term by invoking Adorno: "Or, to put the criticism in Theodor Adorno's terms, does it exemplify the violent hubris of Western philosophy, a tradition that has consistently failed to mind the gap between concept and reality, object and thing?" (Bennett 2010: 13)

'humanist' gaze with renewed 'sensitivity'. Perhaps this return is a pathway for the sensitive witness (not his characters) in order to gesture to readers, the complex interconnections, and intersubjectivities of the multi-temporal and multi-spatial ecology of the city.

Cleaning, Garbage and Reclaiming as Vital Materialist Processes

Garbage, waste disposal and the activity of cleaning (perhaps, as an act of care in the urban ecology) are significant themes that recur through KGP. They are not simply external, unwanted elements on the periphery of a poet's vision; but they are active contributors to the very conception of the cityscape. Their material economies (both in the Marxist materialist sense, and the analytic of 'vital materialism') become a significant way of reading the city's processes. Waste disposal and garbage has always been seen as a significant 'problem' of the city and a key factor in urban planning.[19] This urban process is dominated by social framings of the dimensions of caste-based work and exploitation.

KGP brings home the material presence of garbage and its role as an actant in the everyday life of the people of Kala Ghoda by invoking both disgust and care. This turns garbage into a living, breathing entity, while also establishing a relationship between garbage and the people who deal with it (and those who produce it). The poet walks a tightrope in this regard. His position runs the risk of alienating the work and caste identity of those who clean the city, by foregrounding material over human presence and identities, that are forged in the kilns of exploitation and humiliation.

In KGP, we are profoundly aware of the social location of the human characters. Each human character has a rich backstory, whether it is *Parameshwari* the lavatory attendant or the *Barefoot Queen of the Crossroads*. Their circumstance of being homeless (among other complexes of identity) is always tied to other more-than-human presences that form composite pictures of belonging—objects (bicycle tyres, pinwheels, *charas* [cannabis] pills, brooms)—or living beings (dogs, crows, cats, rats). Accomplices include bodies that are cleaning, caring, repairing, desiring, and belonging. Events happen in a comradeship of shared activity. In all this, the everyday does not function as a structure where things happen to individuals, and subjects engineer acts of resistance, rather, it aggregates as a series of open-ended schemas of relationality. The sensitive witness does not openly condemn social inequality. His concentrated descriptions, and mock-ethnographic histories of each individual unravel the social machinery of hierarchy and power, simply through the poetic construction of the assemblage. It is an aesthetic of 'show' rather than 'tell'.

The poem titled "Meera" describes the morning scene of a street being cleaned by the "sad-eyed feminine half[20]" (Kolatkar 2004: 26) of a municipal street cleaning team. However, it begins from the point of view of a "coconut frond" (Kolatkar 2004: 26):

> A footloose coconut frond,
> a dropout,
> bored with life at the top,

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[19] DH Web Desk (26.10.2023) "Absence of 'marshals', monitoring & penalties: What has led to inaction in addressing Mumbai's garbage dumping issue". Deccan Herald: https://www.deccanherald.com/india/maharashtra/absence-of-marshals-monitoring-penalties-what-has-led-to-inaction-in-addressing-mumbais-garbage-dumping-issue-2742284 (accessed 10.02.2024).
[20] This description reeks of voyeuristic middle-class 'sympathy'. At the same time, as the sweeper is described in detail, as to her appearance, movement, and self-expression, the reader is also made familiar with the possible trope of identity being subsumed within character.

> with nothing to do up there
> except twiddle
> its three hundred fingers
>
> all day long and through the night
> or tickle the moon
> now and then,
>
> and looking for something
> a little more interesting and/or
> useful to do,
>
> has befriended
> and attached itself
> to Our Lady of Dead Flowers…

The city square is transformed into an effervescent space, where a frond from a tree descends into the street as a participant, moving with intent and taking part in the cleaning. The frond "runs ahead of her" (Kolatkar 2004: 27) crossing and recrossing her path, clearing the road for her, and performing a series of actions including "chasing the riffraff of dry leaves off the road" (Kolatkar 2004: 27). The sweeper-goddess (*Our Lady of Dead Flowers*) prefers the frond that has detached itself from the familiar urban environment to the "regular broomstick…that comes with the job" (Kolatkar 2004: 27). It is her ally, with will, and a kind of ideological force that could be termed as consciousness. But it is still not a person. The frond is "learning new tricks" (Kolatkar 2004: 26). Its presence is lively and enervating: "It's a joy to see the coconut frond clown around, jump and dance" (Kolatkar 2004: 27). While there is an element of imagination in this anthropomorphic creative act, it lets the reader feel the presence of actants that work through belonging, feeling, and action – that is inspired in other actants. Bodies live in transition, in moments of reconstitution, movement and compassion. Kindness and 'obligation' are subsumed in the everyday activity of persons interacting with the city's material infrastructure. But the material infrastructure also engages with persons. The line blurs. There is an intuitive 'vibrant' presence that animates bodies that are engaged in the complex dance of living. This energy is particular to a space, turning it into a place, much in the way dialect is related to language and geography.

This 'force of things' is not transcendental, or symptomatic of an external spasm that enlivens matter; it "is not 'a spiritual supplement' or 'life force' added to the matter said to house it" (Bennett 2010: xiii). This is a vitality that is intrinsic to the 'matter' that is described. Its force comes from the very 'thingness' of each object, and it is cumulative in that it is alive through association with other actants. The scene is populated with material things that seek out other bodies to 'possess', exchanging their energy. Each character plays a part in forming a 'compound of sensations', and the everyday act of sweeping 'objectively' embodies the cycle of cleaning and reclamation that continuously makes and unmakes this city: "the more you clean Bombay/ the more Bombay there is to clean." (Kolatkar 2004: 31).

Meera and her partner curate a mock-exhibition of garbage mounds in front of the Jehangir Art Gallery (a celebrated white cube space) that doubles up as a slap on the face of elite art critics "asleep in their beds" (Kolatkar 2004: 28). A "fresh new series of installations" (Kolatkar 2004: 28) of garbage, are accompanied by a poetic catalogue, listing what the art is composed of in material terms. The city is repurposed in this assemblage of diverse 'things', this inventory of non-human refuse (Kolatkar 2004: 28):

...consisting of dry leaves, scraps of paper,

prawn shells, onion skins, potato peels,
cast off condoms, dead flowers
- mostly gulmohar and copper-pod.

The list locates garbage, and the processes of cleaning and recycling as intrinsic to the city's economy and ecology. The living presence of rubbish, and the people associated with it, embodies the living presence of the city itself. In his poem *Song of Rubbish* (Kolatkar 2004: 34), the persona is a "we"—a community of rubbish—that exhibits aspiration and connection with the journey of the city into the future. Its lifepath is inseparable from that of the city's in the way that grapes "aspire to greater glory" (of wine), and clay "hopes to rise again/ find a new purpose" like ornament or jewellery sitting "on a pretty woman's shoulder" (ibid.):

We too
have our own tryst with destiny, and feel
the birth-pangs of a new

city,
but prepare for a long period of exile
in the wilderness of a landfill
site.

The evocation of the words of the first prime minister of the country ('tryst with destiny') contrasts the euphoria of nation-building with the literal detritus of development and waste disposal in the city. The city's landfills are a spillage, a symptom of the uneven developmental path that plagues urban planning efforts to this day.[21] Meera alludes to a history of reclamation from the sea. Her daily work of cleaning, recast by the poet as art installations, might as well be labelled *Homage to Bombay, one/ Homage to Bombay, two* (Kolatkar 2004: 28):

since a good bit of the city stands
on sweepings such as these

All of Colaba, for example, or Khetwadi

Bombay itself is made up of garbage. In a nonchalant sweep, this connection is made between the materiality of the everyday cleaning activity of the sweeper, and the history of reclamation in the making of the city. Even the *Pi-dog* makes a reference to this (Kolatkar 2004: 16):

I look a bit like
a seventeenth-century map of Bombay
with its seven islands

not joined yet,
shown in solid black
on a body the colour of parchment;

with Old Woman's island
on my forehead,

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[21] The 'wilderness' of the landfill is also a place where sanitation workers labour in terrible conditions. Anand Patwardhan's 1985 ethnographic documentary *Hamara Shahar* ('Bombay: our city') documents the everyday fight for survival for slum dwellers.

Mahim on my croup

The map that the poet is most likely referring to is John Thornton's famous 1685 map, *A New Mapp of the Island of Bombay and Sallset* (Riding 2018: 34). Thornton styled himself as the East India Company's 'hydrographer' (Riding 2018: 35). It is a seafarer's map, with nautical information, and smooth edges, betraying a vision of conquest. The illustration does convey a 'pirate's' regard for accuracy. Perhaps Kolatkar had seen the 1750 reprint in a newspaper, or in the David Sassoon Library, or the Asiatic Society of Bombay's library, both are in the vicinity of Kala Ghoda. This is one of the earliest printed maps of the area referred to as Bombay. Another Portuguese map names the land mass 'Bombaim'; and the Portuguese also referred to it as 'Monbaym' (Riding 2018: 30). The first blueprints for reclamation of the seven islands were being made by the East India company that fortified the geographical conception of the scattered land masses as one region for ease of administration among other reasons. This led to extensive reclamation activity, a huge part of which took place in the early 18th century. This is what Kolatkar illustrates in the lines "a good bit of the city stands on sweepings such as these" (Kolatkar 2004: 28). The poet's conception of reclamation as 'sweepings' and 'rubbish' is not far from the East India Company's characterisation of the reclaimed land as "variously called drowned, overflown or *waste land* (italics mine)" (Riding 2018: 35). The emphasis on the material process that went into the making and maintenance of the geography of the Kala Ghoda trisland is thus replayed again and again, every day, in the sweeper's cleaning of the ground, with the coconut frond as accomplice.

In *A Note on the Reproductive cycle of Rubbish* (Kolatkar 2004: 35) the sheer cumulative currents of the garbage ecosystem—its growth, disposal, and treatment—are likened to the birth cycle and evolution of a community of humans. Rubbish is anthropomorphized into hordes of organic living beings that 'copulate' and multiply: "watch out when rubbish meets rubbish" (Kolatkar 2004: 35). The vast landfill site is the breeding ground of these organic beings; it is where rubbish 'matures' (Kolatkar 2004: 35). The rubbish is a visceral presence, a fuming, heaving, breathing horde that effects humans around it. It is a part of the landscape whose vitality is described in terms of 'blocs of sensation', social processes, and in this case suggesting potential harm, and pollution (for humans) through its overwhelming sensorial power (Kolatkar 2004: 35):

Rubbish ovulates
only once
in its lifetime

releasing pheromones
during the period
of its fertility.

As the poem veers towards the 'animal', the final image invokes desire. The garbage economy is likened to a red light district, and the transactional market of sex work, where people from the Bombay 'land mafia', or 'contractors' are leering at clients (Kolatkar 2004: 35).

Driven wild by the scent
speculators in rut
arrive on the scene in droves,
their chequebooks hanging out,
and slug it out
among themselves.
Rubbish waits.

Patiently.
And copulates with the winner.

The landfill is a place teeming with activity. It has morphed and congealed into something else, an entity that is more than a simplistic residue of hyper consumption. In its changing avatar, it embodies the material transformation of the city's topography over the centuries. It is as much a part of the city's horizons as its towering skyscrapers, and the commercial establishments. The garbage hills, landfills, and dumping grounds of Bombay *are* 'alive'. The copulation is not just metaphorical. The microorganisms (micro-actants) interact with each other through various chemical processes, producing fumes, airborne particles, and germs that are akin to 'tropical winds'. The release of pheromones draws humans to it and sense becomes a form of communication. This has topographical implications marking out pathways in the city, showing trajectories of associative activity. The formations produced by things and their groupings across the spread of the city is an assemblage whose tendency of mapping is dominated more through chaotic activity than stability. KGP is littered with instances of 'thing-power' and material vitality constructing the environment. This sensibility is ecological and proposes a different way of thinking about place and social environment, rooted in contemporary concerns that ask us to be attentive to more-than-human presences and materialities even if it is in retrospect (for example, to look for 'traces of animals in the archive' or 'the journey of rubbish and santitation discourse in state records').

Conclusion

Locating the poet as a "sensitive witness" within this complex interplay of currents, and the poetry as curation of blocs of sensation, a unique conception of urban life emerges, that is associative, and alive, mainly in moments of 'entangled interactions'. The picture of the urban in Kala Ghoda, rather than being reduced to a resilient 'community' with 'spirit', is upended to reveal an intricate network of interactions where everyday objects, human-made artefacts and dead matter come to life. Humans and non-humans coexist in an intuitive, unpredictable everyday that both embraces and deepens the *narrations* of 'ordinary life'.

However, rather than denying the historical individuality of the modernist subject, this impulse to anthropomorphize – this pre-empting of new materialist philosophy – allows for a 'double movement'. The decentring deepens the reader's awareness of the lived urban landscape in all its layered granularity, and allows for a political consciousness of the city's ecology, that is not located purely in human action and choice. It enables a return to the space, enriched by the acute presence of actants whose ontological force and relational immediacy thrive at the same level as human agency. This deepening allows for an ethical consciousness of 'place' that is alert to ecological shifts that the Anthropocene, in its contemporaneity is witness to this. It doesn't subsume "identity" but remoulds it within the vibrant presence of a multi-species urban environment, finding a vital materiality in what is otherwise regarded as 'inanimate' matter. Bennett suggests an ethical position which throws light on this question of 'association' (Bennett 2010: 13):

> Such a newfound attentiveness to matter and its powers will not solve the problem
> of human exploitation or oppression, but it can inspire a greater sense of the extent
> to which all bodies are kin… inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations.

Kolatkar's sensibility is prophetic and subversive, in that, it captures the pulse of social relationships through a version of materialism whose seeds were just beginning to germinate at the time he was writing *Kala Ghoda Poems*. I reinvoke the concept of a 'double movement' here that is enabled by Kolatkar's poetics of attention. The shift in focus to the nonhuman, posthuman, and more-than-human is deliberately radical in its conception of a multilinear

reality, allowing for a return to human perception that is evident in the (poet's) and characters' interpretation of the things that happen to them (and in which they participate). The poetics of *Kala Ghoda Poems* in its movement and phrasal shifts, teaches a 'noticing' that opens rather than crystallizes. I venture that this shift offers a freedom that is horizontal, re-inhabiting the gaze itself, rather than the object of the gaze. It represents a different conception of the 'social' exhibited through formations and organisational principles that come to life through linkage between shifting and associative matrices rather than rigid identities or homogenous communities made abstract by their eventual ontological immovability.

I rearticulate this 'return' then, as an extension, through 'sensitivity', a sensitivity, enriched by the 'senses' and by 'beings of sensation'. The focus on the vital materiality of things sharpens the gaze into a 'flattening' – a gaze that would otherwise be attuned to categories and hierarchical tabulations. The breakdown of these barriers allows for a deeper sensitivity, that in turn forges the possibility of wider alliances, even in its calls for justice. Kolatkar's brand of poetic imagination is drenched in an urban placemaking that recruits history, mythology, heritage, archival truth, and a diverse 'reclaimed' tradition that is both local, cosmopolitan, and global. This placemaking reinvigorates human ecology through a double movement of creative gaze in the poetics of observation and place. This vision of distributive agency learns from the materialist philosophy outlined by Bennett, and endorses a fuller, more 'sensitive' identity-material-place assemblage. This imaginative cosmology opens up an argument for a reconstituted 'association' in the city of 'Bombay' that is in a continuous state of becoming. This vision does not achieve this cosmology by simply reversing the sociological gaze, or by overturning human 'hubris'; it enlarges, problematizes, and nuances a politics of gaze that looks, with sensitivity at a continuously evolving urban synaesthesia – an interzone that envelopes and recasts time and space in its allusive and imaginative creative expanse. We encounter, then, as creative readers, not merely the presence of 'the artist as witness' but an ethical and political reconsideration—'the complete artist as sensitive witness'.[22]

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[22] At the time when I was finalising the first iteration of this paper (February 2024), I was alerted by a colleague to the fact that the term 'Sensitive Witness' came into currency through Kristin M. Girten's book *Sensitive Witnesses: Feminist Materialism in the British Enlightenment*. Girten's pathbreaking work argues that pioneering British female philosophers of the Enlightenment were embodied through their materialist practices of 'observation, experiences, and experiments' an attitude of 'sensitive witnessing'. She produces an alternate history of work as represented by their male counterparts who underplayed their styles as 'modest witnesses'. (Girten 2024: 6-8) Her argument makes significant contributions to Feminist Materialism. While my framing, and ideological force is different from hers in many ways, the linguistic and conceptual construction converged unknowingly. For this, I can only express the gratitude that comes with the synchronicity of epistemes.

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Research Article

Delhi in the Shadow of Partition

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Whereas Partition Fiction has been widely examined since the 1990s in echo to the historian 'Partition mania', the movement *naī kahānī* (New Story) that emerged in the early 1950's in the Hindi literary field has received comparatively little attention in research adopting this perspective. In fact, Partition does not represent a central position in the themes that *naī kahānī* developed or explored; rather, they focus on the quotidian experiences of ordinary men and women, set mostly in an urban environment (predominantly, Delhi) characterised by an oppressive atmosphere. However, Kamleshwar, a critic and novelist and a 'key' theorist of *naī kahānī*, has identified a clear link between the 'role of *naī kahānī*' and the memory of the 1947 violence and exile. The fact that Delhi, which was profoundly impacted by forced migrations, remains a prominent locale in numerous *naī kahānī* stories and novels, underscores a discernible correlation between the genesis of this movement and the harrowing experience of Partition. As historian Pandey writes, "the Delhi of the 1950s to the 1980s was a 'Partition' city" (1997: 2263). The present study aims to illuminate the 'shadows of Partition' in two exemplary *naī kahānī* fictions—one story and one novel—in which Delhi plays a pivotal role. The fate of the characters, who are not explicitly described as refugees, reflects the specific historical context of post-1947 Delhi.

Partition, *Naī-Kahānī*, *Delhi*, *refugees*, *memory*

Introduction

It is commonly accepted that what is considered "Partition Fiction" has after 1947 taken immediate charge of the narratives of violence and exile that, until the 1990s at least, historians struggled to describe. Numerous short stories written in at least six languages (notably : Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Sindhi and English), have been collected in anthologies and republished or translated, making this literature an important source for documenting the social history of Partition, its violence and mass migration that accompanied what historian Vazira Zamindar (2007) described as the 'Long Partition'. While we are familiar with unambiguous accounts of Partition violence provided by iconic authors such as S.H. Manto, Krishna Sobti, and Agyeya—who mainly published in the months or years following the summer of 1947—the fiction from the mid-1950s is less well documented in terms of its connection to Partition.

In Hindi, for example, the major literary movement of the early 1950s, *naī kahānī* ("New Story"), nevertheless set many of these stories in urban settings, particularly in Delhi, a city which has indeed been the scene of massive refugee departures and arrivals from the summer of 1947 onwards. The city's demographic, architectural and cultural landscape was profoundly altered. More than half a million Hindu and Sikh refugees arrived overnight in Delhi and a third of Delhi's population became displaced. The city's demographic, architectural and cultural landscape was profoundly altered. A part of the Muslim population left the city, replaced by Hindus and Sikhs from western Punjab and refugee camps were settled followed by the construction of

vast colonies that aimed to accommodate these displaced populations.[1] As historian Gyanendra Pandey has shown, the transformation of Delhi after Partition was as sudden as it was a long process: in 1951, "Partition refugees (not including the local Muslims) still accounted for 28.4 per cent of the total population of the city", which suggests, as Pandey writes, that "in more ways than we have been willing to acknowledge—politically, culturally and even demographically—the Delhi of the 1950s to the 1980s was a 'Partition' city" (1997 : 2263).

How did *naī kahānī*'s fictions present and analyse the links between the city of Delhi and Partition? How has Partition been represented and absorbed into the urban landscape? Finally, what is the relationship between this representation and the memory of Partition during the mid-1950s? This paper aims to shed light on the 'shadows of Partition' as reflected in two typical *naī kahānī* fictions—one story and one novel—in which Delhi plays a crucial role. The fate of the characters, who are not explicitly described as refugees, reflects the specific historical context of post-1947 Delhi.

Writing Partition

In his seminal work *Witnessing Partition* (2010: 115), a major essay on Partition fiction, Tarun Saint identifies the decade between the 1960s and 1970s as the decade of "Partition's Afterlife", a pivotal period embodying the "legacy of partition through the lens of memory". He conceptualized this afterlife fiction as a "residue of historical trauma" (ibid.), a nostalgic tendency, and an attempt to resurrect the memory of "small communities that shared a secret life that flowed through ages" (p. 117), substantiated by an aspiration to comprehend the circumstances of the aftermath. Like critic Alok Bhalla (1999) before him, who deeply documented what we perceived today as "Partition fiction", Saint differentiates between "early writing that sought to bear witness, often between the form of terrifying chronicles of the damned", and the "later writing that was concerned with the fate of the survivors" (2010: 116-117). According to Saint, "afterlife" writings eschewed realism in favour of the exploration of novel techniques of representation and "disembodied forms" of historical narratives. As Saint contends, critics have also willingly explored these two periods of Partition fiction because of their richness as cultural and historical resource, evidenced by the extant anthologies of Partition stories.[2] These writings bear witness to a coherent trajectory that link stupefaction with (belated) nostalgia. However, the division between early stories of violence and belated nostalgic novels effectively obliterate the corpus of fiction that was written between 1955 and 1965, a period in which Partition was indeed much less represented. But the vivid expression of loss, rootlessness, incommunicability, confusion, and despair present in these works also strongly suggest the continuing prevalence of the tragedy experienced by villages in Punjab, Bengal and Sindh, and the cities of Delhi, Lahore, Karachi and Calcutta that lasted for more than a decade.

Less present as a theme in Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, and English fiction from the mid-1950s onwards, Partition continued to have a significant presence in the material world and the imagination of the population directly affected by the massive violence and exodus following in the wake of 1947. In Alok Bhalla's renowned anthology *Stories about the Partition of India* (1994), only five datable short stories (till 1961) belong to this period. Three of them

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[1] See notably Geva (2022) and Chakravarty (2022) who precisely documented the reshaping of Delhi after 1947.

[2] "Several critics have highlighted the differences between early responses to the partition during the first decade after 1947 and later representations of the event. Aijaz Ahmed suggests that later writing in Urdu tends to be more reflective, seeking to negotiate larger civilizational, social or political questions after the initial raw narratives of suffering" (Saint 2010: 116).

are written by Mohan Rakesh in Hindi and published in 1957, 1958, and 1959. One is published by Upendranath Ashk in Hindi in 1958, and one, written in Bengali by S. Waliullah, has been published in 1964. The latter short story, *ekṭī tūlsī gācher kāhinī* ('The Tale of a Tulsi Weed') describes the resettlement of a group of refugees from West Bengal. In Saros Cowasjee and K.S. Duggal's anthology of Partition stories, *Orphans of the Storm* (1995), only one short story, which had already been translated in Bhalla's anthology (*malbe kā mālik* by Mohan Rakesh published in 1957) belongs to this period.[3] The sudden 'disappearance' of Partition and its massive violence and migration, whose effects were particularly evident during 1955-1960 in the cities recomposed by lakhs of refugees,[4] is a matter of intrigue. How did fiction address the ongoing effects of Partition, to include the vivid memory of violence and displacement? Moreover, most anthologies of Partition (Bhalla 1994, Hasan 1995, Saros and Duggal 1995) document how deeply the Hindi literary field was affected by it, especially when it came to the genre of the novel. Several major Hindi writers had experienced Partition, either as exiles (like K. Sobti, B. Sahni, Kamleshwar, and K.B. Vaid) or as witnesses (like Agyeya, Mohan Rakesh). This specific relationship between fiction and Partition is further elaborated by K.B. Vaid (among others) in an interview with critic Bhalla in *Partition Dialogues* (2006), where he provides a comprehensive analysis of the deep impact of Partition on his literary works. According to him (Vaid, in Bhalla 2006: 168):

> The Partition was an event that had a range of influences on me. It, of course, brought to an abrupt end to all that I remember fondly about my friends and the town where I grew up. Its impact was so great that I'm still not aware of the variety of ways in which it changed my life. But, perhaps, the most important aspect of the Partition for me personally was that it left in me a certain kind of fear and a permanent feeling of dislocation. A couple of years ago, a friend of mine surprised me when he remarked that my entire writing was marked by fear, and that I would, perhaps, stop writing once I ceased to be afraid [...] I find that my characters are haunted by a certain sense of uncertainty, a certain feeling of not belonging. The source of fear is an awareness of dislocation that lies in the days of the Partition.

K.B. Vaid thus illustrates a form of 'dealing with' Partition, as is termed by Sukrita Paul Kumar (1990: 19). He shows that if Partition was not represented in fiction, its effects were made visible through a series of emotions produced in and by the text and its transcribing that Kumar identifies as "modern sensibility" (ibid.: 20). What Vaid suggests, and what Kumar similarly questions in her work on literary modernism in India, is the concomitance of Partition—and, more broadly, the post-Partition period—with a literary modernity that reassesses the modes of representation, promotes subjectivity, and enhances the experience of reality. This is manifest in the advent of a the 'New Story' in the Hindi (*naī kahānī*) and Urdu literary fields, as evidenced by the promotion of urban settings and the recreation and recompositing of cities in North India and Pakistan. While melancholic characters in these cities convert their exile into an existential wandering, their historical amnesia turns into an incommunicability as the condition of modern man.

Towards a New Realism: Partition and Modernity

The Hindi 'New Story' (*naī kahānī*), as belatedly theorized by novelist and short-story writer Kamleshwar (who wrote the famous novel *kitne pākistān* in 2001 and an eponymous short story published in 1966) does not present itself as a movement (*āndolan*). For Kamleshwar,

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[3] Several other famous Partition novels were also published during this period, notably *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (Attia Hossain 1966) and *Ādhā Gāoṁ* by Rahi Masoom Raza (1966).
[4] See notably Zamindar (2007), Chatterji (2007), Tan & Kudaisya (2000).

naī kahānī must be comprehended as a dynamic 'process' (*prakriyā*), a 'literary revolution' (1966: 1) that bears witness to fiction's profound desire to renew itself after independence. According to him, idealism and romanticism proved inadequate to illustrate new social and cultural conditions after Partition and independence, and to capture the sense of confusion and disappointment.

This 'New Story', which had similar forms in Urdu (*nayā afsānā*) and in Punjabi (*navī kahānī*), advocates a new realism that is able to convey what Kamleshwar refers to as a "tipping into the shadows" (1966: 15) that, according to him, accompanied the conditions and aftermath of a nauseating Independence: the rise of communalism and violence, massive urbanization or industrialization, and the progressive alteration of traditional values, contributing to the anxiety of what Kamleshwar outlined as the 'modern man'. In the scope of realism advocated by the Progressive Writers Association, who were particularly productive since the mid-1930s, *naī kahānī* focused on the emotions and experiences of men and women. In the words of novelist Nirmal Verma (1973), the author assumes the role of the 'detective of the human soul', a position that entails refocusing on characteristic situations rather than slices of life. In these situations ordinary individuals transcend sensational heroes, and urbanity over rurality, exemplified by Mohan Rakesh's novel *Andhere Band Kamre* ('The dark closed rooms' published in 1961) or by Usha Priyamvada's *Koī Nahī* ('Nobody' published in 1990). *Naī kahānī* thus aimed to abolish the distance between the author and the characters, and between the characters and readers. It explored the paradoxes of the middle class, its desires and frustrations, and adopted familiar situations and characters, discarding social or religious identification, to focus primarily on the individual and their experience of the world.

Although not central to this literary emulation,[5] the city of Delhi became, for quite some time, a metaphor for the profound upheavals brought about by independence and Partition.[6] Gordon C. Roadarmel's anthology *A Death in Delhi* (1972) is quite significant in this regard, as it illustrates how *naī kahānī* and what it articulated metaphorically occupied a considerable place of importance in melancholic writing: death, embodied by palpable melancholy, inextricable situations, and permanent failure. While *naī kahānī* tends to break with the romantic aesthetic that Kamleshwar perceives as the bulwark between reality and its representation (1966: 9), the authenticity he promotes is inseparable from formal strategies: simplification of language in order to adopt the character's idiolect (de Bruijn 2003: 128), the use of present tense, internal focalization, and the frequent use of the first person.[7] As Madhu Singh (2016) has demonstrated, 1955 was a pivotal and prolific year for Hindi literature, giving rise to the publication of remarkable short stories such as Bisham Sahni's *Cīf kī Dāvat* ('A Dinner for the Boss') or Krishna Sobti's *Bādloṁ ke Ghere* ('Surrounded by Clouds'), both of which, though different, have become emblematic of *naī kahānī*. When considered in conjunction with the movement's focus on the Delhi 'locus' and the gradual dissolution of Partition as a theme, the literary revolution that *naī kahānī* undertook prompted scholars to contemplate it as a response

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[5] Madhu Singh (2016: 314) sheds light on the fact that despite Delhi's omnipresence in *naī kahānī*'s fictions, it was the city of Allahabad that truly served as the 'epicenter of major literary activit' from the mid-1940s onwards.

[6] See Priyanka Chhabra's documentary *Pichla Varka* (2018), and Castaing's discussion of the same (2020).

[7] "Many short stories are told in the first person, or refer to the main character only as 'he', or otherwise avoid naming the characters' identities. Giving a name would imply identifying a person's religious affiliation and, often, caste, which could automatically produce associations or stereotypes in the reader's mind. On the contrary, many authors deliberately seek to reduce the distance between the reader and the character, by mobilizing an imprecise point of view, through the use of the present tense or direct speech, by rendering scattered sensations, ordinary actions and ambiguous reactions" Roadarmel (1972: 3).

to the experience of violence and exile, this experience being embodied in Delhi by the arrival of thousands of refugees within a few weeks of August 1947.

In this context, the juxtaposition of the independent man—not to say the modern man—and the refugee gains significance in stories and novels written and published in this period. However, as Saint wrote, the 'afterlife' of Partition somehow recomposed the representation of Partition and its refugees. Common tropes and figures such as the uprooted erratic man lost to modernity, the invisible enemy, and incommunicability can also be read as metaphors of post-Partition India and, more specifically, of post-Partition Delhi, where the effects of 1947 were major but nevertheless not constitutive of a theme, whether in literary or political language.

In K.B. Vaid's short story *Merā Duśman* (1962), Delhi is not specifically named, yet the context is sufficiently urban for Hindi-speakers and readers to recognize the city.[8] This link is further facilitated by the author's relationship with Delhi, where he and his family lived for most of his life after crossing the new border to settle first in Eastern Punjab and then in Delhi. Back in Delhi in the late 1980's after several years in the United States, Vaid settled for the rest of his life in Vasant Kunj, in one of the colonies built to house migrants after 1947. The story (*Merā Duśman*) starts with a near-perfection criminal setting; the narrator has just poisoned his 'mortal enemy' by adding a 'little something' to the drink he has proffered his mortal enemy. As the latter now lies comatose in the adjacent room, the narrator is in a state of indecision regarding whether to abscond or to dispose of the body. This 'enemy' also happens to be an old friend with whom the narrator would have earlier roamed around, a stark contrast to the reassuring bourgeois comfort of his current married life. Before the narrator had sought refuge "in Mala's [his wife] skirts", this old filthy (*gandā*) 'vagabond' (*āvārāgard*), would have been his 'ideal' (*ādarś*).

The unexpected reappearance of the stranger in the narrator's life is met with dismay by his wife, who, as a perfect housewife, graciously welcomes the guest and offers him her husband's attire, suggesting that the similarity between them makes her feel as though she is 'having two husbands'. Although he harbours the hope that his wife will dispose of the intruder, the narrator, portrayed as cowardly and sheepish, endures both her disapproval, and also the taunts levied by his 'friend' (1962: 284): "You got involved with this woman to serve as her slave, really?" For the narrator, since Mala personifies order and reason, she is unlike his old friend. She takes sound decisions in contrast to his own tendency to "call for [her] name for every issue" (ibid: 285). However, in contrast to the intruder, who represents the archetypal figure of arrogance and manipulation, Mala exhibits a sense of autonomy, evidenced by her decision to pack her bags and leave the house with the children. Confronted with the challenge of addressing the situation, the narrator finds himself in a state of uncertainty, wherein he lacks a clear course of action: "If Mala were here right now, she would find a solution. But she's not here, and I don't know what to do" (ibid: 283).

Unlike *Merā Duśman*'s caustic humour, Rajendra Yadav's novel *Sārā Ākāś* ('The Whole Sky' published in 1960) employs a rather dramatic expression.[9] The 200-page novel, seemingly inspired by the experiences of one of the author's acquaintances, chronicles in two distinct sections, the arduous years of a young urbanite, Samar, who, compelled by familial pressures, enters into matrimony and grapples with the oppressive weight of Hindu tradition. As a young student, Samar aspires to pursue his education. Yet his family insists that he weds, and secures

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[8] 'Do you like this city?' the narrator's wife asks her husband's old friend. Apart from this question, the story contains no information on the environment, as is often the case in *naī kahānī*'s stories.

[9] The novel was first published in 1952 under the title *Pret Bolte Haiṁ* ('Ghosts are Speaking') and then renamed and slightly reshaped in 1960.

employment. Samar finally accepts but places the blame of his failure on his young wife, Prabha, whom he decides to ignore completely. Prabha, who is attractive and educated, arouses jealousy among the household women, who subject her to the worst kind of rudeness and humiliation, all except for Samar's sister Munni. Munni suffered from the brutality of a sadistic husband whom she left to return to her natal home. Meanwhile, Samar flees the house as far as possible. To evade both physical intimacy with his wife and the incessant scolding he is subjected to by his family, he spends his nights roaming the streets of Delhi, consumed by despair, anger, and guilt. Concurrently, his young wife continues to perform her domestic duties and endure constant humiliation. Nonetheless, the initial part of the novel culminates in an embrace between the couple (1960: 88):

> I don't know how long we both kept crying together. We couldn't manage to say a single word. We'd pause briefly and then again start crying. I felt as if she had almost lost consciousness. When I lifted her to my room, I felt as if I had brought her from a burning house, from beneath fallen walls and rubble, and as my body was scorched, my clothing burnt.
>
> The moon was hidden and the sky was dark. All night we didn't sleep a wink, nor could we speak a word or even look at one another. It was as if all that had been suppressed for a whole year had to burst out in one day.[10]

In the second part of the novel, the couple's harmony is restored, but mounting family pressures persists. Samar realizes that his autonomy depends on financial independence, and he plans to terminate his joint-family arrangement and leave the house along with his wife. Following a brief period of hope, the situation undergoes significant change. Samar loses his job and his family expels him. He is informed of his younger sister's death, killed by her husband (their father had forced her to return to her in-laws). Samar flees, roaming the streets of Delhi for several hours before arriving at a railway station, where he intends to commit suicide by jumping in front of a train. The novel concludes at this moment with an air of uncertainty (ibid.: 192-193):

> The train behind me had also begun to slide forward—the two trains were drawing away in two opposite directions. I felt as if I were standing on a rapidly spinning wheel while someone chanted inside me—Jump down!... Leap up! Jump down! … Leap up! Confounded, I looked up—the sky too had begun slowly to revolve above me.

As a typical, even emblematic novel of the *naī kahānī* movement, *Sārā Ākāś* elaborates several characteristic themes, motifs and features, focusing on the existential (and social) rut of an ordinary character, grappling with the requirements of the modern world. The novel illustrates the hiatus between persistent traditions perceived as liberticidal on the one hand, and individual aspirations perceived as incompatible with the principle of collectivity and therefore guilt-inducing on the other. More allegorically, the same hiatus also drives the narrator of *Merā Duśman*, setting up oppositions between the individual and family, between freedom and home, wandering and bourgeois sedentariness, past and present; and between the 'mortal enemy' and Mala. In both cases, it is noteworthy that it is the female figure of Prabha in *Sārā Ākāś* and Mala in *Merā Duśman* who unwillingly embody the bourgeois alienation of male individuals. Realism in both these fictive enterprises is elaborated through the exploration of hiatus—in free indirect speech in both texts—of the paradox between the modern man and the promotion of his subjectivity.

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[10] As translated by Ruth Vanita (2014).

Melancholy of the Exile

Despite the absence of the specific term 'Partition' in both stories, certain themes emerge that demonstrate a parallelism or corollary between Partition and *naī kahānī* urban fictions. The motif of roaming or *bhaṭaknā* is common to both texts, where it is opposed to bourgeois sedentariness and a comfort perceived as alienating. The narrator of *Merā Duśman* is 'no longer himself' and the narrator of *Sārā Ākāś* is oppressed and a 'prisoner', in to his own words.[11] *Bhaṭaknā* is embodied by the narrators' physical peregrinations: as Samar traverses the streets of Delhi, the narrator of *Merā Duśman* remembers wandering around with his own 'mortal enemy'. On the other hand, a series of unrooted characters in the story, the figure of the 'mortal enemy' himself, is a hostile foreigner with no ties, no possessions, and no name who is perpetually on the road and emerges out of nowhere. The two female characters of Munni and Prabha in *Sārā Ākāś* are perceived as exiles as young brides who are forcibly extirpated from their families and thrown into hostile households where cruelty is *de rigueur*. And finally, 'real' refugees, whom Samar meets on the streets of Delhi, are the only explicit references to the historical context of post-Partition (Yadav 1960: 39, 47):

> An extremely weak and emaciated Punjabi refugee had gone into the temple to ask for *prasad*. The priest picked up a smouldering stick and beat him out like a dog. That sight broke something in me. I said nothing. I merely watched like a spectator sitting on a balcony, but that was my last day at the temple.

Then, a few pages later:

> I roamed the streets. Punjabi refugees were hawking soap, vegetables and other goods. Boys were selling roasted gram and peanuts; some had set up wooden stalls to sell clothes. One had to acknowledge the courage and self-reliance of these people. After going through such terrible hardship, such an inferno we people would have been fit for nothing but begging alms. What had they not suffered and witnessed?

In *Sārā Ākāś*, these distressing scenes are used to demonstrate the character's sense of exile and marginality. Samar is shocked by the priest's cruelty, which serves to confirm his mistrust in Brahmin orthodoxy. He experiences empathy for the refugees going through such terrible hardship. Meeting these refugees indeed gives rise to profound introspection concerning his condition and marital relationship in Samar. In a striking shift, Samar's perspective is suddenly transformed, leading him to hold Prabha in high esteem. The scene between the priest and the refugees, somewhat surprisingly, serves to invigorate him and lighten his despondency, as if it had absorbed all the characters' misery: "I was surprised at myself: where was all my despair, my anxiety and sorrow? (p. 47)" The novel's historical allusion offers readers with a compelling perspective on the interconnection between the characters' melancholy and the post-1947 context, which is typical of *naī kahānī* fiction, highlighting the ongoing repercussions of Partition for Delhi's inhabitants. Kamleshwar himself identified this relationship when comparing the refugee and the modern man. According to him, the conditions of modernity are inseparable from Partition because dreams of the future are also inseparable from the "sight of refugees' columns [...] engraved in people's hearts and minds" (1966: 11). Samar, who certainly witnessed Partition violence and exile, formulated his experience in words that resonated with the sentiments expressed by K.B. Vaid. As quoted above, both express their fear, their feelings of uprootedness and non-belonging (or dislocation, in Vaid's terms), and

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[11] The narrator uses the words *qaid* (pp. 91, 183), 'released from prison' for *jel se chūṭkara* (p. 97), and 'trapped' for *phansā* (p. 53).

their alienation. K.B. Vaid, as an inconsolable exile, nurtures his entire fictional oeuvre with this inextinguishable feeling, which he associates with his personal experience of Partition. In *Merā Duśman*, the narrator is a wanderer, as shown by his doubts, convolutions and inability to weave together his contradictory aspirations. Here again, this condition echoes what K.B. Vaid identifies as the very essence of his oeuvre (Castaing 2010), the "exilic state of mind" (Vaid 2004: 295):

> There are important shades of differences between an exile on the one hand and the émigré, an expatriate, a refugee, an immigrant, a displaced person, or a migrant on the other. But all these categories overlap one another. The exilic state of mind, characterized by homesickness, anguish, ennui, nostalgia, nausea, a feeling of rootlessness, a metaphysical homelessness, a spiritual craving, is more or less a common factor in the psycho-spiritual composition of many people belonging to all these categories. Those who have this exilic state of mind in a virulent form or to an extreme degree may be termed as the true citizens, if I may resort to a paradox, of the state of exile even when they are not exiles, technically speaking.

Vaid's concept of the 'exilic state of mind' as a form of melancholy is evident in Yadav's *Sārā Ākāś*, where it is embodied in the miserable character of Samar and a series of characters whose condition exacerbates the narrator's distress. Women notably, and particularly young brides, are the novel's first casualties, and are more afflicted than refugees, with whom they share several characteristics. *Sārā Ākāś* indeed commences with a dramatic scene. On the very morning of Samar's wedding, the neighbour's young wife has been burned alive, probably following a quarrel with her in-laws (Yadav 1960: 17):

> The daughter-in-law in the house directly opposite ours doused her clothes with kerosene and set herself on fire. The neighbours, alerted by the smoke, rushed over to try and save her, but by the time they broke down the door, it was all over. What a tragedy on such an auspicious day! Everyone felt oppressed by a sense of impending doom. Shouts and cries, people running in all directions as if an earthquake had occurred. No wonder I found it hard to believe that it was my wedding night.

The novel's opening moment thus intertwines Prabha's marriage and the neighbour's death, foreshadowing an imminent tragedy. While the novel closes on another (probable) death—Samar's suicide—his younger sister Munni's murder leaves behind a tragic shadow that hangs over Prabha. *Sārā Ākāś* reiterates this crucial issue: Prabha discloses to Samar her concerns regarding the neighbour's suicide on the day of her wedding (ibid.: 103), and Shrish, Samar's friend, condemning the joint-family system, underscores the pervasiveness of such domestic incidents by presenting Samar and readers with horrifying statistics. As he puts it (ibid.: 124):

> Here's today's newspaper. In Lucknow district, 5,000 women from good families have filed for divorce. Do you really think all these women just want to go out and have fun? Two women were burnt to death, four jumped into the well, eight ran away or died of tuberculosis, we're so used to reading this kind of news that we don't even pay attention to it anymore. We don't care anymore. Is this the wonderful system you're talking about? I don't know about your family, but I don't know of a single family where women aren't oppressed.

The domestic space is indeed constantly associated with death. The house is depicted as 'shadowed with death' (*ghar me murdanī chāī thī* [ibid.: 79]), and it is dark, narrow, and constantly invaded by smoke. The narrator feels "drowned in a dark ocean" (p. 26) and a "prisoner in a small dark room" (p. 91). He sees before his eyes, "a dark ocean whose shores

are indistinguishable" (p. 152), feeling overwhelmed by "total blackness" (p. 191) in his head. He is depressed, sad (pp. 26, 106, 183), unhappy (p. 36), hopeless (pp. 39, 120), despondent (pp. 36, 183), and alone (pp. 25, 120, 182). He feels guilty (pp. 37, 39, 65, 66, 119, 165) for making Prabha unhappy and for his complicity in a marriage in a system that is rife with murder. He feels guilty for failings to earn money, for lacking in educational success, and for the ultimate death of his sister. Most deeply, he feels guilty for passively witnessing the historical drama unfolding before his eyes, alluded to by the temple scene, his condition echoing the 'exilic state of mind' as described by Vaid.

The Intimate Enemy

The exile's melancholy is arguably more challenging to discern in the short story *Merā Duśman*, where humour plays an important role in the zany tale of an intruding 'intimate enemy' and of the narrator's embarrassment. The story's title illustrates its specular dimension, *Merā Duśman* ('my enemy') being perceived over here as an 'intimate enemy'. The allegorical nature of the story is readily discernible as it incorporates a narrator with a severely limited frame of reference (neither depicted nor characterized), and his even less referential evil double, named with a series of disparaging, even insulting adjectives: harassing, wretched, a carrion eater, a creature, appalling, filthy, venomous, a fat bastard, and infamous. The story repeatedly points out similarities between the two characters, perfect doppelgangers who wear the same clothes, have resigned in the same way and at the same time to more than one employer, and who have 'walked for hours in the same way'. However, the enemy does not (or no longer) belongs to 'our own world', and this resemblance horrifies and strangely delights the narrator at the same time. The confrontation between the two worlds, embodied on the one side by the filthy vagabond and on the other by the perfect Mala, represents the staging of everyone's inherent otherness, a concept described at length by psychoanalytic theory. But the aggressive nature of this double and the uncanny character of the story also echoes what Freud identified as the *Unheimlich* (2003: 148), as an uncanny element "which is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only being repressed." In a Freudian sense, then, this aggressive, uncanny double, can only be perceived of as the embodiment of a repressed but persistent traumatic memory that resonates with the 'exilic state of mind'. The wandering the vagabond invites, is attractive but also disgusting. The sedentary, bourgeois life embodied by Mala is thus called into question when one considers the impromptu forays of the vagabond.

The emergence of *naī kahānī* that Kamleshwar perceived of as a literary legacy as an indigenous recompositing of a new humanism, indeed echoed both Sartre and Camus' existentialism and Freud's psychoanalysis. This resonance justifies the scholarly inclination towards introspection of characters that are doubles and doppelgangers, malevolent or otherwise. These characters are commonly exemplified in K. B. Vaid's story *Dusrā na Koī* 'There is no Other' published in 1978), *Dard lā Davā* ('Pain with no remedy' published in 1980), and *Ajnabī* ('Stranger' published in 1964). This double character is also more than evident in the fictions written by Mohan Rakesh, Nirmal Verma and Upendranath Ashk (cf. Dimitrova 2014). More broadly thus, the 'uncanny' indeed assumes a pivotal role in a realistic literary movement that was, as a paradox, firmly grounded in reality. The presence of (disembodied) doubles is intricately linked with the incomprehensible and distressing, and with almost fantastic situations, as shown in Nirmal Verma's short story *Jaltī Jhāṛī* ('Burning Bush' published in 1965), where a man remembers his experience in a foreign city. Confronted by a series of enigmatic characters (an elderly fisherman, a child, and a young woman), this stranger is erroneously identified as someone else, initially as the old fisherman himself, and subsequently as the young girl's lover. A strange bush, in whose shade the young couple had sought refuge, gazes upon the character with a gleaming and also ironic gaze, and he,

bewildered, hastily leaves to never return. The mystery of how he is twice mistaken for someone else, and of how the bush stares back at him is not explained by the narrator, and the story ends with a strange, agonizing sense of distorted reality and loss of identity. *Jaltī Jhāṛī* displays similarities with *Merā Duśman*, but seeks not so much to penetrate the realm of the fantastic as it tries to explore its character's experience with strangeness, evidenced by the explicit biblical reference of the 'burning bush'. As the narrator puts it in the very first line of the story: "It was the first time I'd been to this city" (Verma 1965: 166). The narrator puts himself in the position of a stranger, who is unknown and unrecognized.

Isn't this strangeness a typical condition of the exilic state of mind of post-Partition India? Set against the backdrop of the 1950s and 1960s in the Hindi-speaking zone, which was predominantly preoccupied with the post-Partition reconstruction, the unsettling strangeness embodied in the fantastic elements of Verma's story is fuelled by a pervasive and persistent theme of difference and alienation. *Naī kahānī*, that is frequently regarded (Kumar 1990, De Bruijn 2003) as a manifestation of the repercussions of a modernity resonating with European existentialism, thus exhibits novel traces of Partition, illustrating what historian Vazira Zamindar (2007) perceives of as a 'Long Partition', a Partition with long effects and enduring experience.

Telling their own Story?

Communicating is one of the key issues in both *Merā Duśman* and *Sārā Ākāś* that promotes narrative subjectivity in the representation of reality. Both stories are narrated in the first person by an internal narrator, who is omnipresent as a character. In both cases, the narrative mainly consists of monologues; dialogues are rare, as are descriptions of the narrator's feelings. In *Merā Duśman*, the 'enemy' for instance is represented by a series of comparisons (Vaid 1962: 31):

> Seeing him busy inspecting the room, I began to observe him out of the corner of my eye. With his legs tucked up, he looked like an animal on the couch. He looked exhausted [...] He smiled as if he'd seen through me.

This description then draws a parallel with the narrator himself: "But he has something in common with me, even physically" (p. 31). Further on, the narrator continues to try to describe the character: "He emerged from the bathroom duly washed and changed: he was wearing clothes of my own" (p. 33). The motif of the double here serves to stress the narrative presence in the story, with each appearance of the secondary character aiming to engage the narrator in a self-referential discourse.

In *Sārā Akā*ś, this representation is highly subjectivized (Yadav 1960: 97):

> I came into the kitchen like a scalded cat and sat down on a small stool in silence. A shiver ran through me when Prabha brought in the food. I raised my head and looked at her like a stranger; on her face there seemed to be a comparable gravity, her eyes were lowered and the shadow of a smile appeared on her lips. Her face was always closed, but today it was as if it shone with a new happiness, as if, after years, the dust had been removed from a mirror. All I could think about was looking at that mirror again and again. I wanted to say something to her, but I didn't know what. At that moment, I had the feeling that I'd been longing to hear the sound of her voice, that maybe I'd never really heard it. Maybe I wouldn't even be able to recognize her by her voice alone. How could I? I couldn't remember ever hearing her. She was just working, with her face closed.

Similarly, *Merā Duśman's* narrator is 'racked by doubt', uncertain and 'doesn't know; (Vaid 1962: 21):

> I was surprised not to have thought of this earlier. Perhaps I did, and then some other thought nipped it in the bud. It's something that often happens to me, to think about a question and then lose my many previous thoughts, nipped in the bud. Even today, I was gnawed by doubt that he would find a difference in taste and catch me red-handed.

As 'unreliable' and 'untrustworthy',[12] the narrator is unable to represent a reality any other than through his own feelings and doubts. This kind of narrative strategy, fairly typical of *naī kahānī*, but not specifically linked to the use of the first person,[13] aims to abolish the distance between narrator/character and the reader, who is as fallible as the narrator is. It thus bears witness to human fragility, translated as hesitation and an imperfection of expression. The first part of *Sārā Akāś* deals with the lack of communication between Samar and Prabha, as well as Samar's inability to articulate his own desires. But the entire novel is concerned with incommunicability, and the inability of the narrator to accurately translate the complexity of his inner world, evidenced by the constant flow of consciousness in the novel. The story often features Samar struggling with his family, unable to express himself openly before his brother, father or mother. During discussions with his friends, Samar's flow of consciousness is still dominant. He represses his own speech, and his inside comments to the words of others, like 'I felt like saying no'; 'I was embarrassed'; 'I was petrified and didn't know what to say'; 'I was relieved to change the subject'; 'I wasn't really listening to him anymore' etc. These comments break up the fluidity of dialogue, and thereby reveal Samar's discomfort within and through simple conversations. In *Merā Duśman*, communication is both a challenge and a failure. The story is devoid of any real dialogue—between the narrator and his double, between the narrator and Prabha—this communication consisting only of long monologue, constantly interrupted by meta-discursive comments. This is quite a typical characteristic of K.B. Vaid's writing. The narrator's feelings are highly complex, and hardly communicable to the reader. In Yadav's novel, where most of the characters are mute, the secondary characters have little to say, and their words are misperceived or misunderstood by the narrator. The enemy speaks little or 'seems' to say something that is rather confused, expressing himself mainly through a sardonic laugh that is utterly distressing.

As a sense of 'speaking about' and of 'telling a story', communication has been quite a challenge when it comes to Partition, documented after the 1990s through numerous oral history initiatives that invited eye witnesses to share their story,[14] as it has been analysed further by historians.[15] Urvashi Butalia's well-known *The Other Side of Silence* (1998) illustrates the will of two generations of Partition refugees to break their silence and amnesia that was at the heart of the Partition experience for several decades. Both *Merā Duśman* and

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[12] According to Wayne Booth, "I will call a narrator reliable if he speaks or acts according to the norms of the work (that is to say, the author's implicit norms), and I will call him unreliable if he doesn't" (1977: 105).

[13] As illustrated by K.B. Vaid in his novel *Uskā Bacpan* ('His Childhood' published in 1957) that tells the story of a young boy's everyday life in the third person, in a highly modalized narrative that is dominated by fear and doubt.

[14] As proposed by the massive project 1947 Partition Archive (https://www.1947partitionarchive.org/). Cf. Dandekar (2019, 2024) for an example of the recent work on Partition memory, based on the primary text interviews collected by the 1947 Partition Archive that are presently housed at the Stanford University library and available online.

[15] Several historians have aimed to give voice to witnesses (Hasan 1995, Butalia 1998, Talbot 2006, Kothari 2007, Malhotra 2017).

Sārā Ākāś, where the respective narrators obviously cannot properly share, resonate with a context where the tragedy of Partition bore the burden of both intentional amnesia and burning memory. In his historiography of Partition, G. Pandey shows the measure to which India's Partition history and violence was silenced by a general desire to forget. As he writes, "Historian's history works, I suggest, to produce the 'truth' of the traumatic, genocidal violence of Partition and to elide it as the same time" (2001: 45). Furthermore, as Butalia (1998) demonstrates, the silence that ensued in 1947, particularly within familial units, for which the second and third generations ultimately bore the consequences, is more indicative of the witnesses' inclination to forget than of any institutional inability to articulate their experiences. It is evident that a significant number of witnesses, victims and displaced persons have been compelled to enter a state of profound silence, precipitated by a complex interplay of emotions that include shame, fear, pain and a strong inclination to 'move on'. I would suggest that this phenomenon is exemplified by the thematic element of incommunicability prevalent in the fiction of the *naī kahānī*. Reflecting this intentional or unintentional silence, *naī kahānī* depicts the internalization of Partition as a long process, formulated through a series of devices and tropes that testify to the unease, despondency, anguish and melancholy of disenchanted tomorrows, embodied in desperate characters like Samar, or 'deranged' characters like the narrator of *Merā Duśman*. As Sukrita Paul Kumar (1990) suggests, questioning the emergence of literary modernism in the context of the cultural and socio-political history of the post-independence period, *naī kahānī* fictions reveal the persistence of the 'Long' Partition in people's daily life and imagination.

In Yadav's novel (1960), Delhi itself personifies this persistence, and bears witness to a complex reconstruction—as I earlier mentioned—the construction of large colonies that aimed at accommodating Partition refugees partially reshaped and transformed the city of Delhi. What this essay aims to demonstrate is the strong connection between cities and the untold memory of Partition, a theme that Intizar Husain also explored in the case of Lahore in his novel *Bastī* (1979), with each city experiencing Partition in a singular manner. But this article also aims to explore the modalities of the literary narration of History.

Conclusion

Naī kahānī, often perceived of as a distant echo of existentialism or of the European nouveau roman, emerges in a particularly sensitive context where literary discourse clearly plays a significant role in bearing witness to the unspeakable pain of Partition. These two works of fiction analysed in this article do not explicitly 'mention' Partition, but many elements in the stories evoke an invasive memory and the struggle between remembering and 'moving on', that is considered beneficial. The presence of these elements also suggests the possibility of writing a history that is beyond direct representation in fiction, where every word is historical and historicized, and where every word is a form of assault against history and simultaneously a journey towards history writing.

In perspective of a history of Partition literature as a genre, which began in August 1947 and continues to this day, as Partition remains a prevalent theme in contemporary South Asian and diasporic literatures, the 'amnesiac' treatment of Partition in *naī kahānī* cannot, I argue, be perceived as a rupture. This 'amnesiac' treatment is in fact a continuation of historical experience, given that Partition is a significant process that affected South Asia across generations. I suggest that this literature can rather be understood as a stage in the memory process, as historian Henry Rousso, in *The Vichy Syndrome* (1987[1991]) identifies it with regard to the memorialization of the Second World War also characterized by the inevitable amnesia of the decade following, as also discussed by Anjali Gera Roy (2020) in her research on the memory and postmemory of Partition. Exploring the 'shadows of Partition' in novels that

do not specifically mention Partition, but which provide certain clues that lead the reader to an elusive conclusion—beginning with the location, Delhi—demonstrates the persistence of Partition memory in South Asian and diasporic literature that continue to impact the imagination of those affected. Finally, this literature aptly illustrates the various ways in which this memory can be and is embodied, expressed in everyday lives.

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Research Article

'The Somnath of My Imagination': The Indo-Persian Pluralistic and Cosmopolitan Urbanity of Mirza Ghalib's Banaras

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Banaras is often recognized today through popular media and even scholarly discourse as a metonym for Hindu India, ignoring its substantial Muslim presence and socio-cultural contributions to the city. My translation of Mirza Ghalib's (1797–1869) Persian long poem in praise of Banaras, *Chiragh-e-Dair* (1826), as *Temple Lamp* in 2022 represents an attempt to showcase a 19th-century Turkic-Indian Muslim poet's representation of the Hindu holy city. In this close reading of the poem, alongside historical contextualization, I elucidate how Ghalib's Banaras is both real and symbolic, and transcends the *shahr-ashob* tradition of Persianate poetry on the city. Ghalib is shown to present readers an outward looking view of the city, linking it to the Persian cosmopolis stretching from the Balkans to Bengal, as well as the Silk route—drawing connections to China—connecting Hinduism to Islam and the Hebraic, and seeing the city of Kashi/Banaras as comparable to the Kaaba and Paradise. Ghalib also uses vocabulary that emphasises the city as one's country or locus of cosmopolitan belonging and as the place for civilisation, society, and friendship. The city's close connections to river/ water, forests, spirituality, and the vivacity of its people's bodies and lives are all highlighted. Ghalib thus provides us with a unique Indo-Persian, composite view of this singular city, albeit from a largely elite perspective. The cross-religious translation of concepts works almost like a kind of conversion, giving this distinctive Hindustani cosmopolitanism a most interesting gloss.

Banaras, Ghalib, poetry, cosmopolitanism, Persian

Introduction

> *ibādatkhāna-e-nāqūsiyānast*
> *hamānā ka'aba-e-hindostānast*[1] (Verse 47)

> The (supreme) place of worship for
> the conch-blowers,

> surely, (Banaras) is the Kaaba
> of Hindustan. (Ghalib 2022, 49)

The above verse from the Persian *masnavi*[2] or long poem *Chiragh-e-Dair* (1826), or *Temple Lamp* (2022), by Mirza Ghalib (1797–1869), has come to define the holiest Hindu city, variously

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[1] For key to transliteration refer to (Ghalib 2022, ix–x).

[2] The *masnavi* is a long narrative poem written in beits or distiches made up of two equal hemistiches called *misra*. Each of these has an internal end-rhyme, so the poem has an aa, bb, cc . . . rhyme scheme… The form of the *masnavi* originated in the Middle-Persian period (roughly from the 3rd century BCE to the 9th century CE) and later was adopted in Arabic (where it is also called *Muzdawij*), Turkish, and Urdu. It has been used mainly for romantic, heroic, and didactic themes, and it became one of the

known as Banaras, Kashi, and Varanasi, in the great poet's imagination. To represent Banaras as 'the Kaaba of Hindustan' is illustrative of varied synergies. The fact that Ghalib sees it foremost as the Kaaba of Hindustan, the focal point for devotional obeisance, signifies the town's holiest status in India in the early-19th century in all of its religiosity. Moreover, the fact that Ghalib calls Banaras the Kaaba of Hindustan and not the *ka'aba-e-hinood* or the Kaaba of Hindus points to Ghalib's pluralistic[3] and cosmopolitan[4] view of Banaras and its urbanity, as was first pointed out by Khushwant Singh (Ghalib and Nijhawan II). This view is pluralistic and inclusive in far greater ways than the narrow secularism of the West, especially the French laïcité, which asks its citizens to leave their religion out of the public domain, especially when they are a minority (refer to Asad 2003 for more detailed discussions on the limits of laïcité).[5]

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most popular genres of Persianate cultures, including in India. The most popular *masnavi* globally is probably the *Masnavi-e-Ma'anavi* or 'The Spiritual *Masnavi*' by Rumi. Convention dictates that the metres employed do not exceed eleven syllables in a poetic line. Appropriate metres and diction are also chosen in accordance with the theme of each *masnavi* (Bilal 2022: 43).

[3] Pluralism is "a form of society in which the members of minority groups maintain their independent cultural traditions" (Oxford English Dictionary). Such, pluralism was common during Mughal rule in India, albeit Ghalib lived in the reign of the last Mughal king, Zafar, and his political influence was declining. However, the residual cultural import continues to an extent till date, as it has been enshrined in Indian ideas of secularism in the constitution. Kinra has recorded this pluralism from the time of Akbar in the 16th century, seen in Akbar's *sulh-e-kull* which can be variously translated as 'peace for all' but also universal reconciliation/arbitration, and seeing India as *dār-ul-sulh*, or land of reconciliation. Akbar's ideas, which related to his inclusive religion, *dīn-e-ilāhī*, arise from within Islam, possibly from Mansūr-al-Hallāj's *wahdat-ul-wajūd* or the unity of being (of God and his creation). Hence, *sulh-e-kull* meant an acceptance of different kinds of Islamic beliefs, including the Shia and Sunni, their individual sects or *mazhab*s, as well as various other religions (Kinra 2020). Ghalib, as is also clear in his Urdu writing as well, which is not discussed here for reasons of brevity, but displayed in *Chiragh-e-Dair* in this paper, is quite evidently a pluralistic person who believes in a society of multiple traditions.

[4] Cosmopolitan from the original Greek literally translates as 'citizen of the universe' or more commonly 'citizen of the world'. A city or any place may be also called cosmopolitan as "including or containing people from many different countries" (Oxford English Dictionary), or a person is also called so when they are "familiar with and at ease in many different countries and cultures" (ibid.). Cosmopolitanism traces its roots to Greek philosophy where it began to be used to emphasize human belonging beyond their city-state toward all other humans as co-belonging. In modern Western philosophy Immanuel Kant in *To Perpetual Peace* extends cosmopolitan belonging to all citizens of the world (Kant and Humphrey 2003). However, his philosophy has been critiqued for not extending to non-citizen humans such as refugees. Immanuel Levinas has extended responsibility in responses to the other, and Jacques Derrida in *Politics of Friendship* and elsewhere has proposed hospitality as a basic (cosmopolitan) requirement (Hand 2001, Derrida 1994). In contrast to these moral philosophies of cosmopolitanism, Richard Eaton emphasized the lived cosmopolitanism of the Islamic, Persian-speaking world between the Balkans and Bengal as the Persian Cosmopolis (Eaton 2015). Seema Alavi focuses on "the age of Empire" to "show how the cultural universe of Muslims was actually shaped," and how "British, Ottoman, and imperial networks encouraged the creation of a pan-Islamic global public sphere." She calls this "the new Muslim cosmopolis" (Alavi 2015: x). Ghalib's cosmopolitanism in *Chiragh-e-Dair* and elsewhere in his poetry, prose writings, and life, is known to be consistent with all these different definitions and meanings of cosmopolitanism given above. As a citizen of Delhi he hobnobs with Mughal and British elite, his friends include Muslims such as Fazl-ul-haq Khairabadi, Christians such as the Delhi Resident William Fraser (who was possibly killed because he was going to rule in Ghalib's favour over his 'pension' case), and Hindus such as Hargopal Tufta, who was also Ghalib's disciple. Ghalib is greatly appreciative of the diverse ritual and spirituality of Banaras, seeks to pitch and valorise it in the Persian cosmopolis by writing on it in Persian, and he is at ease there as earlier in Delhi and later in Calcutta.

[5] Ideas of laïcité are born following the French Revolution of 1789. They continue to develop and get more established. Secularism had already begun to develop from the French Third Republic of 1870. Laity and later laïcité after 1789 came to denote the separation of religion from the state. From the end of 19th century laïcité came to denote the separation of state from religion in other catholic countries as well. The Mughal pluralistic state in contrast patronised different religions, and maintained law in

Religiosity and spiritualism suffuse Ghalib's perception and representation of Banaras, yet they are not partisan, and retain a cosmopolitan and pluralistic purchase.

This essay close reads Ghalib's *masnavi Chiragh-e-Dair* in conjunction with its historical context to elucidate Ghalib's ascription of a pluralistic religious urbanity to Banaras. I begin by introducing Ghalib and then contextualizing the historical conditions of the writing of *Temple Lamp*. Next, I place *Temple Lamp* in the longer tradition of Persian poetry writing on the city, the *shahr-ashob* tradition, particularly on the South-Asian city, as well as other writings, and recent slants of scholarship on Banaras. This helps to shed light on the unique characteristics of the poem, as I then give the detailed close reading of the poem. I illustrate that Ghalib's Poetic Banaras is 1. real and metaphorical, 2. diverse, pluralistic, and cosmopolitan, 3. spiritual, 4. sensuous and physical, 5. a garden/forest city, natural and ecologically sensitive 6. devotional and transcendental, and 7. a locus of cosmopolitan belonging.

On Mirza Ghalib: The Classical-Modern Poet of Urdu and Persian

Mirza Ghalib was born in Agra of Turkic ancestry, of which he was proud throughout his life. While his father and uncle had fought for the British under Commander Lake against the Marathas, for which Ghalib's family had been granted an estate, Ghalib had moved to Delhi at a young age, where he sought patronage as a poet at the Mughal Court, which was itself under the tutelage of the Delhi Residency of the East India Company. At Delhi, Ghalib managed to establish himself gradually as a leading light among the galaxy of poets gathered there, such as the Royal Tutor to the King, Sheikh Ibrahim Zauq (1790–1854) (whom Ghalib replaced as Royal Tutor upon the former's death), Momin Khan Momin (1800–1852), Mufti Sadruddin Aazurdah (1804–1868), Imaam Bakhsh Sehbaai (c.1806–1857), Nawab Mustafa Khan Shefta (1809–1869), and Dagh Dehlavi (1831–1905).

Ghalib is, arguably, the greatest poet to have written in Urdu. In early 19th-century North India, he was writing at a transitional moment when the Mughal regime that had sustained Ghalib's Indo-Persian poetic culture was dying, and the new colonial power of the British was ascendant. This reached its climax in his later life as he witnessed the 1857 revolt and the post-mutiny retributions by the British, which took away his brother (who was killed), his editor-friend, Fazl-ul-Haq Khairabadi (who was imprisoned at the Andamans, where he died), his king, Bahadurshah Zafar II (who was exiled to Rangoon, where he died), most of the court and all Mughal Princes (who were killed), and many other friends and family, who either migrated or died. In his poetry, Ghalib has been seen to have been "the last of the classicists and the first of the modernists" in the Urdu tradition (Narang xix). Ghalib's first biographer and protégé, Altaf Husain Hali (1837–1914), had argued that Persian poetry and prose in India saw its final heyday with Ghalib (Hali 1897).

Ghalib wrote twice the amount in Persian as compared to his Urdu writings, but it is due to the gradual replacement of Persian by English (and Hindi) as the language of the federal state in India that Ghalib's Urdu poetry and prose received most attention, as Persian as a spoken or even read language had largely died in South Asia. However, it is especially Ghalib's Persian writings that sought to interact with the larger world or the Persian Cosmopolis that stretched from the Balkans to Bengal (Eaton 2015). Even the diary that Ghalib wrote as an eyewitness account of 1857, *Dastanbuy*, that he also had printed and bound as a gilded copy and sent to Queen Victoria, was written in Persian, since Persian was still the court language. This account

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arbitration with multiple religious laws and actively as permissively inclusive. Thus, it is possible and viable to compare these different but synchronous views and socio-legal orders of multi-religious coexistence in different societies. Moreover, Ghalib is born in 1797 making his life and the evolution of laïcité roughly contemporaneous as well.

was largely in favour of the British, as opposed to his private condemnation of the violence meted out by them to the locals, which he expressed in his various letters to friends, mainly in Urdu.

Ghalib's Persian *Masnavi* on Banaras: *Chiragh-e-Dair*, and its Context

Ghalib wrote the Persian *masnavi Chiragh-e-Dair* on Banaras well before the violence of 1857, in c. 1826–1827. From 1826 to 1829, he undertook the return journey from Delhi to Calcutta (now Kolkata), to petition the British for the reinstatement of the correct amount of the pension that was due to his brother and him in lieu of the estate endowed to his uncle, for his services in the British army, that was now managed by a distant relative. Ghalib was in debt for most of his life and was desperate for the increased allowance. While he had not intended to stop for long in Banaras, Ghalib ended up spending over a month there and recreated the city that he beheld upon arrival in this magnificent *masnavi*.

Ghalib felt immense joy upon reaching Banaras at the end of a tortuous short stay in *Ilahabad* (now Prayagraj) where he had taken ill and had been forced to flee the city because of the fans and followers of Qateel, a rival poet. He described at length in a letter written to his friend, the Sadr-e-Amin or the civil magistrate of Banda, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, a notable poet of his time, the misery he experienced in *Ilahabad* and the joys he discovered in Banaras once he reached it after the boat ride from the former to the latter, quoted in the Introduction to *Temple Lamp* (Bilal 2022: xxvii–xxix). *Chiragh-e-Dair* subsequently takes a largely adulatory view of the city of Banaras, valorising it in terms of the Persian Cosmopolis. Ghalib employed the *hazaf musaddas mahzuf bahr* (metre) in *Chiragh-e-Dair* and the upbeat and melodious metre, pleasant to the ear, was appropriate for the immense happiness, joy, admiration, and fondness that Ghalib felt for Banaras. It served as the perfect vehicle for his poetic paean to the city.

Persian (and subsequently Rekhta/ Hindavi/ Urdu) *masnavi*s have had a long tradition of focusing on the city and its various attributes in the subgenre of the *shahr-ashob*, which can be variously translated as the 'tumult' or the 'lament of the city'. As has been well explained by Sunil Sharma, among others, the *shahr-ashob* tradition in its early phases praised the vivacity of the city, celebrated it, and catalogued its people by their various professions and trades, with a focus on the beauty of the young men (Sharma 2004). This is well evident in the South-Asian context in the famous Rekhta *masnavi* by Wali Muhammad Wali on Surat. In its later articulations, by the 18th century, especially in poems by Delhi poets, such as Mir Taqi Mir and Mirza Muhammad Rafi Sauda, the *shahr-ashob* tradition showed greater elements of lament for the city following Delhi's plunder by Ahmed Shah Abdali and Nadir Shah (Sharma 2004: 77, Petievich 1990: 99). This only gets accentuated after the losses of the revolt of 1857 and the British mutiny-retributions of 1857–58, incorporating the *marsiya* tradition of collective mourning into the *shahr ashob*. This came to include a mourning for buildings and monuments as opposed to the people of the city (Tignol 2017). Further down the line, the festive vignette develops as genre that developed other dimensions of the *shahr ashob*, but all of this followed the 1857 revolt (Dubrow 2018: 29–30). Ghalib's *Chiragh-e-Dair*, which precedes the revolt by a good 30-odd years though, represents Banaras by celebrating it. Yet, it neither presents us with a catalogue of the city's professional people, as other earlier authors of this genre had done such as Afrin on Banaras (discussed below) or Wali on Surat, nor does it lament its decline like the Delhi poets. Instead, Ghalib focusses on larger thematic details, such as spirituality. The work therefore exceeds the *shahr-ashob* genre, providing a quite unique *masnavi* on a city, even as the work evokes the broader genre.

Close Reading *Chiragh-e-Dair* and its Representation of Banaras as a Real and Metaphorical Garden City

KUPULDHARA TULAO, BENARES
Drawn on Stone by L. Haghe from Sketch by James Prinsep Esqr.

Image 10.1: [Kupuldhara Tulao, Benares Drawn on Stone by L. Haghe from Sketch by James Prinsep Esqr]

Temple Lamp may be understood to be comprised of four sections. The first section is indeed a lament, first expressing the restlessness of Ghalib's heart, possibly at having left his beloved city of residence, Delhi. It continues as a complaint or lament against Ghalib's Delhi friends for having forgotten him (verses 1–19). In the next section, the longest of the poem (verses 20–81), Ghalib praises Banaras for its spiritual and transcendental qualities, the beauty of its people and monuments, the mighty cleansing river Ganga, its salubrious climate, and verdant flora. In the third section (verses 82–102), Ghalib expresses guilt at having enjoyed Banaras while abandoning his family and expresses a desire to break his bonds to the city. The final section (verses 103–108), is a Sufi dialogue that Ghalib has with himself on *fanā* or self-annihilation to care for others and be one with God, and appears to quit Banaras, "extinguish(ing) the rest" (verse 108) (Ghalib 2022: 110). Section two is, therefore, the key section that is analysed in this paper. Ghalib renders Banaras as a paradisical, garden or forest city here. Thus, the openings verses of this section, 20 and 21, reveal (Ghalib 2022: 22–23):

> *sipas dar lālah zāre jā tawāñ kard*
> *watan rā dāgh-e-istighna tawāñ kard*
> *bakhātir dāram ainak gul zamīne*
> *bahār āīñ sawād-e-dil nashīne*

> One can, thus, make place
> in a garden of Tulips.

and turn the home-city
into the mark of renunciation.

I welcome now
a flowering land,

spring settles here
on the horizon of the heart.

BENARES FROM THE MUNDAKINEE TULAO
Drawn on Stone by J.D. Harding from a Sketch by James Prinsep Esqr. Printed by C. Hullmandel
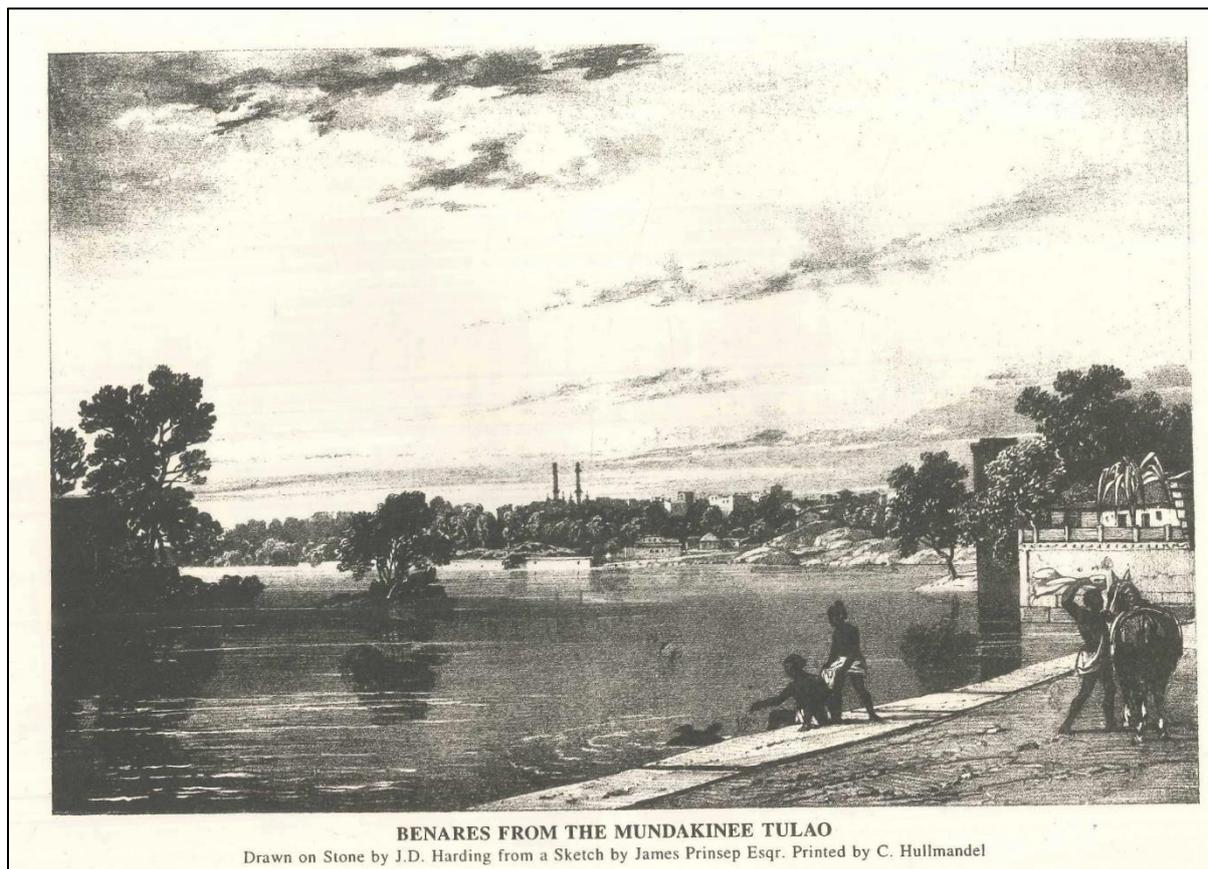
Image 10.2: [Benares from the Mundakinee tulao; drawn on stone by J. D. Harding from a sketch by James Prinsep Esqr. [Originally] printed by C. Hullmandel]

Representing Banaras as "a garden of tulips" where "spring settles" is at one level metaphorical and in keeping with the *masnavi* and *shahr-ashob* traditions in praising the city. However, much of this was also real in the case of Banaras, as Ghalib experienced it upon his arrival at the city. Banaras in 1826 was a city with stability and peace, ruled by the vassal king, Raja Udit Narain Singh, who ruled under the aegis of the supreme authority in the land, the British East India Company. With the decline of Mughal power in the previous century, it was the Marathas who had patronized the construction of various ghats on the Ganga at Banaras. But the city retained its green and leafy nature until the early 19th Century. The thick green cover of the Banaras of the early 19th century, in stark contrast to today's cluttered city, is evident from James Prinsep's *Benares Illustrated*, which was first published in 1833 from sketches Prinsep made during his posting in Banaras in the 1820s, probably just a couple of years before Ghalib's arrival. I reproduce but two of the prints here, for illustrative purposes (Prinsep 1996). As one can see in these images, Banaras upon Ghalib's arrival would have been a green haven. Ghalib also informed his friend, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan, of his quick recovery from illness upon arrival in Banaras in a letter (Bilal 2022: xxviii-xix):

> On Thursday, a heavenly, life-affirming breeze arose from the east that energized me and refreshed my soul. The miracle of this breeze cleared the haze I was enveloped in and lifted my spirits like victory banners. The waves of the cool breeze swept away all weakness from my body. What can I say about the city of Banaras!... It would be proper to call it heaven on earth because of the foliage and flowers that are in bloom in their full glory. Its breeze blows life into dead bodies. Its every fleck of dust has the qualities to pull thorns and needles away like magnets from the feet of travellers.

Moreover, the city was filled with ponds and rivulets such as the ones shown above, the second of which was drained not many years after Ghalib had left the city. Today, this second pond, Mundakinee Tulao, is a square and a *bazar* called Maidagin, as the city of Banaras is a crowded concrete jungle. However, Ghalib's Banaras was green and well-watered. Thus, when in 1826–27, Ghalib writes in verse 27: *bayābāñ-dar-bayābāñ lālah-zārash/ gulistāñ dar gulistañ nau-bahārash*, or "Its forest after forest/ is filled with beds of tulips,/ its garden after garden/ blooms with perpetual spring" (Ghalib 2022, 71), Ghalib is not just following Persianate convention in describing a verdant city, but also representing what his eyes beheld. Going further, Ghalib often calls Banaras 'paradise', such as in verse 25: *ta'ālallah banāras chashm-e-bad dūr/ bahisht-e-khurram-o-firdaus-e-ma'mūr*, or "May God keep Banaras/ from the evil eye,// it is heavenly bliss,/ paradise established" (Ghalib 2022, 25). The term paradise here originates from the Avestan or Old Persian *pairidaēza* meaning 'enclosure, park' (Oxford English Dictionary) that originally refers to the royal park or orchard of the king (Meisami 1985: 231). Thus, to call Banaras paradise was both Persianate convention, but also a response to the verdant garden-like quality of the holy city, proving both the real and metaphorical nature of the garden city seen in Mirza Ghalib's depiction of Banaras in *Chiragh-e-Dair*.

The Cosmopolitanism of *Chiragh-e-Dair*: In Relation to Shahr-Ashob Tradition and Other Writing on the City

Ghalib, a Muslim of Turkic ancestry, wrote the *masnavi Chiragh-e-Dair* in praise of the holiness and spirituality of Banaras in 108 verses. 108 is the number of beads in the Hindu rosary *rudraksha*, and has various other significances in Indic traditions (for details see Bilal 2022: xlviii). We know that Ghalib had written more verses on Banaras that he did not include in the published poem, but included in letters he wrote to friends.[6] Keeping the number limited to 108 was a clear act of homage to the sacred number. Yet, Ghalib feels this was not simply the Kaaba of Hindus, but the Kaaba of the country of Hindustan that was open to all, including himself. The allusion to the Kaaba, moreover, makes a shared claim to the divinity of the Kaaba at Mecca and at Banaras, introducing a pluralistic approach to religion.[7] The first hemistich of the verse following the 'Kaaba' verse, verse 48, makes a claim that would elsewhere be sacrilegious to orthodox monotheistic Islam: *butānash rā hayūlā sholā-e-tūr* or "The idolatrous beauties (of Banaras) are made of the fire of Tur". Mount 'Tur' or Sinai from the *Bible*, connects Hebraic divinity with the Hindu, presenting a pluralistic approach to theism in the holiness of Banaras. Divinity for Ghalib is, therefore, transcendental of any one expression of formal religion. He creates an organic hybrid of different religion influences in his life as a cosmopolitan Turkic-Indian.

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[6] For example, refer to verse in the 'Introduction' (Bilal 2022: lxviii), also quoted later in this essay.

[7] 'Divinity' is used in this paper as a noun to imply: "the state or quality of being divine" (Oxford English Dictionary). This can be further understood as sacred, transcendental, creational power. It does not refer to God as defined by a single religion, but instead to the sacred force that pluralists and cosmopolitans may see apparent or at least acceptable in different religions.

Ghalib also brings out the cosmopolitan character of Banaras through the above analogy as well as other comparisons to 'world' cities from the Persian Cosmopolis. Banaras's synonym Kashi lends itself to an easy comparison with the Persian city of Kashan, for example, as Ghalib "collapses spiritual, poetic, and cultural differences between Hindustan and Iran" (Bilal 2022: lxiii) in verse 86: *junūnat gar ba-nafs-e-khud tamāmast/ ze-kāshī tābeh kāshāñ nīm gāmast*, or "When your madness reaches/ the perfect frenzy,// Kashan from Kashi/ is just a half-step journey" (Ghalib 88). Elsewhere, in verses 26 and 70, he compares Banaras to China, and finds Banaras superior. Consider verse 26, for example: *banāras rā kase guftā ke chīn ast/ hanūz az gang chīnash bar jabīn ast*, or "Someone once compared the beauty/ of Banaras to China,// and since that day its brow is wrinkled/ with the bend of the Ganga" (Ghalib 28). The verse puns on *Chīn* which means both China and a 'frown' in Persian. Even Delhi, the erstwhile capital of Hindostan, is said to come pay its homage to Banaras in verse 22: *keh mī āyad be-da'wa gāh-e-lāfash/ jahānābad az bahr-e-tawāfash*, or "For this (city) has such pride/ of place// that even Delhi comes/ to circle around it" (Ghalib 24). Banaras is therefore at par with the best of the cities of the Persian Cosmopolis and the Silk Route, going as far as the hyperbole to say the Mughal capital Delhi pays it homage. Not only is Banaras absorbent of so many different traditions, its various qualities make it worthy of comparison with any of the best cities of the (Persianate) fabled cities of the world.

Syed Akbar Hyder has discussed the cosmopolitanism of *Chiragh-e-Dair*, which he calls *The Temple's Lamp*, to point out how critics have read Ghalib according to their own predilections, where Ghalib's cosmopolitanism has been completely ignored. He writes, "I am drawn to this poem for the synergy of cosmopolitanism that is harnessed in it. By cosmopolitanism, I mean a mode of existence in which difference is not only accommodated or tolerated but also cherished and fostered" (Hyder 2006, 463). Thus, not only is Banaras comparable to cities of many different regions and cultures, and cosmopolitan, as shown above, but, as Hyder argues, it is cosmopolitan in its pluralism and ecumenism. Banaras, ruled by a Hindu king, and considered the holiest of Hindu cities today, was nonetheless inhabited since many centuries by Muslims numbering over a quarter of the population. James Prinsep had conducted a survey of Banaras, soon after Ghalib's visit, in 1828–29, where he found 121,446 Hindus and 31,248 Muslims in the city (Prinsep 1996: 14).[8] In fact, Sheikh Ali Hazin was a prominent Persian poet who came to Banaras from Iran c. 1750 and lies buried there, with his shrine visited today by many devotees of different backgrounds. He praised Banaras, thus: *az banāras na rawam ma'abad-e-'aam ast īñjā/ har brahman-e-pisar-e-lachhman-o-rām ast īñjā*, or "I will not leave Banaras for it is holy everywhere,/Every Brahman here is a son of Lachhman or Ram (Bilal 2022: xxxiv)." Hazin, therefore, preceded Ghalib as a Muslim in praise of the Hindu religiosity of Banaras. His presence also shows the city's international cosmopolitanism, besides its religious ecumenism. The Buddha had also visited Banaras as it was already a great centre of learning, and delivered his first sermon only about 10 kilometres away at Sarnath. Banaras was also home to the anti-caste poet-saints, Kabir (fl. 15th century) and Ravidas (fl. 15th–16th centuries). Kabir appealed to both Hindus and Muslims, often from lower castes and backward classes, especially the strong weaving community of Banaras that Kabir himself is said to have come from, as he advocated the quest of a formless divinity within and without. Ravidas, who came from the leather tanners caste, *chamar*, has many devotees among Sikhs and lower caste Hindus. Kabir math and Ravidas temple in Banaras continue to be important centres today for a very diverse set of devotees. Clearly, the city has been a centre of a diverse

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[8] The 2011 Census of India, the last official census, records the demographics of Banaras as follows: Hindus: 840,280 (70.11 per cent) and Muslims: 345,461 (28.82 per cent).

set of religious traditions, apart from Shaivite and Vaishnavite Hinduism, exemplifying the millennia-old pluralism.

Yet, despite the city's multi-religious, pluralistic, and cosmopolitan composition, Banaras is often painted as a Hindu city in contemporary popular media discourse. In fact, Muslims particularly are seen as aggressors who destroyed some of the city's temples, and much of the city is sought to be described or interpreted through a discourse focusing on Sanskrit and solely Hindu sources. This can also be seen in colonial sources such as Prinsep's views on Banaras (Prinsep 1996). As Madhuri Desai has argued, "colonial representations of the city simultaneously rendered it static and Hindu" (Desai 2003: 29), thus making such colonial-scholarly writing on Banaras an Orientalist discourse in a true Saidian sense that keeps knowledge about the colony (and post-colony) static. Diana L. Eck's most popular book on Banaras may also be argued to follow a similar approach, where it focusses almost solely on Hinduism and goes back to myths to explain the holy city, while it largely ignores the medieval and early-modern agents and multiple religious influences that shaped modern Banaras (Eck 2015). Her later important work on the sacred geography of India also focuses primarily on Hinduism, although it brings in conversations with other religions such as Islam and Sikhism and corrects the preponderance of the first to an extent (Eck 2012).[9]

In contrast, Ghalib's *masnavi* is all the more resplendent for giving us a testament to the city's cosmopolitan culture. On the other hand, we have another Persian *masnavi* on Banaras, *Kashi Istut*, by Matan Lal Afrin, a Kayastha Hindu from Allahabad, written in 1778-79. While some of *Kashi Istut*'s ways of praising Banaras are similar to *Temple Lamp*'s, the narratorial positioning is quite different. This appears to have to do with the locations and identities of the two poets, Ghalib and Afrin, but probably also to do with their individual temperament. As Kinra has shown, Brahmin and other upper-caste Hindus, often working as *munshi*s or clerks in Sultanate and Mughal courts in India, had to engage in complex ways with the Islamicate tradition of Persian poetry, where idolatry was viewed as blasphemous but also as seductive and desirable (Kinra 2015: 258–285). Pello builds on this in his essay on *Kashi Istut* to clarify how Afrin opens the poem by writing in 'self-humiliation' at not knowing great Persian as a Hindu: "I [am] a Hindu secretary with dark beliefs/ who knows just a few words of Persian," (Pello 2020: 129). I would like to posit that there is some disingenuity on Afrin's part here, which is in continuation with the assumed humility of many Persian writers of the period, but acquires a double (religious) irony in Afrin's case as he claims to be an inferior Persian writer on account of his religion, but soon claims superiority for Hinduism. Moreover, Afrin soon exploits the traditional Persian ambiguity and irony in its poetic relations to idolatry to present Banaras as a gallery of images, describing its various communities including the Brahmins at length in the *shahr-ashob* tradition.

By the end, Afrin has begun to claim the superiority and rightness of Hinduism, such as in claiming the primacy of the Hindu mala's 108 over the 100-bead Muslim rosary, *the tasbīh*, and exploiting the Arabic *abjad* system to show that 108 is the numeric value of *haq* or Truth (8 for *hā'* + 100 for *qāf*, the letter representing the q sound), and so tries to prove that 108 is superior to 100 both numerically and in value. While making similar analogies and using similes comparable to Ghalib's, Afrin proceeds in a different mode from the former, concluding by ascribing a superiority to Banaras and its Hindu religiosity over Islam and the rest. Ghalib, instead, simply finds the same divinity here too, with a much deeper pluralistic and cosmopolitan attitude, and is not bothered by competitive religiosity. *Chiragh-e-Dair* itself

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[9] In more recent times, there has been some sensitive scholarship on the Muslim weaver community of Banaras by social scientists and historians such as Philippa Williams (Williams 2015) and Nita Kumar (Kumar 2017). In literature, Christopher R Lee has studied 20th-century Urdu poetry by two Muslim poets of Banaras (Lee 2012), while others have also examined Ghalib's *masnavi Chiragh-e-Dair*.

therefore is a far-more cosmopolitan poem on Banaras than its predecessor *Kashi Istut*, taking a more pluralistic view of Banaras's greatness without running down any other.

Ghalib had, thus, written the Persian Qata or four-line poem elsewhere (Bilal 2022: lxii)::

> *masanj shaukat-e-'urfi keh būd shirāzī*
> *mashū asīr-e-zulālī keh būd khwansārī*
> *ba-somnāt-e-khayālam dar āī tā bīnī*
> *rawan faroz bar dūsh-hāe zunnārī*

> Do not be awed by Urfi even if he is from Shiraz,
> Don't be taken by Zulali though he comes from Khwansar,
> Come into the Somnath of my imagination and see:
> Soul-stirring forms adorned with the janéu on my shoulders.

Firstly, here too, now with Somnath, we see Ghalib's desire to put India on the Persian Cosmopolitan map and to rank important centres such as Somnath as high as any Persian city. Furthermore, Ghalib was proud of the Somnath (temple) of his imagination, while also affirming his monotheistic beliefs even in *Temple Lamp* as elsewhere in his Urdu poetry. Both could exist simultaneously for him. By contrast, Afrin concludes his poem: "An idol made of the stone of Moses, a Sinai of meaning,/from whose blackness appears the light of meaning//…// O heart, if you wish to visit the Ka'aba/kiss **this** black stone: **this** is the perfect *hajj*" (Pello 2020: 142) (my emphases). Clearly Banaras is the perfect Haj and pilgrimage for Afrin, superior to Mecca or anywhere else. In contrast, to Ghalib, Banaras carries the same divinity, it is 'the Kaaba of Hindostan' even as there may be another Kaaba elsewhere. Ghalib appears to see the same divinity operative at these major centres of devotion, whereas Afrin appears to set out to establish a more chauvinistic viewpoint.

Ghalib is far more generous to the 'other' in his work, immersing himself in the process of writing this poem and, in doing so, undertaking a kind of conversion. The writing of the Hinduism, spirituality, and devotion of Banaras in the Banaras poem by a Muslim author maybe considered an act of translation, where the translation itself begins to amount to conversion/immersion (especially in the Ganga, as is shown below). This is described in a letter Ghalib wrote Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan that acts as a paratext to *Temple Lamp* (Bilal 2022: lxiv):

> Such an important matter is at hand that if the heart wasn't to be wounded by enemies and foes, I would have given up my religion. I would have broken the rosary and painted a tilak (on my forehead). I would have worn a janéu and sat for so long at the banks of the Ganga that all filth would have been washed off me and I would have joined the river like a drop.

The poet Ghalib clearly chooses a pluralistic piety where he wishes to adopt ritual as it pleases him in Banaras.

The Piety of Banaras

By writing his *masnavi* in Persian on Banaras, Ghalib is putting forth the views of a Muslim poet of Turkic ancestry attached to the Delhi court on a city of multifarious (Hindu and other) holiness and presents them with a cosmopolitan and pluralistic perspective to the whole of the Persosphere. Ghalib further ignores the convention of the *shahr-Ashob* tradition to list professional communities and describe them in detail, unlike Afrin on Banaras or Wali on Surat. Instead, Ghalib focuses on the spirituality of Banaras while ignoring any detailed catalogue of ritual. Thus, embracing a sense of visceral experience. Ghalib (verse 33, 34, 36 respectively)

may thus have written the following verses while looking at the everyday piety of its citizens and pilgrims or gazing upon the burning cremation pyres of Banaras (Ghalib 2022: 35, 36, 37):

> *zahe āsūdgī bakhsh-e-rawānhā*
> *ke dāgh-e-chashm mī shūyad ze jānhā*
> All praise to this city
> that grants contentment to souls,
>
> it removes the evil eye,
> makes whole.
> *shagufte nīst az āb-o-hawāyash*
> *ke tanhā jāñ shawad andar fazāyash*
> It is no wonder
> that from its climate,
> in its ambience,
> one should become pure soul.
>
> *hamah jānhāe be-tan kun tamāshā*
> *nadārad āb-o-khāk īñ jalwah hāshā*
> Behold: the tamasha
> of these souls without bodies,
> their spectacle bears no concern
> with water or dust.

It is as if Ghalib encountered and thus represents pure souls in Banaras, without feeling the impediments of creed, identity, or overt ritual, to behold and showcase the human soul itself. Spirituality here is framed as *moksha*, the ultimate release of souls from the cycle of recreation or metempsychosis, referencing various Indic traditions including various ideas of Hinduism as well as the Buddhist and Jain: *ke harkas kāndarāñ gulshan bimīrad/digar paiwand-e-jismān-e-nagīrad* (verse 31) or "All captive souls that quit their prisons/from this garden//never again find union/with their bodies", and *chaman sarmāya-e-ummīd gardad/ba-murdan zindā-e-jāvīd gardad* (verse 32) or "The garden becomes/the wealth of their hopes (of *moksha*),// The dead (from here)/are eternally alive" (Ghalib 33–34). Banaras is also, thus, a place of redemption for the poet. Even as the concepts remain far from orthodox Islam, Ghalib is able to appreciate them with nuance.

The Body of the City: Sensual and Vivacious Banaras

In fact, going beyond spirituality into Persian convention and poetic universe but also referring to Brahminical attire, Ghalib draws imagery for the city in his poem through the *zunnar*, or the sacred thread, which in the Persian tradition has pre-Islamic, probably Zoroastrian, origins: *bah-taslīm-e-hawā-e-āñ-chaman-zār/ zemauj-e-gul-bahārāñ bastah zunnār* (verse 43), or "Bowing in respect to the very air/ of this garden (that is Banaras),// the spring breeze wears/ a janéu made of flowers" (Ghalib 45).[10] This beautiful image alerts us to Ghalib's liberality in identifying and transposing beauty from the piety of the people to their city. This appreciation of the beauty of the city and its people further extends to greatly sensual bodily images as well. Here is Ghalib admiring many of the bodies (possibly) bathing or taking a ritual dip in the Ganga, in the sequence of verses 58–62 (Ghalib 60–64):

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[10] While I have translated *zunnar* as *janéu* in the Indian edition, for an Indian audience that is quite familiar with the Sanskrit-originated word for the Hindu sacred thread, the Persian word *zunnar* for the sacred thread straddles more traditions.

qayāmat-qāmatāñ mizhgāñ dar āz āñ/ ze mizhgāñ bar saf-e-dil nezah-bāzāñ// ba tan sarmāyah-e-afzāish-e-dil/sarāpā muzhdah-e-āsāish-e-dil// ba-mastī mauj rā farmūda ārām/ze-naghzī āb rā bakhshīda añdām// fatādah shorish-e dar qālib-e-āb/ ze māhī şad dilash dar-sīnah betāb// ze-bas arz-e-tamannā mī kunad gang/ze-mauj āghosh-hā wāmī kunad gang

Their height, their eyelashes/ will cause (our) doom.// these lashes cut,/ they spear the frontlines of the heart.// In body, the capital/ of the heart's gladdening,// from head to toe—/relief for the heart.// Their joy stuns the waves/ (of the Ganga) to stillness.// their newness grants/ shape to the body of water.// Embodied by water,/ they cause a storm in the river,// a hundred fish hearts/ beat in the chest (of the lover).// (As they step into it),/ the Ganga reveals its desires;// each wave rises,/ opening its arms in embrace.

Unlike the traditional *shahr-ashob*'s descriptions of each class of people and, most often, the bodies of men, Ghalib is describing the beauty of the bodies of Banaras without discrimination, and in idealized and celebratory terms.

The early Ghalib critic, Malik Ram has argued for the possibility of Ghalib having a paramour or object of admiration during his short sojourn in Banaras (Firaqi 2012: 75). This, it is argued, provides a personal reason for Ghalib's lush descriptions of beloved bodies in the poem. Ram cited Ghalib's following Persian verse (not included in *Chiragh-e-Dair* by Ghalib, but available through a letter to a friend) as evidence (Bilal 2022: lxviii):

kāsh kāñ but-e-kāshī dar pazer dam
Ghālib bandah tawām goyam, gavīdam, zanāz, ārī.
I wish that idol of Banaras would accept Ghalib,
I would say I am your slave, and they'd respond proudly, yes!

Banaras as *Watan*, Hospitable Home, Locus of Belonging

While we cannot verify such academic conjecture, we know from Ghalib's extension of his stay for a month in Banaras, and his rich descriptions in *Temple Lamp,* that he relished the hospitality he received in Banaras, even as there is no evidence that he visited anyone of note, and rented accommodations from an old woman (Mahuli 2010: 16). Thus, he comes to see Banaras as an alternative abode or *watan*, after Delhi. *Watan* has the multiple meanings of "native country, country, home, abode, residence, dwelling" (Platts 1884). Subsequently, Ghalib asserts to making a perfect home in Banaras in verses 20–21, after lamenting how his Delhi friends' have forgotten him: *sipas dar lālah zāre jā tawāñ kard/ watan rā dāgh-e-istighna tawāñ kard// bakhātir dāram ainak gul zamīne/ bahār āīñ sawād-e-dil nashīne* or "One can, thus, make place/ in a garden of Tulips,// and turn the home-city/ into the mark of renunciation// I welcome now/a flowering land,// spring settles here/on the horizon of the heart" (Ghalib 22–23). This also juxtaposes exceptionally well with the first section of the poem, where Ghalib expressed his restlessness, pain at having had to leave Delhi and his Delhi friends, who it seems to him, have already forgotten him.

This record of the natural and spiritual hospitality of Banaras as *watan*, a place of cosmopolitan belonging, in early 19th-century at a time of turmoil in the Persian Cosmopolis with the emergence of Empire is an interesting manoeuvre by Ghalib. It signals the cosmopolitan adaptability of this cultivated man, one can assume as a type of Persianate North-Indian elite of the time, but also the dynamic prevalent in the subcontinent and its cities. Religion clearly does not define belonging, as is evidenced from the Muslim Ghalib moving from the Muslim-ruled Delhi to Hindu-ruled Banaras. Belonging is also not to a nation-state (that is yet to fully

form in its European, colonial state in South-Asia) in early 19th century, but to community and to cities. Symptomatic of this, *watan* can be used by Urdu speakers till date to ask each other of their native town or village. Ghalib had stated his dismay at being forgotten by his friends,
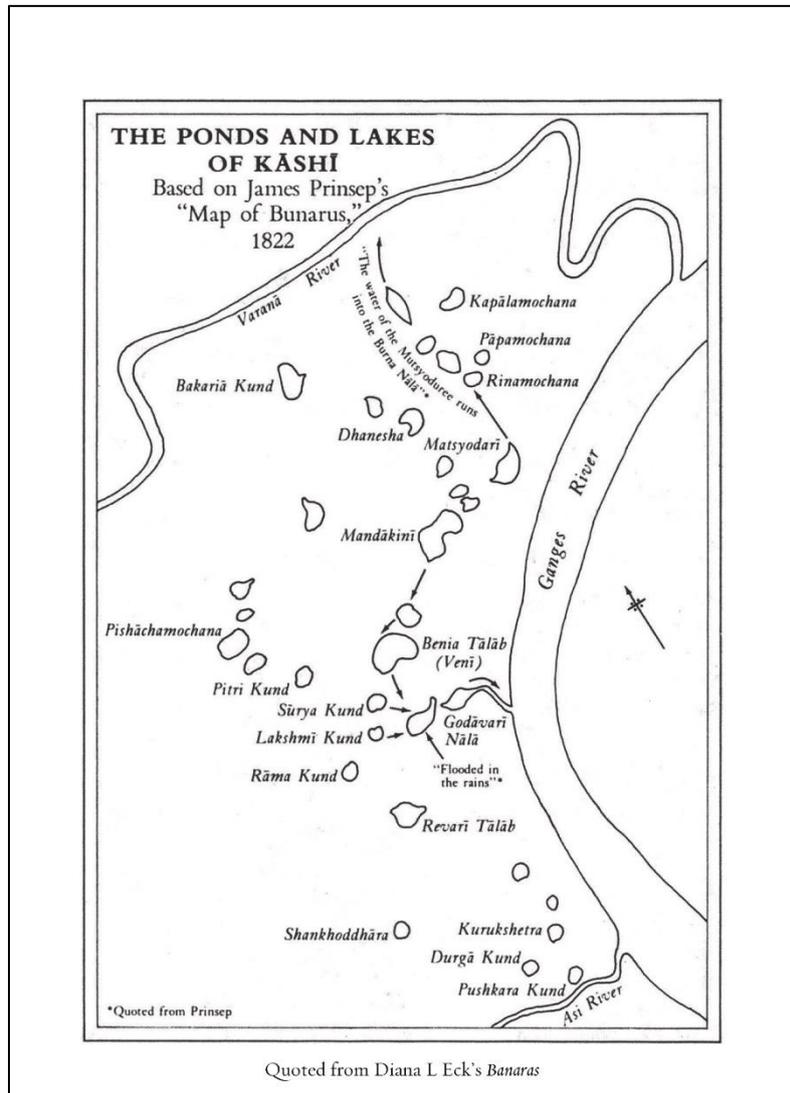
the citizen of Delhi, in verse 11: *kas az ahl-e-watan ghamkhār-e-man nīst/ marā dar dahr pindāre watan nīst* or "not one of my fellow citizens/ partakes in my pain,// it is as if I had no country/ in the whole world" (Ghalib 2022, 13). *Watan* here is translated as 'country' in the verse, but it can just easily be 'home', 'residence' or 'abode', as shown above, and in fact extends to the 'city' here. This strain continues in the next verse 12, in which he beseeches the beloved three lords of his *watan*, his friends, whom Ghalib considers the light of his 'nine-garden city', Delhi, who he feels have forgotten him. This loss of one cosmopolitan *watan* is resolved by finding another in Banaras as quoted above in verses 20–21. The furthest extents of Banaras's hospitality are often natural, as suggested earlier in this paper in the section on the importance of gardens in *Chiragh-e-Dair*. This natural

THE PONDS AND LAKES OF KĀSHĪ
Based on James Prinsep's "Map of Bunarus," 1822

Quoted from Diana L Eck's *Banaras*

quality is extended to remarkable images of the river, and may be read today as providing an important valorisation of the ecology of 19th-century Banaras. Apart from his sketches, Prinsep also gave us a map of the Banaras city of his time which shows us all the water bodies of Banaras from that time that have since been drained, whose further simplified version by Eck is useful here (Eck 2015):

The Ganga is a teeming river, unhindered at that time by any major dam, and receives significant description in Ghalib's verses. The city and the river are often personified as a beloved woman adequately reflected in the perfect foil/ mirror that is the river: *magar goī banāras shāhide hast/ze-gangash subh-o-shām āīnā dar dast* (verse 64) or "Or one could behold Banaras,/ perhaps, as the beauty// who preens from dawn to dusk/ with the Ganga as a mirror in their hand" (Ghalib 66). *Ba-gangash 'aks tā partau fagan shud/banāras khud nazīr kheshtan*" (verse 68) or "with its image reflected/ in the Ganga, // Banaras is its own /peerless second" (Ghalib 70). *Chū dar āīnā-e-ābash namūdañd gazañd-e-chashm-e-zakhm az we rabūdañd* (verse 69) or "When it revealed its face/in the mirror of water, // the ritual was completed, / the evil eye avoided" (Ghalib 71). This profusion of water and green imagery takes almost a Romantic joy in nature and reads well today as environment affirmative poetry.

The last reference, to local ritual, again points to Ghalib's pluralistic outlook, which suffuses the whole poem.

Conclusion

Ghalib's *Chiragh-e-Dair* (1827) paints a holistic picture of early 19th-century Banaras through his pluralistic vision of it as a cosmopolitan city with deep spirituality and cleansing natural environs. It is also a city of multitudes of sensuality combined with bodily redemption, with an emphasis on the powerful river. Ghalib is himself seduced in flesh and spirit, and moved to linguistic creativity by the city, as not only is he swayed to write the poem, but, as he says elsewhere in a letter to Miyandad Khan Saiyyid, he wishes to belong here: "Banaras is beyond words. Such cities are seldom created. I happened to be there at the height of my youth. If I were young now, I would go and live there and not return" (Farooqi 2021: 96). Ghalib transcends conventions of the traditional *shahr-ashob* in *Temple Lamp*, where he limits the lament of the city to Delhi, and does not praise Banaras through a list of professions but in its wholeness as a cosmopolitan centre that rivals any of the cities of his Persianate world. The poem concludes as he must renounce Banaras as the woes of his own city, Delhi, weigh on him, and he must continue his journey further. However, if given a choice, Ghalib would stay in Banaras forever, relishing its cosmopolitanism and spirituality. Moreover, he is a pluralistic and cosmopolitan man who appears to have found a city after his heart, and unlike Afrin's *Kashi Istut*, *Chiragh-e-Dair* adopts a generous non-competing pluralistic tone to praise the city and its spirituality. That Banaras is cosmopolitan is also evident by the presence of Persians such as Hazin who have already being embraced by Kashi, as seen in the quotation of his verse above. This paper has shown how Ghalib's poem reflects on Banaras and its various facets as both real and symbolic, going by poetic convention as well as real piety, beauty, sensuality, and greenery that he encounters in the city.

Furthermore, the poem is important today as it shows how easily a man such as Ghalib could move across different cities of South Asia and appreciate their beauty irrespective of whether they were ruled by Muslim or Hindu kings who were in any case under the aegis of the British East India Company in the early 19th century. Ghalib's *watan* could be thought of as multifarious with many concentric or overlapping circles of location. He belonged to *Hindostan*, but also to Agra, and most so to Delhi, but also to a larger Persian Cosmopolis. Poetically, he found the greatest of succour in Banaras for which he wrote his only long poem dedicated to a city, even as he was inspired to write a few *sher*s for Calcutta and Delhi as well. While colonial texts already labelled Banaras as a Hindu city in as early as 1868 (Sherring 1868), Ghalib's *masnavi Chiragh-e-Dair* is a testament to his own pluralism and cosmopolitanism as well as to these values, as he found them, in the city of lights as he set them alight on the world maps of the Silk Route and the Persosphere. Contemporary media discourse which often renders Banaras monolithic, with repeated controversies over Mughal engagement with Banaras, will do well to refer to this *masnavi* by Ghalib.

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Research Article

Intellectual Authority in the Precolonial Sikh Tradition: A Case Study of Bhai Mani Singh Shahid

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This article explores the formation and expansion of the Sikh intellectual tradition through a case study of the enigmatic scholar Bhai Mani Singh (c. 1644-1738) who appears to have been a key contributor to the intellectual consolidation of the Sikh community in 18th-century Punjab. Part I and part II of the article take an overall approach to illumine the contributions of early generations of scholars and the institutional milieus they created, their intellectual production and participation in wider South Asian knowledge systems, as well as their knowledge-dissemination to younger generations of scholars. With this social context, part III of the article then examines how Bhai Mani Singh operated within such milieus and networks to become an intellectual authority par excellence in the Sikh tradition.

Sikh, *Khalsa*, *Sikhism*, *Guru*, *Punjab*

Introduction: Authors, Authorizers, and Authority [1]

The 18th-century history of Punjab is popularly remembered as a dramatic period of upheaval, marked by the Mughal Empire's decline and the Sikh community´s ascendance to kingship and imperial rule. In the study of both phenomena, scholars have constructed extensive political and military histories to explain the causes of both (Alam 2013, Dhavan 2011). Little scholarly attention, however, has been paid to a parallel yet less-visible development that was also taking place during this dramatic century of transition: the Sikh community's efforts to preserve, reinvigorate, and expand their intellectual tradition.

This article examines intellectual authority and production in the early 18th-century Sikh world through a focused study of the scholar Bhai Mani Singh (c. 1644–1738, 94 years old) whose career offers a rare window into the formation of intellectual authority and the development of scholarly networks in precolonial Sikh tradition. Recent Western scholarship has illumined the intellectual contributions of prominent precolonial scholars such as the Braj and Sanskrit-literate Bhai Gurdas Bhalla (ca. 1551–1636) and the Persian-literate Bhai Nand Lal Goya (ca. 1633–1713) (Gill 2014, Fenech 2008: 199–277). Today, these two scholars are widely recognized as exemplary Sikh thinkers and intellectual authorities, as their multilingual works have been canonized by key Sikh institutions. Their works are therefore employed as interpretive lenses for engaging with the philosophy of the Guru Granth Sahib (the central scripture and eternal Guru of the Sikhs). By contrast, Bhai Mani Singh's intellectual legacy is more diffuse, and he has therefore received comparatively less academic attention, despite his pivotal role in shaping precolonial Sikh intellectual culture. Unlike the other two intellectual authorities, Bhai Mani Singh does not appear to have authored any surviving texts of his own.

Instead, he taught, authorized, and cultivated a network of students whose subsequent literary works played a crucial role in the consolidation of 18th-century Sikh intellectual traditions. Through his pedagogical influence and intellectual authority, Bhai Mani Singh served as a critical actor in the transmission and legitimation of authentic Sikh knowledge.

The following sections demonstrate how we can enable a richer and more nuanced understanding of Sikh intellectual authority by expanding our analytical lens to include a figure like Bhai Mani Singh, who functioned primarily as a teacher and authorizer rather than as an author. More specifically, the article explores how non-textual modes of knowledge transmission, educational mentorship, and institutional influence contributed to the consolidation of intellectual authority in precolonial Sikh tradition. As such, the article seeks to widen the scope of inquiry within Sikh Studies beyond textual authorship to include the social and pedagogical infrastructures that sustained Sikh intellectual life, by asking the question: what insights may emerge when we examine precolonial Sikh intellectual authority not only through authorship, but through the legitimization and transmission of knowledge by a figure such as Bhai Mani Singh?

Historical narratives portray Bhai Mani Singh as a devout Khalsa Sikh, court scribe, a compiler of sacred scriptures, scholar, diplomat to governing Mughal authorities, and a robust community leader during severe periods of schism, when many aspirant individuals sought to establish themselves as gurus and dominate the Sikh leadership vacuum (Singh 1999, Bhangu 2004, Chibbar 2005, Singh 2007). A close reading of narratives and colophons in precolonial Sikh literature reveals that Bhai Mani Singh appears to have been a prolific educator for the early Sikh and Khalsa Sikh community. He was the main source of information for many later authors who presented their teachings and scholarly lineage as emanating from this esteemed scholar, thereby surpassing all other prominent Sikh intellectuals in the early modern period. The literature that emanated from the memory and study notes of his students encompass diverse genres like philosophy and hagiography, exegesis of Sikh scripture and court poetry, as well as other miscellaneous genres that include compilations of mantras from the Guru Granth Sahib. Indeed, several published and unpublished works reveal that many disciplines of Sikh intellectual thought centred around the persona of Bhai Mani Singh. This is particularly the case in matters pertaining to *arth* (exegesis) and *uthanka* (historical context) where we see a diversification and proliferation of such genres in the later period of Sikh rule over the Punjab after 1765.

Part I: Early Sikh Tradition, Scholarly Lineages, and Intellectual Production in the Precolonial Sikh World

The Sikh tradition centres around the teachings of the itinerant mystical-poet and musician Guru Nanak (1469-1539). Guru Nanak's mystical and social ideas spread gradually across the South Asian subcontinent during his lifetime but were particularly rooted in the territory known today as Punjab. Guru Nanak was an itinerant teacher whose extensive travels brought him into conversations with great mystics and intellectuals from different religious traditions such as Siddhs, Yogis, Sufi saints, Hindu bhagats, Buddhist monks, and Jain renunciates across South Asia and the Middle East (Nesbitt & Singh 2025: 4). It is of crucial significance that, during his own lifetime, Guru Nanak codified his ideas of oneness, social service to humanity, and inner transformative work into a written codex. In the century and a half following his death, Guru Nanak's 9 successors expanded and systematized his teachings in a gradual process of scripture formation (the *Adi Granth* which later became the Guru Granth Sahib). As a by-product of having a central scripture, Sikh intellectuals generated an early literature and interconnected pathway of interpretation that primarily took the format of stories (*sakhi*), which placed Guru Nanak's verses into a narrative context, and commentary (*viakhia*), which

expounded on their meanings (Grewal 2023: 61-62). During this long period, an unknown number of diligent scribes, talented illuminators and calligraphers, paper makers, charismatic storytellers and curious students wanting to learn these various crafts increasingly began to present themselves for service at the Guru's court, which thereby contributed to the formation of an intellectual and creative environment.

Scholars today know relatively little about the history of intellectual consolidation and institutionalisation during the Sikh tradition's first 200 years of existence (1469-1675). Only a handful of names appear to have been preserved and transmitted within the historical records. Literacy was not common in the early Sikh community and Sikhi is essentially an oral tradition; teachings and practices are therefore transmitted through oral discourse (*katha*), active involvement in spiritual circles (*satsangat*), and music (*kirtan*) by itinerant teachers and musicians. As a result of being an oral and living tradition, the names of most transmitters and teachers have been lost to history. In the past few decades, Pashaura Singh has brought to light a handful of literary Sikhs and the range of scriptural works in production in the late 16th century, which has illumined the early milieus of the Guru's court wherein an intellectual culture was fostered (Singh 2006: 134-172, Singh 2023: 38-41). These early and lesser-known scribal and intellectual milieus require further research, as only a few individuals have been identified so far: Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Jagana Brahmin, Bhai Sant Das, Bhai Haria, Bhai Sukha, Bhai Mansa, Bhai Pandha, and Bhai Bula (ibid.).

<u>Authority in the Sikh Tradition</u>

Historically in the Sikh tradition, the reigning living Guru was regarded as the supreme authority in all matters pertaining to the spiritual, ethical, martial, political, and intellectual. Sikhs who had questions about any of these spheres would therefore approach the reigning Guru for guidance. Overall, there was no distinction amongst these spheres in the days of the ten human Gurus (1469-1708) as the Guru was the prime authority to answer questions as well as to lead the community in a certain direction in regards to any of these matters. However, with Guru Gobind Singh's abolition of the line of human gurus after him in 1708 and his subsequent elevation of the *Adi Granth* scripture to eternal Guru-status, community negotiations and discussions increasingly began to take place about these different spheres that had to be navigated, understood, and consolidated by the community. The absence of a human Guru essentially created diversifications and a window of opportunity for many talented individuals who rose to secure a position of influence amongst their contemporaries. As such, the warrior strand of the community began to consolidate the martial and political spheres, while the non-martial segments consolidated the spiritual and intellectual spheres. Over time, warriors, saints, and intellectuals established their own institutions and lineages.

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair has rightfully noted that Guru Arjan (1563-1606), the 5th Guru of the Sikh tradition, took major steps to "consolidate and diversify the nature of authority within the community, which till then centered around the figure of the living Guru" (Mandair 2023: 27). Through his actions, Guru Arjan elevated the *Adi Granth* to an authority that had to be obeyed with the message "spiritual authority lay not only with the person of the living Guru but, from now on, with the *Adi Granth*; not only with the corporeal text but even more importantly with the incorporeal teachings contained within its verses" (ibid). As such, the 5th Guru created a culture among his followers whereby they began to regard the collective corpus of holy teachings as a (spiritual) authority to be obeyed alongside himself. As I have noted elsewhere, a similar diversification in the realm of intellectual authority was employed by Guru Gobind Singh (1661-1708), when he authorised several of his followers to take a lead in teaching and answering questions from inquisitive Sikh pilgrim congregations (Singh 2024: 39-40). As such, the Guru singled out, elevated, and thereby multiplied the number of intellectual authorities his

followers could seek advice and guidance from. The Guru's transmission of intellectual authority and power to certain of his followers appears to have generated a framework and infrastructure that made it possible for later 18th-century scholars to present lineages they could trace back to one of the Gurus.

Intellectual Authority and Lineages

The following introduction from the opening lines of an unpublished manuscript from 1874 succinctly introduces readers to the phenomenon of intellectual authority within Sikh tradition (Shan 1994: 21):

> This is a commentary [*prayā*] of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. [The interpretations presented in the following is derived from] Bhai Mani Singh Ji who studied [directly] under Guru Gobind Singh. From [Bhai Mani Singh], Bhai Divan Singh Ji [then studied and received knowledge]. From him, Gurdiyal Singh and Bhai Khajan Singh ji [received instruction]. From these [teachers], Bhai Gurbakhsh Singh studied… [then] Amar Singh… Surat Singh…. Kaul Singh…. Ram Singh…. Sant Singh... Kaul Singh and Jassa Singh [who are today my teachers].

In this lengthy quotation, we encounter a long list of precolonial saint-scholars who belonged to one particular lineage of intellectual authority that considered it their foremost duty to preserve and impart scriptural knowledge to the wider Sikh populace. A large percentage of precolonial Sikh literature contains some form of short or extended lineage information. These can often be found in colophons, and serve an important and instrumental role in granting legitimacy to the information presented in the book. It can overall be stated that the credibility of a scholar was entirely dependent on the lineage he was able to position himself in, and it was expected that such lineages could be traced back to one of the 10 Sikh Gurus, like in the case above of the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh (Luis 2012: 236). Each individual mentioned in a lineage was considered, or claimed, to be an intellectual authority within their own lifetime. By presenting such extensive lineages, scholars increased the likelihood of their particular interpretations of Sikh scripture being accepted, granted authority, and transmitted among their peers. However, because of this system of knowledge preservation and production, there was a likelihood that lineages in some cases were forged, manipulated, or purely symbolic in nature, in order for their citations to add authority to a particular scholar, book, or teaching. As such, the lineages we find in colophons do not always equate and translate into actual historical fact. In such cases, the individuals mentioned in a lineage nonetheless yields considerable insight into the people who were regarded as intellectual authorities during different decades of the precolonial Sikh world, especially since authors sought to attach themselves onto such symbolic and intellectual capital.

Over the last 3 centuries, hundreds of Sikh scholars, positioning themselves within such lineages, have produced a rather extensive and sophisticated body of literature pertaining to the exegesis of Sikh scriptures and Indian epics, social and urban history, mysticism, hagiography, mythology, Ayurvedic medicine, Indian philosophy, as well as arduous translations of difficult Sanskrit and Islamicate classics. Much of this literature remains unexplored in the Western academy and holds great potential to illumine the formation, evolution, and development of precolonial Sikh intellectual thought and knowledge production. Many scholars sought to position themselves within lineages that traced themselves back to Bhai Mani Singh, but there was a plethora of such lineages in the precolonial Sikh world. This was a social world of fluid, loose, yet energetic scholarly networks and milieus where intellectuals and their students travelled across the Indian subcontinent in their attempt to acquire, preserve, further develop, and transmit Sikh intellectual thought. Often, scholars

operated within a socioeconomical context that was devoid of court patronage. They were hence dependent on local donations and charity. Students arrived from near and far to attend lectures, or study for years under prominent teachers who resided in specific learning institutions under a larger connected network of *dharamsalas, akharas, taksals, ashrams, bungas*, and *deras*. While the major Gurdwaras and *dharamsalas* catered for the masses through congregational prayers, *langar* (free food after the prayers), and singing, many of the other aforementioned institutions were more specialized. These specialized institutions primarily catered for those few individuals who desired to go beyond the basics and engage in matters that were much more esoteric and scriptural. The intellectual production of the 18th century, whether written or oral, was generally preserved, developed, and systematized within these learning institutions and subsequently disseminated to larger audiences of literate and non-literate Sikhs by itinerant scholars who ventured into rural areas across the Punjab and beyond. At such local levels in towns and villages, scholars taught their students various philosophies emanating from scriptures such as the Guru Granth Sahib and the *Dasam Granth Sahib,* but also from wider Indic and Islamicate classics such as Valmiki's *Ramayana,* Ved Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, Rumi's *Masnavi-e Manavi,* Imam Ghazali's *Kimiya-yi Sadat,* the *Hanuman Natak, Hitupdesha*, *Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads,* and the *Puranas*.[2]

With later court patronage, these nascent intellectual milieus developed extensively, and over time produced several generations of students and scholars who created firmer organizational structures. As their networks expanded, they increasingly began to identify themselves with and as the educational groups we know today as Nirmalas, Gianis, Udasis, and Sevapanthis.[3] These mystical traditional orders, known as *sampradayas,* eventually developed extensive scholarly traditions, and often composed their works at the aforementioned *ashram*s, *dharamsalas,* and *bunga*s.[4] Initially, however, these milieus were quite fluid and overlapping, and scholars therefore occasionally taught within or learned from several different milieus simultaneously, whereby the same scholars can be found within the lineages of many different *sampradaya*s. Such fluidity, flexibility, and the lack of a coherent organizational structure in the early period complicates research that seeks to trace the histories of intellectual authority in the 18th century. Simultaneously, however, such circumstances also illumine the formation of intellectual thought that took place in more humble settings defined by chaotic ground-level realities where scholars operated within a context that was devoid of state patronage. Over time, a distinct vocabulary connected with intellectual authority became employed, a vocabulary which has not been granted much authority within today's Western academy of Sikh Studies. Such terminology includes the aforementioned *sampradaya,* as well as *parampara* (lineage), *pandit, giani, vidiyaguru* (different titles for a teacher/ scholar), and *sina ba-sina* (teachings transmitted heart-to-heart i.e., oral traditions transmitted from a teacher to

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[2] The Sikh study of the Indic epics and classics can be traced back to the court of Guru Gobind Singh where they served as seminal works in a much wider curriculum of political edification of late 17th century Sikhs (see Singh 2024).

[3] It is outside the scope of this article to delve into the long history of these educational *sampradaya*s. For background information, see Khalsa 2006, Mansa 2009, Judge 2014.

[4] For a list of prominent Sikh works composed within the 19th century *bunga*s of Amritsar, see Singh 2024: 260-263. For summary lists of the extensive corpus of Sikh works and commentaries on ancient Sanskrit classics composed within such Nirmala *ashram*s over the span of 3 centuries, see Singh 2009: 51, Mansa 2009: 171-173. These two summary lists include works that are generally overlooked in the Western academy such as *Vedant Paribhasa, Advait Sidhi Sugamsar Chandraka, Prabodh Chandra Natak, Abhav Rahasya, Vairag Shatak Bhasha Tika, Guru Sidhant Joti, Guru Sikhsha Prabhakhar, Niyae Muktavali, Mahurat Chandraka, Guru Stotra, Mumuksu Bodhan Prakash, Yog Sikhia Prabhakhar, Adhyatam Anubhav Vivek, Advaitanubhav Prakash, Gurmat Sidhant Sar, Satyarth Prakash, Bharat Mat Darpan, Navin Panth Prakash, Tvarikh Guru Khalsa* etc. For a thorough discussion of the history and practices of the Nirmala Sampradaya, see Luis 2012.

his students) (Khalsa 2006: 15, 19).[5] As mentioned, precolonial Sikh literati and educators generally operated within a social culture where they had to position themselves within intellectual networks reaching back to one of the Gurus to claim and provide credibility, continuity, and authenticity to the teachings they were about to present. The notion of scholarly continuity, however, did not imply stagnation and mere blind repetition of preexisting knowledge. Within the *sampradaya*s, there has historically been some scope and room for intellectual manoeuvring and development of thought. Cross-comparing different 19th and 20th century exegetical works (*tika*s) from authors who ascribe to the same lineage for instance reveals that the interpretations of select verses expand over time, while in other cases students surpassed their teachers.[6]

Marginalization of the *Sampradaya*s

With the advent of British colonial rule in the 19th century, many reform movements emerged across the Indian subcontinent as a response to rapid societal disruptions, impacting old social and political orders. These included groups and movements such as the Ramakrishna Mission, the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, and the Aligarh Movement (Luis 2012: 43). Punjab's Sikhs experienced a similar development as the late 19th century witnessed the formation of the Singh Sabha reform movement, who were adamant to protect Sikhi from the threats of the colonial administration. They were equally concerned about the social and religious corruptions that was said to have entered Sikh praxis, thought, and institutions in the decades prior. In most regards, these corruptions were connected with popular 'Hindu' practices, represented by the decadent *sampradaya*s. Within only a few decades, the Singh Sabha marginalised the *sampradaya*s from the centre and a distinct form of reformed Sikhism emerged that eventually became the dominant expression of Sikhism worldwide. Francisco José Luis has recently termed this expression of Sikhism as neo-Sikhi and notes that its chief characteristics include (Luis 2012: 65):

> The adoption of modernist discourses such as nationalism, positivism, modernity, a certain idea of democracy and insistence on religion having to be in agreement with modern science. As a consequence of these notions Neo-Sikhs consider the Sikh community as a nation or qaum, refuse the traditional notion of meritocracy and lineages in favour of elected authoritative bodies at both local [Gurdwara committees] and central level… and insist on Sikhism being a modern and scientific religion.

As William Hewat McLeod has noted, ideas such as the above that began as sectarian and marginal within the Singh Sabha movement have since become deeply embedded in mainstream Sikh institutions and global scholarly discourse (as qtd. in Luis 2012: 56). As such, ideas that were once considered fringe are now widely accepted by the global Sikh majority. As a result, the Singh Sabha lens appears to dominate the modern analyses of Sikh tradition. Indeed, the dominant Singh Sabha lens of intellectual history tends to render much early Sikh literature problematic rather than as evidence of a vibrant, thriving tradition that constructively engaged with wider Indic and Islamicate discourse. Intellectual authority and production in the

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[5] In 1832, the scholar Megh Singh, connected to the Giania Bunga in Amritsar, noted the following in regard to the community leader Giani Surat Singh who served the Sikh community in the 1770s "…then Surat Singh established this *sampradāyā*, the whole world refers to it as the Giani order" (Khalsa 2006: 55). For a presentation of Sikh history and teachings framed in such terminology, see Singh 2009, and Singh and Singh 2005.

[6] Compare for instance the *Garab Ganjani Tika* (The Pride-Crushing Commentary) from 1829 with the late 20th century *Amir Bhandar* (The Rich Treasury) wherein the authors descend from a Mani Singh lineage (see Singh 2006, Singh and Singh 2005).

precolonial period overall appears to be under-emphasized as research subjects in Western academia on Sikhism. Academics, who have briefly covered the *sampradaya*s, generally tend to frame these orders as Brahminized or Vedantic-influenced groups. Academics moreover tend to initiate their discussion on the *sampradaya*s by questioning their historical legitimacy and connection with the Gurus, to then provide fragmentary and insufficient glimpses of their scholarly activities and contributions to the Sikh world (for example, see Judge 2014: 377). As 18th-century authors did not employ a defensive tone in their works with the aim to prove their authority, the legitimacy of their milieus, and the *sampradaya*s to which they adhered, it appears almost impossible to prove or disprove the legitimacy and historicity of these lineages and orders. To go beyond such questions of historical legitimacy and potential links to the Gurus, it may be more fruitful to examine the contributions of these early scholars and the milieus and networks that they adhered to on their own terms such that we may shed light on intellectual production and transmission in the 18th century.

Part II: Bhai Mani Singh and His Times

A Google search for Bhai Mani Singh shows a plethora of paintings of an elderly man surrounded by chaotic circumstances, yet seated in equipoise, as he is cut to pieces by an axe-holding executioner. This visual outlook of Bhai Mani Singh (hereafter Mani Singh) is echoed in the Ardas prayer recited by millions of pious Sikhs across the world several times daily: "We remember and honor the brave Sikh men and women who sacrificed their lives for the love of dharam [and we remember all of those before us] who were cut to pieces [but never surrendered their faith]" (Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Comitte 2003: 166). These verses reference Mani Singh's final hours of martyrdom. Such visual and liturgical representations present a very one-dimensional view of our esteemed scholar who lived to the ripe age of 94. Indeed, it can be postulated that most Sikhs today primarily know Mani Singh as a preeminent martyr from Sikh history. While it is historically correct that he ended his life as a martyr in defence of the Sikh faith, this popular, one-dimensional view overshadows his long life that encompassed intense periods of scholarship and service to the house of Nanak.

According to popular tradition, Mani Singh was born as Mani Ram in Multan, in current day Pakistan, around 1644 AD. During his long life, he served the last five Gurus, Har Krishan (1654-1664), Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675), Gobind Singh, Granth Sahib, and Khalsa Panth. Mani Singh steered the nascent Khalsa community through one of its most challenging periods of state persecution, survival, and expansion. The Khalsa was a newly inaugurated community consisting of those few Sikhs who had sworn complete loyalty to Guru Gobind Singh and the faith by observing a strict and regimented code of conduct on the lines of an ancient Kshatriya warrior ethos. As a householder, Mani Singh is said to have fostered ten sons and generally lived an active life serving the Gurus and the Khalsa community. Considering his popularity, it is therefore not surprising that he is the first Sikh to have a 'biography' written about his life. This biography, titled *Shahid Bilas* (The martyr's splendour), was composed around 1803 during the early years of the Sikh Empire (Singh 2007). Much of the information we have today appears to be derived from this composition. Chroniclers in the precolonial period generally presented him as an authority in several spheres. In such accounts, we encounter a Mani Singh who is a devout Khalsa Sikh, court scribe of sacred scriptures, a scholar, itinerant teacher, diplomat to governing Mughal authorities, and a robust community leader whose advice and council were continuously sought after by the Sikhs of his time (Singh 1999, Bhangu 2004, Chibbar 2005, Singh 2007). Over the centuries, different *sampradaya*s have sought to claim Mani Singh, as belonging to or representing their specific order (Khalsa 2006: 34, Mansa 2009: 174). As such, Mani Singh can be approached as a persona, that allows different groups to claim legitimacy for their own outlook and teachings. For example, both the Damdami Taksal and Nirmalas have claimed him as theirs and presented him as a devout

scholar-saint who is to be emulated (ibid.). In essence, different *sampradaya*s have sought to model Mani Singh in their own image, and we consequently encounter different vignettes about this great personality, which complicates scholarly attempts to historicize Mani Singh. As an itinerant teacher travelling across the Sikh heartlands of the Indian subcontinent, Mani Singh taught several students within the local and fluid milieus. Later, many of these students and their own students rose to great intellectual heights in the time when fluid milieus began to organically evolve into fixed *sampradaya*s. Consequently, we observe a situation where different authors, starting in the early-to-mid 18th century, began to codify and trace themselves back to Mani Singh in their works, wherein they continued to develop Sikh teachings. As such, Mani Singh has historically united Sikhs across various divides, which may explain why the teachings of lineages that trace themselves back to him contain so many complexities and layers. Or said differently, while Mani Singh may have influenced several of his students and left behind a core of teachings among them, these individuals branched out their ideas later into new and perhaps contradictory directions.

Mani Singh rose to prominence in a turbulent and dramatic period of transition that witnessed political, military, and social upheavals. Guru Gobind Singh was unexpectedly assassinated in 1708, and many of his talented court scholars had been dispersed or killed by Mughal forces in the years before (Singh 2024: 200-202). Prior to his death, the Guru abolished the lineage of human Gurus and disrupted the authority of several dozen *masand*s (regional community leaders) who had governed the Sikh community across Indo-Islamic worlds for more than a century (Fenech 2021: 10,12). These two abolitions created severe vacuum in local leadership across the Indian subcontinent where local Khalsa Sikhs now increasingly sought to consolidate themselves within the empty seats of power (Sainapati 2016: 52). Simultaneously, Khalsa Sikhs rebelled against the Mughal Empire in 1709, which resulted in severe state persecution against the Sikhs in the following decades (Alam 2013). Moreover, at a cultural level, many sacred manuscripts perished due to warfare while spurious narratives on the teachings and lives of the Gurus circulated widely, making it difficult for pious Sikhs to adhere to their traditions and the genuine teachings of the new and vulnerable faith (Singh 2013a: 9-10).

Reframing Early Sikh Literati and Intellectual Authority

Guru Gobind Singh was a highly educated leader, and traditional accounts portray the Guru's childhood education as encompassing a studious learning of Sanskrit, Braj, Persian, martial arts, and swordsmanship (Singh 2024: 72). The educational standard set by the Guru was reflected in the intellectual environment he created in his Anandpur kingdom, located in the sub-Himalayan Mountain range. In the late 17th century, the Guru fostered a cosmopolitan court and library where he invited more than 100 Sanskrit and Persian-literate scholars, to bring ancient Indic and Islamicate knowledge systems to the attention of his followers (Padam 1976, Fenech 2008, Singh 2024). Many of these scholars were Hindu Brahmins and Khatris, and a substantial minority were former Mughal and Rajasthani court scholars. Combined, these Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim scholars constituted crucial segments of the late 17th century Sikh literati, and some consequently became intellectual authorities among pious Sikhs, the most famous being Mani Singh, Sainapati, Dharam Singh, Nanua Vairagi, and Nand Lal Goya. It is essential to emphasize that Sikh literati and influential authorities from Anandpur during this period were not necessarily Sikhs by conviction, but they worked under Sikh patronage, in a Sikh institution, and under a Sikh framework whereby they significantly influenced the later course of the Sikh tradition, especially in the intellectual and political spheres (Singh 2024).

Under the Guru's guiding hand, this centralized Anandpuri literati translated and studied the classics of the Sanskrit and Islamicate civilizations. Or said differently, Sikh literati studied the

accumulated knowledge and skills that had shaped the society and institutions around them, and interpreted them in light of their own social and political objectives. By doing so, Sikhs increasingly tapped into ancient knowledge systems and thereby affiliated themselves with preexisting intellectual capital as they catapulted themselves into ancient debates on mysticism, leadership, and political science (ibid.). By 1704, Sikh literati had translated or studied an extensive corpus of South Asia's and Persia's ancient classics such as Chanakya's *Niti Shastra*, Shukarcharya's *Shukraniti,* Ved Vyasa's *Mahabharata,* Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Abu Al-Qasim Firdausi's *Shahnama,* Sheikh Sadi's *Bustan* and *Golestan,* the eighteen *Puranas*, instructive manuals on Ayurveda, fifty-two *Upanishads*, the *Hitupdesha, Chhand Vichar Pingal, Baznama*, and the *Aspnama*. If we were to look beyond the 'Muslim' and 'Hindu' labels of much of this literature and examine the actual content of these works, we encounter a group of Sikh literati that was engaged in a comprehensive study of political science and principles of governance , political posture, human psychology, ethics, spirituality and knowledge of the self, strategies of kingship, battle formation, courtly etiquette, warfare, ancient mythology, architecture, geography, systems of education, medicine, cultural narratives and mythology, linguistics and literature production, as well as zoology. Simultaneously, Anandpuri scholars occasionally taught visiting pilgrims Sanskrit and Persian, the elitist lingua franca of the time in which a majority of intellectual discourse and ideas had been transmitted for centuries, while they engaged in discussions with and answered any questions these pilgrim Sikhs may have had (Singh 2003: 866). As such, there were concrete organisational mechanisms in place in this grand institution to multiply the intellectual authority and in transmitting knowledge from the elites to a larger collective of pious Sikhs.

The Sikhs prior to Guru Gobind Singh's reign had not developed a distinct philosophical vocabulary and they do not appear to have possessed an extensive intellectual infrastructure of academies and scholars. Bhai Gurdas, a preeminent Sikh intellectual authority of the early 1600s, for instance, did not appear to have left behind any students nor any lineage to continue and expand his work. The new Anandpuri literati therefore had to attach themselves to South Asia's preexisting and centuries-old symbolic authority and sophisticated curriculums. Such alignments with the wider Indic tradition and the Sanskrit canon have in post-Singh Sabha times of identity politics, caused several controversies as to whether these scholars and their intellectual production is even to be regarded as contributions to Sikh literature and ideas. Consequently, such narrow discussions have missed the greater picture of what discussions, epistemologies, and infrastructures the Anandpuri scholars attempted to embed and tap into with their unique Sikh perspectives.

The *Shahid Bilas* from 1803 is careful to position Mani Singh within this cosmopolitan Anandpuri court as it notes that Mani Singh was regularly seen "scribing and preparing new manuscripts… At all times, fifty-two scholar-poets resided near the Guru. Mani [Singh] was seated among these intellectuals" (Singh 2007: 57, 59). We do not know much about Mani Singh's exact role in this grand assembly. He has not left behind any corpus of literature that can be firmly attributed to his name, and it appears that he was most likely a smaller scholar-poet in the assembly since he is not mentioned in any contemporary Anandpuri sources. Later sources describe him likewise as a transmitter and educator, and not translator, from the Anandpur court. It is in the post-human Guru period that he appears to have risen to eminence, most likely as a result of his capture of Amritsar's sacred premises around the year of 1700 when he ousted a rival-guru and brought the holy complex back into the ten-Guru lineage fold (Singh 2007: 70). Since the reign of the 5th Guru (1563-1606), Sikhs had experienced occasional conflicts with Mughal authorities, which sometimes resulted in direct military confrontations. In 1704, Mughal forces and their local Rajput allies laid siege to the Anandpur kingdom and subsequently occupied its main territories, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of Sikh warriors and civilians. Many court scholars died in the defence of the town, while others

survived and sought employment elsewhere (Singh 2024: 200-202). Tradition notes that many subjects left these conquered main territories, which significantly destroyed Anandpur's newly established intellectual infrastructure. This destruction caused an unprecedented decentralization of knowledge production among dispersed Sikh literati who in the following decades established new and much humbler *dharamsalas and ashrams* across the Punjab and beyond wherein knowledge could be preserved and taught.

Ideas Travel with People

The tragic siege of Anandpur may be approached as both a destruction and as an expansion of Sikh intellectual infrastructure. While the siege dispersed the many scholars present in Anandpur, it also caused their students and descendants to come into contact with mystics and literati across the wider Indian subcontinent. Indeed, by the late 18th century the intellectual descendants of the Anandpuri literati and milieus had established themselves in concrete institutions that were in close proximity to sacred shrines and pilgrimage centres across the Indo-Sikh world. The scholars thereby attached themselves to a preexisting sacred and intellectual geography. Colophons found in mid-to-late 18th century works as well as later narrative traditions reveal that Sikhs who were engaged in intellectual production were to be found in *dharamsala*s and *ashram*s in many of South Asia's vibrant cities and regions such as Kabul, Varanasi, Hyderabad (Pakistan), Multan, Hardwar, Amritsar, Damdama, Kurukshetra, Kashmir, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Due to this widespread dispersal across the subcontinent after the Anandpur siege, Sikh intellectuals increasingly came to engage with the contemporary milieu of saint-scholars across a wide spectrum of Sufis, Dadus, Vaishnavas, Brahmins, and ascetics as they appropriated and established their centres in the sacred geography of South Asia.[7] Being dispersed, the aforementioned fluid milieus operated at ground level and continued to preserve, study, and promote the Braj and Sanskrit works from the Anandpur kingdom. But more importantly, Sikh intellectuals participated in wider philosophical debates of their time and constructed a flexible eco-system wherein classical works, ideas, students, and emerging scholars constantly circulated. By the mid-18th century, Sikh scholars in Muslim-dominated regions (present-day Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa etc.) had integrated and translated the influential works of Jalal ad-Din Rumi and Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali into their regional curricula where they both studied these classic works but also provided *katha* (oral discourse) of their inherent teachings at local Sikh centres of learning (Padam 2006: 14). Simultaneously, some of these Persian-literate Sikh scholars appears to have cultivated a reputation as skilled translators and interpreters of Persian intellectual traditions far beyond Sikh circles and regions such as Rajasthan (Horstmann 2009). Moreover, by composing two different translations of the 12th-century *Prabodhacandrodaya* (the awakening of moon-like wisdom), Sikhs in the 1780s positioned themselves within a much larger literary and intellectual landscape where this composition was increasingly translated and studied by different religious Vaishnava orders.[8]

Over time, several of the Anandpuri and later *sampradaya* works evolved into fixed components in Sikh intellectual curriculums for the training of new generations of scholars.[9]

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[7] For contact between Sikh, Sufi, and Dadu mystical scholars, see Padam 2006, and Horstmann 2009.

[8] For a recent study and translation of another *Prabodhacandrodaya* adaptation from the 18th century, see Pastore 2024. In 2020, I was fortunate to examine a rare manuscript of Pandit Gulab Singh's translation of *Prabodhacandrodaya* from 1789 that was completed in Kurukshetra. In the colophon to this manuscript located in the Dr Dapinder Singh Collection, the Nirmala notes "Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, of whom there are no equals, I prostate myself eternally before them." (See Gulab Singh, *Prabodh Chandar Natak*, fol. 1a).

[9] The *Chanaka Shastra* (Precepts of Chanakya) by the Anandpuri court poet Sainapati was for instance a part of the curriculum studied by the grand scholar Santokh Singh (1787-1843), (see Singh 2024: 48-

Some of the most popular compositions from Anandpur that were integrated into later educational curriculums consist of concise and succinct texts structured as pedagogical didactic manuals, the verses often being quite short, instructive, and self-contained. The production of such short and concise compositions that could fit into small manuscripts made it easier to transport ancient and complex knowledge systems across regions, often aided with *katha* by a scholar. The associated costs of this circulation would have been minimal since such works could often be scribed within very small and concise manuscripts.[10] The later patterns of reproduction furthermore include illustrated and illuminated manuscripts which indicate that they targeted both elite and *bazaar* markets. It may overall be stated that the historical *sampradaya* literary production did not in any way appear to have departed drastically from the works that had already been translated and studied in the Anandpur court. The *sampradaya*s thereby continued along the trajectory that was initiated by the 10th Guru.

The military encounters between Khalsa Sikhs on the one hand, and Mughal and Afghan forces on the other hand, continued throughout the century which accelerated hostility between Khalsa Sikhs and Muslims. Some productions from the *sampradaya*s authored during this period reveal a sensitivity toward the sociopolitical context of the time. The lineage connected with the Anandpuri philanthropist Bhai Ghaneya (who, like Mani Singh, did not author any works himself) translated several seminal Sufi classics such as Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali's 12th century *Kimiya-yi Sadat* (The alchemy of happiness) and Jalal ad-Din Rumi's *Masnavi-e Manavi* (The spiritual couplets). These two masterly treatises on spiritual ascent are among the most widely circulated Sufi compositions of history. Due to severe Khalsa hostility toward Mughal and Afghan rule, the translators (or later scribes) appear to have appeased surrounding Khalsa sentiments by omitting information in some texts, thereby toning down their Islamic contours. The translators or scribes have in many cases also omitted Quranic verses and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad despite such verses and sayings being present throughout the original Persian text. For instance, when a prophetic saying is presented in the *Parasbhag* (Fortune of the philosopher's stone, this being the Sikh translation of the *Kimiya-yi Sadat*), it's articulation is generalized into "the statement of the saint (*sant janā kā bacan hai*)" or "the master (*saiṁ*) has said," thus maintaining the teaching but omitting the speaker prophet Muhammad (Garhu 1983: 46).[11] Moreover, though this is more common in such Indo-Islamic translations, Islamic terms are translated into Indic terms making the *Parasbhag* far less

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49). Santokh Singh was both a product of and participant in the Giania Bunga and Giani Sampradaya. Similarly, the *Adhyatam Prakash* (Manifestation of Divine Wisdom) by the Anandpuri court poet Pandit Sukhdev has become privileged enough to be adopted within traditional, educational curricula (Singh 2020: 171, 189). The traditional curriculum of the *sampradaya*s can often be found listed in modern works as well as in the 19th century manuscript anthologies wherein these works are often found together in single-volume manuscripts. An intriguing 19th-century manuscript in the Dr Dapinder Singh Collection for instance, corresponds almost identically with the *sampradaya* curriculum employed today, the other works in the manuscript being the *Vicharmala, Adhyatam Prakash, Anubhav Prakash, Sarkutavali, Vairag Shatak, Ashtavakra Gita* etc.

[10] I have examined two such small manuscripts of the Vedantic *Adhyatam Prakash* that are no more than a few centimeters in width. The educational usage of these manuscripts can also be detected from the margins when they carry Punjabi translations of difficult Persian words (see Nand Lal Goya's *Tasnif Bhai Nand Lal Ji* for such a manuscript that contains the extant Persian corpus of works from the Anandpur court). Such informal margin translations may suggest that the manuscript was employed historically as a teaching aid in a circle of educators and students.

[11] Similar examples can be found in the different Sevapanthi recensions of the *Sukhan Fakiran Ke* (sayings of the *fakir*s) and *Ahi-vali Sukhan Sain Lokan Ke* (The nature and sayings of God's Men) that compiles many philosophical teachings of Sufi mystics such as Abdullah Ansari, Hassan al-Basri, Ibrahim Adham al-Balkhi, Junayd al-Baghdadi, Rabia al-Basri, and Rumi, as well as references to Mithra, Imam Ali, Adam, Moses, and Jesus. In several later manuscripts, scribes have omitted some of these names or revised their teachings (Padam 2006: 25-26).

Islamic; *Roza* (fasting) is translated as *vart, zakat* (charity) as *dhan, namaz* (prayer) as *bhajan, shaytan* (Satan) as *maya* etc.

Part III: Vignettes of Intellectual Authority

Having outlined the overall social contours of 18th century Sikh intellectual traditions, the following examination will provide fragmentary glimpses into how later Sikh intellectuals and chroniclers constructed, remembered, and positioned Mani Singh as an intellectual authority par excellence.

<u>As a Source of Authority</u>

For two centuries prior to Guru Gobind Singh's abolition of the human-Guru lineage, Sikhs had approached the reigning Guru directly and asked questions relating to exegesis and the historical context to Guru Granth Sahib's individual hymns. After 1708, Sikhs no longer had a human Guru to approach, and here, Mani Singh appears to have occupied a centre stage in answering any such questions that may have helped Sikhs on their spiritual path. Indeed, many compositions of *arth* (exegesis) and *uthanka* (historical context) appear to be constructed around Mani Singh's *katha* to his audiences. Many prefaces in works originating from these genres are constructed around a narrative wherein Mani Singh authorizes certain interpretations and limits the frameworks of understanding. The following is a case from an unpublished 19th century manuscript titled *Uthanka Granth Sahib Ki* (Historical context to the hymns of the [Guru] Granth Sahib) (fol. 1a):

> One day in Anandpur, the Singhs asked Bhai Mani Singh "who will provide the oral exegesis [*kathā*] of the Granth Sahib when the Guru is no longer [physically] present among us?" Mani Singh answered "this is a good question. Let us go and ask the Guru"… [The Guru answered] "You Mani Singh should perform the *kathā* [after my departure]." Mani Singh answered "I cannot perform this. The interpretations [*arth*] are too deep and difficult [to fathom and transmit onwards]… Only if you assist me will I be able to complete this task." The Guru then commanded the Sikhs to bring the Granth Sahib near [so he could directly instruct and relay the exegesis to Bhai Mani Singh who could then pass the authentic teachings forward].

What we witness here is the author establishing a direct link between Guru Gobind Singh and Mani Singh. This is emphasized to provide legitimacy to the teachings presented in the following chapters, and is but one of the numerous examples wherein the Guru authorises Mani Singh to preserve and transmit Sikhi's authentic teachings to diverse followers in the absence of a human Guru (also see *Tika Japuji Ka* fol. 1a, Shan 1994: 26).

<u>As a Commentator Granting Authority to Earlier Philosophers</u>

In other cases, Mani Singh and the associated authority embodied by him is invoked to confer authority to other individuals and works, thereby authorising a certain curriculum that in many examples centre on the works of Bhai Gurdas (1551-1636). In today's world, Bhai Gurdas's two works in Punjabi and Braj have received a prominent position as canonized literature that comments on and frames Guru Granth Sahib's teachings and philosophy. One popular tradition notes that the 5th Guru, Arjan Dev (1563-1606), himself had authorized and referred to Bhai Gurdas's works as the key to unluck the wisdom of Sikhi. The origins of this tradition appear relatively late in writing, and new research has suggested that Gurdas's works were commenced during the tenure of the 6th Guru, and not the 5th, which complicates this popular tradition (Gill 2014: 150). Whether the 5th Guru had authorized Bhai Gurdas's compositions

as central works in a fixed curriculum is difficult to ascertain. But the later popularity and sacredness of these compositions revolve around Mani Singh, who in this regard appears to have had an important role to play in authorizing their content among wider Sikh literati and populace. Written as an extensive commentary wherein philosophical teachings are packaged within narratives about the Gurus and their followers, the *Sikhan Di Bhagatmala* (Garland of devout Sikhs) by Giani Surat Singh in the 1780s states in its opening lines (Singh 2013b: 223):[12]

> One day a group of Sikhs folded their hands toward Bhai Mani Singh and exclaimed "[the eleventh chapter of] Bhai Gurdas's *Var* [ballads]) relay names of many Sikhs here and abroad. Can you tell us about their lifestyles, manners, and misdeeds (so we can benefit from such knowledge)?..." Bhai Mani Singh then said "you have asked a very virtuous question of benefit to all. I once asked the Master of the poor, Guru Gobind Singh, this very question. Whatever the Master replied to me, I will relate that onto you… Your Sikhi will prosper (with such knowledge)... The way I heard it from the blessed mouth of the Tenth Guru, in this way will I relate the knowledge to you."

This narration follows the same structure as the previous one wherein Mani Singh's teachings are authorized by its key source, the 10th Guru himself. More intriguing, however, is the implied subtext that Bhai Gurdas's works were discussed and its verses elaborated upon by the 10th Guru himself. We can thus begin to trace the rise and popularity of Bhai Gurdas's works in precolonial Sikh literature. Indeed, the *Sikhan Di Bhagatmala* is an intriguing early example of an exegetical work that functions as a commentary of a commentary. The popularity of Bhai Gurdas in the milieus engaged in commentarial works is evident in several of their compositions that occasionally quote from his *Var* (Singh 1997: 3, Singh 2013b). [13] Mani Singh thereby appears to have been a key contributor to promote and position Bhai Gurdas as an intellectual authority within their ranks Overall, it appears that Mani Singh is a figure who, carrying the glow of the Guru's authority, authorised certain authors and thereby favoured a certain curriculum and interpretation of Sikh faith through his *katha.*

As a Founding Father of New Lineages

The multitude of intellectual authorities throughout different decades of the precolonial Sikh world can be gleaned from colophons and metanarratives. Image 1 illumines the teacher-student relationships in four works on scriptural commentary and the history of the Gurus.

Such lineages provide key insights into the evolution of scholarly activity across generations, with the earliest works logically having the shortest chain back to Guru Gobind Singh.[14]

Gurbilas Patshahi 10 (authored by Kuir Singh in 1751)	*Gurbilas Patshahi 6* (authored by Bhagat Singh in 1719/1840)	*Bhai Sahib Chandrika* (authored by Megh Singh in 1833 – Giani Sampradaya)	*Praya Granth Sahib* (authored by Kaul Singh and Jassa Singh in 1874 – Giani Sampradaya)
Bhai Mani Singh -> Bhai Kuir Singh (author).	Guru Gobind Singh -> Bhai Daya Singh -> Bhai Mani Singh -	Guru Gobind Singh -> Bhai Mani Singh -> Baba Gurbakhsh	Guru Gobind Singh -> Bhai Mani Singh -> Bhai Divan Singh ->

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[12] Also see *Gurbilas Patshahi 6* (Singh 1997: 42).

[13] Also see *Uthanka Granth Sahib Ki*, fol. 25b that is associated with a Mani Singh lineage that quotes and discusses a verse from Bhai Gurdas's *Var.*

[14] See Singh 1999, Singh 1997, Khalsa 2006: 34-64, Shan 1994: 21.

| | > Bhais Dharam Singh & Bhagat Singh (author). | Singh -> Giani Surat Singh
-> Bhai Gurdas -> Giani Sant Singh -> Bhai Megh Singh (author). | Bhais Gurdyal Singh & Khajan Singh -> Bhai Gurbakhsh Singh -> Bhais Amar Singh & Surat Singh -> Bhai Kaul Singh -> Bhais Amar Singh & Ram Singh -> Bhai Chanda Singh -> Bhais Surat Singh & Gurdas Singh -> Bhai Sant Singh -> Bhais Kaul Singh & Jassa Singh (authors). |

Image 11.1: Overview of intellectual authorities after 1708 who are positioned in a Mani Singh lineage, covering several generations into the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The frequent appearance of Mani Singh and others underscores their centrality in anchoring intellectual teachings, but also illumines a continuity of scholarly traditions beyond the human-Guru period. Indeed, proximity to the Guru through Mani Singh appears to have been a marker of authenticity, which is critical in a tradition that values direct transmission. The lists moreover illumines the intellectual authorities through whose efforts knowledge was preserved, interpreted, and transmitted. Such lineages challenge the misconception that Sikh intellectual life declined after the Anandpur siege and instead reveals a dynamic network of intellectuals who shaped Sikh understanding in the precolonial world prior to the Singh Sabha reform movement.

In the 19th century, as these different milieus continued to evolve institutionally, an internal complexity and diversity of teachings arose as the *sampradaya*s branched into new directions. A succinct example that illustrates such diversity is through a comparison of how 3 different authors who claimed descent from Mani Singh interpreted a key verse from Guru Nanak's *Japuji Sahib* that is of great significance for Sikh praxis, and is recited as a morning prayer daily by millions of Sikhs across the globe. The fourth verse of *the Japuji Sahib*, which emphasizes the significance of early morning devotion, states: "In the *amrit velā,* the early ambrosial hours before dawn, recite the Name of Truth and contemplate its glory and majesty" (Singh 2006: 42). This succinct verse is interpreted in noticeably different yet overlapping ways by 3 commentators who claim descent from a Mani Singh lineage (image 2):

***Tika Japuji Ka,* unknown author, n.d**	***Garab Ganjani*, Santokh Singh, 1829**	***Uthanka Granth Sahib Ki,* unknown author, n.d**
The *Tika Japuji Ka* aligns Sikh praxis with Vedantic philosophical idioms and interprets *amrit vela* as the metaphorical "birth/awakening of a human being" (rather than solely a specific time to wake up in the morning). It furthermore incorporates terms like *Aham*	In contrast, Santokh Singh offers a long devotional reading that aligns fairly well with a modern mainstream interpretation that directs Sikhs to rise in the early ambrosial hours, recite '*Satnam*' and contemplate/praise the Name of Truth. The *arth* to this specific verse carries no	The *Uthanka Granth Sahib Ki* strikes a mediating tone that blends metaphoric language about the spiritual "birth/awakening of a human being" with the use of more distinct Sikh terminology such as '*Vahiguru*'. This balance may indicate both a sensitivity to earlier

Brahmasmi, Oam, and *Soham*. This may suggest the work was aimed at a classically trained audience familiar with Sanskritic metaphysics (Tika Japuji Ka, fol. 4b). [15]	Vedantic angle unlike the previous *Tika Japuji Ka* (Singh 2006: 42-43).	interpretive modes and a confidence in Sikh theological vocabulary. (Uthanka Granth Sahib Ki, fol. 5a). [16]

Image 11.2: Overview of three different interpretations of a select verse from the *Japuji Sahib*, each author claiming descent from a Mani Singh lineage.

Image 11.3: Manuscript titled *Tika Japuji Ka* (Commentary of Japuji). This intriguing and beautifully illuminated manuscript in the Dr. Dapinder Singh Collection was likely commissioned by Punjabi elites in the 19th century. The manuscript appears to be unique among commentarial manuscripts, as it is illuminated and written in fixed columns where the left column contains sacred verses, accompanied by an adjacent column that provides a commentary of Japji Sahib's verses.

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[15] The commentary can be translated in the following way: "*Amrit velā* is the (spiritual) birth/awakening of a human being. Truth is to be spoken (in life). With Truth, other forms of speech should be recited and contemplated upon such as '*Aham Brahmasmī*', '*Oam*' and '*Soham*'…". The connection to Mani Singh is narrated on fol. 1a.

[16] The connection to Mani Singh is narrated on fol. 1a.

Image 11.4: The manuscript *Tika Japuji Ka*'s opening section of Guru Granth Sahib's Rag Suhi section, containing both the original source text and commentary in separate columns.

Conclusion: A Towering Figure Among Towering Figures

Today, Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal are widely recognized as the only two central thinkers and intellectual authorities whose interpretations are crucial to the understanding of Sikh philosophy and scripture. Yet, there is reason to argue that earlier intellectual circles before the Singh Sabha reformation often included Mani Singh as a third authority, thereby making up a trio. Mani Singh's exclusion from the modern canon may reflect a broader development in the colonial period that saw the privileging of written works over lineages and orally-transmitted teachings. Unlike the other two, Mani Singh did not leave behind any written works, but rather he left behind a network of students who claimed to carry forward his teachings. The Singh Sabha's sidelining of Mani Singh from the ranks of central intellectual authorities may have facilitated the marginalization of the *sampradaya*s in the 20th century, and thereby severed the link between textual interpretation and lived *sampradaya* tradition. This break and shift privileged direct engagement with written works as the primary means of understanding, and thereby rendered inherited interpretive traditions and lineages less authoritative. The

grand scholar Santokh Singh (1787-1843) from the Giani Sampradaya appears to reflect such a harmony between textual interpretation and lived tradition when he noted the following in his voluminous *Nanak Prakash* (The manifestation of Nanak) from 1823 (Sagar 1993: 22, 72):

> [To understand the truth about Guru Nanak] first you must listen to the testimony [*sākhī*] of the (Guru) Granth… Then listen to the stories [*sākhī*] explained and expounded [*bhākhī*] by he who is named Sri Gurdas… [Then consult the works descending from the lineages of] Mani Singh who was [spiritually and intellectually] perfected… Based on these sources, I have now created my own account [*kathā*].

Indeed, from the late 18th century onward, we witness the 3 intellectual authorities being connected in a variety of intriguing ways. In a lesser-known voluminous composition titled *Gian Ratnagar* (Ocean of wisdom) by Bhai Vishan Singh, presumably from the early 19th century, we can begin to detect an early codification of a spectacular lineage that connects the 3 intellectual authorities in a much grander lineage that also includes Guru Arjan Dev, who himself was a master poet and intellectual (Singh 2013b: 41):

> Bhai Gurdas expanded [on the teachings of Sikhi] under the Fifth Guru's own instruction. [A century later, Guru Gobind Singh provided] direct instruction to Nand Lal who subsequently became a manifestation of virtue. Then one day the Sikh congregation desired [spiritual] knowledge and instruction. Sri Mani Singh provided this knowledge [by answering their questions]. Sri Gurbakhsh Singh heard [the *katha*] and the highly intelligent Surat Singh then wrote [the teachings down in a book format].

We encounter the same trio in an unnamed manuscript from the Punjab University Library which notes "Praised be Bhai Gurdas, Nand Lal, and Mani Singh. [Praised be] Sri Gurbakhsh Singh and Surat Singh" (Singh 2013b: 41). Overall, Bhai Nand Lal and Bhai Gurdas's elevation appears to have been facilitated by the scholars connected with the Giani Sampradaya, whose key leadership all claimed loyalty to and descent from the revered intellectual authority Bhai Mani Singh Shahid.

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Research Article

Early Modern Digambara Jain Ascetic Lineages

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Ascetic lineages have played a crucial role in the history of Jainism. Yet, the development of Digambara Jain lineages remains poorly studied in comparison to their Śvetāmbara counterparts. This paper analyses the case of the western and central Indian lineages of the Mūlasaṅgha Balātkāragaṇa tradition in the Sultanate (1206-1526 CE) and Mughal (1526-1857 CE) eras. Throughout the early modern period (ca. 1400-1800 CE), the formation of new Balātkāragaṇa lineages and the frequent relocations of their seats were steered by external factors like the rise and fall of Indo-Persian and Rajput polities, attendant socio-economic conditions, migrations of lay communities, patronage, and caste and subcaste group dynamics. Many Balātkāragaṇa lineages commonly remembered as successions of *bhaṭṭāraka*s instead existed for considerable periods as successions of lower-ranking *ācārya*s and *maṇḍalācārya*s before reaching autonomy as *bhaṭṭāraka* seats.

Jainism, Digambara, asceticism, lineage, *bhaṭṭāraka*s

Introduction: Jain Ascetic Lineages

While the division of the Jain tradition into the Śvetāmbara and Digambara folds and into image-venerating and aniconic sects is well-known,[1] the importance of their further subdivisions into monastic lineages is still less commonly understood. Yet, monastic units (*gaccha*, etc.)[2] are a pervasive feature of the various Jain traditions and have played a crucial role in the functioning of Jainism as a living faith (Folkert 1993; Dundas 2007: 1).[3] The correct transmission of teachings and practices through a continuous, legitimate succession of teachers (*paramparā*) is a critical issue in South Asian religious traditions, with lineage constituting the basis for claims of authority in fields like ascetic discipline, ritual practice, teaching, and scriptural exegesis. For Jain traditions, pupillary lineages of ascetics ideally trace back to Mahāvīra, the ultimate source of truth as the omniscient *jina*, and his direct pupils, the *gaṇadhara*s, who were the first leaders of the ascetic community. Genealogical texts listing the successions within these lineages (*paṭṭāvalī*) and hagiographies of illustrious incumbents preserve the memory of earlier ascetic leaders and legitimise current incumbents. The structure of Jain renunciant orders and their successions has parallels with both family structures and royal genealogy (Cort 1991: 662; Dundas 2007: 3-4, 21-2).

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[1] Next to the Śvetāmbara Loṅkāgaccha, Sthānakavāsīs, and Terāpantha, there is also the Tāraṇa-svāmī-pantha, an aniconic Digambara sect from the Bundelkhand region in Central India (see Cort 2006).

[2] Throughout the centuries, Jains have used various words to refer to a group of monks under a single teacher, including *kula* (family, clan), *śākhā* (branch), *gaṇa* (troop), and *gaccha* (tree) (Folkert 1993: 159-60; Dundas 2007: 11-12).

[3] See Flügel (2006) for the most complete study of both the Śvetāmbara and Digambara ascetic traditions.

19th century scholars considered Jain *gaccha*s to be an exclusively ascetic form of division originating over ascetics' differences of opinion on the interpretation of scripture or correct forms of religious practice (Banks 1986: 453), and earlier scholarship tended to dismiss the concerns underlying the formation of new Jain ascetic groups as supposedly marginal formalities (Folkert 1993: 163). Yet there is a strong overlap between ascetic and lay communal structures, with ascetic communities 'imposing' *gaccha* divisions on the laity to secure patronage (Banks 1986: 449), or lay individuals and communities vice-versa engineering the development of ascetic lineages (see below). For Jain renouncers as well as laypeople, the social identity of the *gaccha* is just as consequential as central religious principles like non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) and non-possession (*aparigraha*; Banks 1986: 449). And seemingly insignificant issues like ritual calendars sometimes underlying disputes between *gaccha*s ultimately relate to questions of authority and to fundamental aspects of Jainism like karma theory and soteriology (Cort 1999).

Cort (1991: 661) identified four main principles behind the formation of subdivisions (*samudāya*) in the 20th century CE Śvetāmbara Tapāgaccha, including demographic and geographic factors, the charisma of mendicant leaders, and splits. While disagreements are but rarely attested as causes of the arising of modern-day Tapāgaccha *samudāya*s, Dundas (2007: 13) found that in the early modern period (ca. 1400-1800 CE) new Tapāgaccha sub-lineages regularly emerged through disputes about legitimate succession between *sūri* (= *ācārya*) rank pupils of a lineage incumbent (*paṭṭadhara*, *gacchādhipati*). In the diverse, late medieval and early modern, Śvetāmbara Mūrtipūjaka sectarian milieu, Tapāgaccha scholar-monks articulated and consolidated the dominance of their tradition among others by polemically engaging with rival *gaccha*s on issues like ritual practice, calendar, and liturgy (Dundas 2007). [4] Śvetāmbara and Digambara mendicant lineages also developed and performed idiosyncratic tantric rituals to legitimise themselves as the sole, proper transmitters of the tradition of Mahāvīra and secure the exclusive patronage of lay communities (Gough 2021: 78-9, 88, 102-3, 194-5, 207).

Early Modern Digambara Ascetic Traditions

As with the study of the Digambara tradition in general, the scholarly analysis of Digambara ascetic lineages has lagged behind in comparison to that of their Śvetāmbara counterparts. Early modern Digambara division is more often discussed with reference to the 17th century CE Adhyātma and the split between the Terāpantha and Bīsapantha factions. For most of the second millennium CE however, Digambara ascetic traditions were organised around lineages of *bhaṭṭāraka*s of different ascetic traditions. Adhyātma was a movement carried by both Śvetāmbara and Digambara laymen, and never had an ascetic component. The Digambara Terāpantha which arose in the 17th century CE in opposition to the *bhaṭṭāraka*s and their communities (the Bīsapantha), and rejected the use of flowers and fruits in *pūjā* rituals, also remained a purely lay movement until the 20th century CE. In the first half of the 20th century CE, naked, itinerant Digambara *muni*s reappeared in growing numbers, a process sometimes referred to as the *muni* revival.[5] These renouncers are now well-organised in *ācārya* lineages which claim to carry the tradition of ancient and medieval Digambara *ācārya*s but are not traced back to the *bhaṭṭāraka* traditions or to any other pre-20th century CE ascetic lineages. The leading *ācārya*s of these contemporary Digambara ascetic communities (*saṅgha*) often explicitly identify with either the Terāpantha or Bīsapantha, or align with either one more implicitly, through their ritual orientation, discourse, and patterns of patronage. *Bhaṭṭāraka*

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[4] The Tapāgaccha also asserted its predominance through scriptural exegesis and the divinization of a past incumbent as a miracle working deity (Dundas 2007).
[5] See, however, Detige forthcoming on 19th century CE precedents.

seats continue to flourish in south India (Flügel 2006: 346), and a large part of the lay Digambara communities of western India also retain their Bīsapanthī identity. Yet, the western and central Indian *bhaṭṭāraka* lineages which are the focus of this article were all discontinued in the 19th and 20th century CE.

Early modern *bhaṭṭāraka*s were active in temple construction, icon consecration (*pratiṣṭhā*) and other ritual practice, literary composition, and manuscript copying. In juxtaposing them to the idealised contemporary Digambara *muni*s, popular as well as scholarly accounts often describe the *bhaṭṭāraka*s as 'administrator-clerics' or 'semi-ascetics', and depict them as the incumbents of an 'institution' established in response to the persecution and harassment of naked *muni*s in the Sultanate era (1206-1526 CE). It is now clear, however, that the ascetic rank of *bhaṭṭāraka* was formalised earlier in the late medieval period, superseding the previously (and now again) paramount rank of the *ācārya*. Furthermore, although the *bhaṭṭāraka*s were clothed and sedentary from at least the Mughal era (1526-1857 CE) onwards, ample evidence remains to show that their lay and ascetic devotees venerated them as ideal renouncers (Detige 2019). The *bhaṭṭāraka*s also led ascetic *saṅgha*s, which up to respectively the first half of the 17th and the late 18th century CE, included renouncers of the *muni* and *ācārya* ranks, hitherto thought to have disappeared early in the Sultanate period (Detige 2018).

The most widely distributed Digambara ascetic tradition in second millennium western and central India was the Mūlasaṅgha Balātkāragaṇa, and relatively plentiful information on it is now available. With half a dozen lineages, the Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha Nanditaṭagaccha was also widespread, and the related Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha Māthuragaccha also had a presence in the region, but the spread and development of these Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha traditions is in need of further study.[6] Through repeated lineage bifurcations reoccurring throughout the early modern period, seats (*gādī*, *gaddī*, *paṭṭa*) of the Balātkāragaṇa and the Nanditaṭagaccha traditions were established in numerous towns across western and central India. Ascetic traditions and individual seats were often closely connected to specific Digambara castes. The various lineages of each tradition typically cooperated (Joharāpurakara 1958: 11-2, 19-21), Balātkāragaṇa *bhaṭṭāraka*s occasionally performing *pratiṣṭhā*s together (e.g., Cort 2002: 54), and new incumbents sometimes consecrated by the *bhaṭṭāraka*s of other seats (Detige 2019: 15). Yet, there is evidence of antagonism between the Balātkāragaṇa and the Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha, and sometimes even the relations between related Balātkāragaṇa lineages were strained. In 1873 and 1878 CE, for example, the local ruler Rājā Bhavānīsiṅha had to settle a dispute between the *bhaṭṭāraka*s Śīlendrabhūṣaṇa and Cārucandrabhūṣaṇa, the incumbents of the Balātkāragaṇa Cambalaśākhā's Gvāliyara-paṭṭa and Sonāgiri-paṭṭa seats (Joharāpurakara 1971: 115, n. 304, see below on these lineages). This dispute concerned the authority to construct temples on the Sonagiri hill, an important pilgrimage site in Madhya Pradesh.

20th century scholarship, mostly by Jain scholars writing in Hindi, did valuable work to reconstruct the successions and bifurcations of the various *bhaṭṭāraka* lineages of early modern western and central India. On the basis of textual and epigraphic sources, Vidyādhara Joharāpurakara (1958) presented a comprehensive overview of the Mūlasaṅgha and Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha lineages in his seminal *Bhaṭṭāraka Sampradāya*. Some information on individual lineages had already been made available in earlier scholarship, and later Jain scholars continued to fill out the picture (see Detige 2024a: 32). Yet, the dynamics behind the

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[6] Phūlacandra Śāstrī's (1985) identification of the Terāpantha and the Bīsapantha with the Mūlasaṅgha and the Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha respectively is entirely unfounded. For other Digambara ascetic traditions and their activities in western India, see Premī 1915, Joharapurakara 1958; 1965: 1-16, 1971: 15-24, Flügel 2006: 346.

formation of *bhaṭṭāraka* lineages remained poorly understood and the frequent relocations of their seats often went unnoticed. Lineage bifurcations were often presumed to have originated from disputes between pretender-successors,[7] or through charismatic, influential incumbents inaugurating additional seats. In the present article, I advance our understanding of the development of pre-20th century Digambara ascetic lineages by analysing the case of the Balātkāragaṇa lineages of western and central India. I draw from extensive new research on epigraphic, manuscript, and archaeological sources.[8]

Mūlasaṅgha Balātkāragaṇa

Inscriptions, manuscript colophons, and other textual sources refer to the Balātkāragaṇa tradition in full as the Mūlasaṅgha Balātkāragaṇa Sarasvatīgaccha Kundakundācāryāmnāya (alt. Kundakundācāryānvāya). The latter two appellations are additional epithets for the Balātkāragaṇa rather than further subdivisions within it. The string of locatives used in countless primary sources ('*mūlasaṅghe balātkāragaṇe sarasvatīgacche kundakundācāryāmnāye*') should thus be understood as 'in the Original community, the Fierce troupe [also called the] the Ascetic group of Sarasvatī [and the] Tradition of Kundakunda'. And not, as is sometimes done, as 'in the Kundakundācāryāmnāya, which is part of the Sarasvatīgaccha, part of the Balātkāragaṇa, in the Mūlasaṅgha'. One more epithet sometimes interjected, Nandyamnāya, signifies 'the felicitous lineage'. P.S. Jaini (2017: 29-30) proffered that the appellation Balātkāragaṇa refers to the name of a caste of bangle-makers (*balakāra*, *balagāra*, Sanskrit *valaya-kāra*, Kannada *baḷegāra*). Usually however, it is taken to refer to the fierceness in debate (*balātkāra*, use of force) of the medieval members of this ascetic group (*gaṇa*). Because in contemporary Hindi, the primary meanings of the word *balātkāra* are violence, coercion, and especially rape, laypeople today mostly prefer to refer to the tradition as the Mūlasaṅgha.

Lineage lists (*paṭṭāvalī*) of the Balātkāragaṇa commonly found in Digambara manuscript collections trace back the tradition to Ācārya Bhadrabāhu, dated to the first century BCE (Hoernle 1891, 1892). Presumably late medieval or early modern fabrications, these texts incorporate illustrious Digambara authors and philosophers from the ancient period like Kundakunda and Umāsvati into a single lineage. Many *paṭṭāvalī*s include the year of consecration (*paṭṭa*) of each incumbent and cite the name of a town as the purported location of either their seat or their consecration to it. The oldest historical attestations of the Balātkāragaṇa date from the 11th and 12th century CE and predominantly stem from Karnataka (Joharāpurakara 1958: 44). Yet, the *paṭṭāvalī* accounts, again probably purely imaginatively, posit a northern Indian spread of the undivided Balātkāragaṇa from the first century BCE onwards. They locate its seat in towns in the contemporary states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, and especially Madhya Pradesh, prior to a turn to Ajmer in the 13th century CE, and, as confirmed, to Delhi in the 14th century CE. From the 15th to the 18th century CE, the Balātkāragaṇa proliferated, with repeated bifurcations leading to a network of ca. a dozen lineages occupying complementary territories across western and central India that served local lay communities.

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[7] In fact, possibly the only known case comes from the 18th century CE Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha Nanditaṭagaccha, with two quarrelling pupils of Bhaṭṭāraka Surendrakīrti (Sakalakīrti and Vijayakīrti) both coming to occupy a seat in Surat (Detige 2024a: 189).

[8] Next to published and unpublished manuscript sources and inscriptions of temple icons (*mūrtilekha*), memorials of renouncers have been especially helpful in studying the formation and geographical distribution of the western and central Indian Balātkāragaṇa lineages, and I frequently draw from findings developed at length in Detige 2024a, esp. p. 30-75.

These various Balātkāragaṇa lineages all used the same, previously discussed string of epithets, without further, individual appellations to distinguish between themselves. Joharāpurakara (1958) therefore coined names for a dozen Balātkāragaṇa lineages which became naturalised in later scholarship, using the terminology of branches (*śākhā*) not used in primary sources (image 1, left column).[9] While many of these names refer to the location of the seat of the last incumbent known to Joharāpurakara, [10] later scholarship often unwarrantedly took them as indicating that the lineages had been located in these towns throughout their often centuries-long existence. In reality, important parts of their history had often played out in other towns and sometimes entirely different regions. The so-called Īḍaraśākhā for example seems to have settled in Idar (north Gujarat) no sooner than around the turn of the 19th century CE, while in the close to four centuries of its prior existence, it had instead been centred in places like Sagwara and Udaipur (both south Rajasthan), and perhaps for a short while also in Surat (coastal Gujarat). I therefore introduce alternative appellations to refer to individual Balātkāragaṇa branches (*śākhā*) and seats (*paṭṭa*) (image 1, right column).

Dilli-Jayapuraśākhā	Ḍhūṇḍhāḍaśākhā
Īḍaraśākhā	Brhadvāgaḍāśākhā
Bhānapuraśākhā	Laghuvāgaḍāśākhā
Nāgauraśākhā	Śākambharīśākhā Ajamera-paṭṭa
	Śākambharīśākhā Nāgaura-paṭṭa
Sūrataśākhā	Lāṭaśākhā Sūrata-paṭṭa
	Lāṭaśākhā Bāraḍolī-paṭṭa
Jerahaṭaśākhā	Mālavāśākhā Canderī-paṭṭa
	Mālavāśākhā Siroñja-paṭṭa
	unnamed
Aṭeraśākhā	Cambalaśākhā Gvāliyara-paṭṭa
Sonāgiriśākhā	Cambalaśākhā Sonāgiri-paṭṭa

Image 12.1: Scholarly appellations for Balātkāragaṇa lineages (Joharāpurakara 1958, left; mine, right).

My appellations for the various Balātkāragaṇa lineages refer to the geographical regions where they centred their activities for more substantial parts of their history: the Ḍhūṇḍhāḍa and Śākambharī regions of Central Rajasthan, the Vāgaḍā region of south Rajasthan and north-east Gujarat, the Lāṭa region of southern, coastal Gujarat, and Malwa (Mālavā), and Chambal (Cambala) in Central India. My names for lineages arising from further bifurcations within these regional branches refer to the towns where their seats (*paṭṭa*) remained settled for a long time (Lāṭaśākhā Sūrata-paṭṭa, Śākambharīśākhā Ajamera-paṭṭa and Nāgaura-

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[9] Further bifurcations of the Nāgaura-, Sūrata-, Jerahaṭa-, and Lātūraśākhās did not receive separate appellations.

[10] This is the case for the Kārañjā-, Lātūra-, Īḍara-, Sūrata-, Dilli-Jayapura- [Jaipur], Nāgaura-, Bhānapura-, and Sonāgiriśākhās, and probably also for the Aṭeraśākhā.

paṭṭa,[11] and Cambalaśākhā Sonāgiri-paṭṭa), or, in the absence of conclusive evidence on their whereabouts throughout their existence, to the towns to which they are related in the available attestations (Lāṭaśākhā Bāraḍolī-paṭṭa, Mālavāśākhā Canderī-paṭṭa and Siroñja-paṭṭa,[12] and Cambalaśākhā Gvāliyara-paṭṭa). The appellations Brhadvāgaḍāśākhā (or in short, Brhatśākhā, major lineage) and Laghuvāgaḍāśākhā (Laghuśākhā, minor lineage) indicate the original subordination of the latter lineage to the former, and their connection to eponymous Huṃbaḍa caste groups (see below).[13] I do not propose alternatives for Joharāpurakara's appellation Uttaraśākhā (Northern branch), which serves well to indicate the claimed northern distribution of the single, late medieval Balātkāragaṇa succession, nor for the Prācīnaśākhā (Ancient branch), the Central Indian Kārañjāśākhā which seem to have arisen from the latter, and the Lāṭūraśākhā, a further offshoot which again bifurcated in the second half of the 17th century CE (Detige 2024a: 57-8).

Balātkāragaṇa Bifurcations and Distribution

The Balātkāragaṇa Uttaraśākhā seat in Delhi stood at the origin of a complex of lineages which kept developing throughout the early modern period through repeated bi- and trifurcations (cf. Detige 2024a: 44-58). These lineages branched out across western and central India, covering towns and regions with lay Digambara communities in the contemporary states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and western Uttar Pradesh. A first bifurcation occurred around the turn of the 15th century CE, when at least three claimed successors to Bhaṭṭāraka Padmanandi (*paṭṭa* s. 1385-1450)[14] came to stand at the origins of lineages active in geographically dispersed locations (image 2). In Delhi, Padmanandi was succeeded by Bhaṭṭāraka Śubhacandra (*paṭṭa* s. 1450-1507). The Vāgaḍāśākhā founder Bhaṭṭāraka Sakalakīrti (b. s. 1443, d. s. 1499) is mostly attested in south Rajasthan and north Gujarat. And the activities of Muni Devendrakīrti (fl. s. 1473-93) in south Gujarat and central India led to the origins of respectively the Lāṭaśākhā and the Mālavāśākhā. Joharāpurakara and Kāsalīvāla (1975: 130) cite a *paṭṭāvalī* from Jaipur recording a fourth, unnamed pupil of Padmanandi being sent 'south' (not further specified where exactly) and also coming to occupy a seat there. In the second half of the 15th and the first half of the 16th century CE, during and after the incumbency of Śubhacandra's Delhi-based successor Bhaṭṭāraka Jinacandra (*paṭṭa* s. 1507-71), this lineage trifurcated once again (image 2). Three successors to Jinacandra stood at the origins of what I term respectively the Ḍhūṇḍhāḍaśākhā, the Śākambharīśākhā, and the Cambalaśākhā, Prabhācandra (*paṭṭa* s. 1571-81?), Ratnakīrti (I) (*paṭṭa* s. 1572?), and Siṅhakīrti (fl. s. 1520-1531). Further bifurcations occurred in five of these by now six Balātkāragaṇa lineages, all save the Ḍhūṇḍhāḍaśākhā.

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[11] Joharāpurakara and Kāsalīvāla (1975: 227) also framed their discussion of these lineages with explicit reference to the Śākambharī region. K.C. Jain (1963: 85-8) already spoke of the 'Nagaur Patta' and the 'Ajmer Patta', and Kāsalīvāla (1989: 157-162) similarly referred to the 'Nāgaura patta' and the 'Ajamera patta'. A single record attests to a third Śākambharīśākhā lineage consisting of four successive *ācārya*s which was unknown to Joharāpurakara (1958), and is left unnamed by me (see below).

[12] Here, I follow Śāstrī (1992: 90, *et passim*), who also used the names 'Canderī-paṭṭa' and 'Siroñja-paṭṭa' (though not Mālavāśākhā). The Siroñja-paṭṭa was unknown to Joharāpurakara (1958), but has meanwhile been partially documented by Śāstrī (1992: 88-90).

[13] Joharāpurakara and Kāsalīvāla (1975: 162-3) also referred already to the '*brhad śākhā*' and the '*laghu śākhā*'.

[14] Depending on the month, the *vikrama samvat* calendar (abbr. s.) used in Digambara sources from northern India runs 56 or 57 years ahead of CE. Because it is only possible to make the conversion to an exact year in CE if a full date is given, and not all secondary or even primary sources do so, I do not calculate CE correspondences here. A single year given as *paṭṭa* refers to the recorded consecration to the seat, a date range to the recorded or reconstructed period of incumbency.
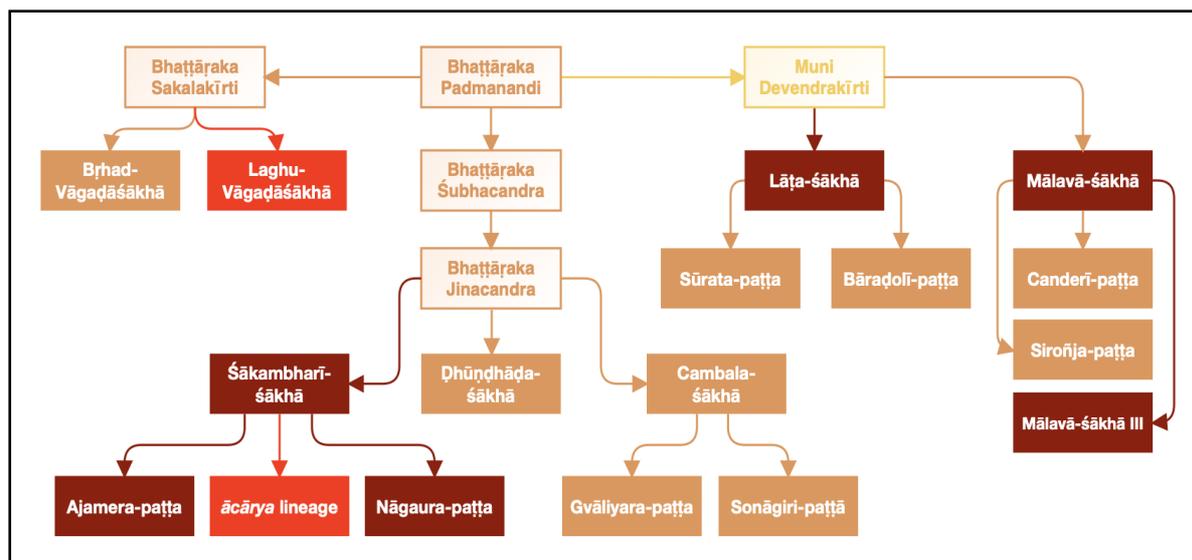
Image 12.2: Lineage bifurcations of the Balātkāragaṇa in western and central India. Colours indicate the rank of the first incumbent(s) of each lineage: *bhaṭṭāraka* (orange), *maṇḍalācārya* (maroon), or *ācārya* (red).

While later accounts of the Vāgaḍāśākhā typically record the direct succession of its founder Bhaṭṭāraka Sakalakīrti by Bhaṭṭāraka Bhuvanakīrti (fl. 1510s-1520s), a few attestations are found of two earlier, consecutive successors to Sakalakīrti from the first half of the 15th century CE, Dharmakīrti (*paṭṭa* s. 1471-95?) and Vimalendrakīrti (*paṭṭa* s. 1495-1508?). The Vāgaḍāśākhā went through a gradual bifurcation which started in the later 15th century CE with two successors to Bhuvanakīrti, but was only completed in the first half of the 17th century CE (see below, next section). The Brhatśākhā sprang from Bhaṭṭāraka Jñānabhūṣaṇa (fl. s. 1531-60, abdicated s. 1557/8?), and the subordinate Laghuśākhā from Ācārya Jñānakīrti (fl. s. 1534). The bifurcation of the Lāṭaśākhā occurred around the turn of the 16th century CE, during the time of Bhaṭṭāraka Mallibhūṣaṇa (fl. s. 1544) or his successor Bhaṭṭāraka Lakṣmīcandra (fl. s. 1556-82). The Lāṭaśākhā Sūrata-paṭṭa, which originated under Vīracandra (n.d.), may have had a continuous, stable presence in Surat up to its discontinuation in the 20th century CE. The Lāṭaśākhā Bāraḍolī-paṭṭa originated with Abhayacandra (fl. s. 1548). Around the turn of the 17th century CE, two of its incumbents are recorded to have been consecration in Bardoli (Bāraḍolī), just 30 km east of Surat, but the lineage is also attested to have been active in Maharashtra and Saurashtra. The Mālavāśākhā trifurcated around the turn of the 17th century CE. Two *bhaṭṭāraka* lineages were connected to and probably based in respectively Canderi and Sironj, towns in Madhya Pradesh less than 150 km removed from each other. A few inscriptions from the first quarter of the 17th century CE attest to a third Mālavāśākhā originating around the same time, consisting of a succession of a *maṇḍalācārya* and an *ācārya* (see below, next section). A trifurcation in the Śākambharīśākhā occurred in the early 18th century CE. The Ajamera-paṭṭa remained firmly established in Ajmer from the mid-18th century CE to its demise in the first half of the 20th century CE. The whereabouts of the early Nāgaura-paṭṭa are still less clear, but its last incumbent in the second half of the 20th century CE and probably a good number of his predecessors were seated in Nagaur, 135 km north-west of Ajmer. A third Śākambharīśākhā lineage consisting of four successive *ācārya*s originated at the same time as the Ajamera-paṭṭa and the Nāgaura-paṭṭa, and was also active in the Śākambharī region. The Cambalaśākhā, finally, bifurcated in the second half of the 18th century CE, following Bhaṭṭāraka Lakṣmībhūṣaṇa. The Gvāliyara-paṭṭa originated with Bhaṭṭāraka Jinendrabhūṣaṇa (fl. s. 1819-45) and the Sonāgiri-paṭṭa with Bhaṭṭāraka

Munīndrabhūṣaṇa (fl. s. 1842).[15] The latter lineage came to be based at the pilgrimage site of Sonagiri, 70 km south of Gwalior. In respectively the later 17th century CE and in the late 19th century CE (and maybe later also), the undivided Cambalaśākhā and the Gvāliyara-paṭṭa were active in Shauripura-Bateshvara (Uttar Pradesh), which is a pilgrimage site on the banks of the Yamuna river some 70 km south-east of Agra.

*Maṇḍalācārya*s

While scholars ever since Joharāpurakara (1958) have discussed all the attested western and central Indian Balātkāragaṇa branches as *bhaṭṭāraka* lineages, it is now clear that several lineages originated as a succession of lower-ranking *ācārya*s or *maṇḍalācārya*s which developed into an independent *bhaṭṭāraka* lineage only decades or even centuries later (cf. Detige 2024a: 58-75). Often the first incumbent of a *maṇḍalācārya* lineage to obtain the *bhaṭṭāraka* rank already initiated the practice of ascribing this higher rank to his predecessors, probably as a strategy to legitimise his own claims to the *bhaṭṭāraka* rank and to boost his lineage's prestige. The actual, lower ranks of the earlier incumbents may have been forgotten very soon. The countless epigraphic and manuscript sources created in later decades and centuries which recorded *ācārya* and *maṇḍalācārya* rank incumbents as *bhaṭṭāraka*s thus 'falsified' the archive, misleading modern scholars into thinking of the lineage bifurcations as direct multiplications of *bhaṭṭāraka* seats. Rarer sources sitting closer in time to the earlier, lower-ranking incumbents, like the inscriptions of their memorial stones, are hence valuable, sometimes unique witnesses to their actual ranks. The Digambara ascetic rank of *maṇḍalācārya* is now no longer used, and until recently very little was known about it. Although attestations of *maṇḍalācārya*s are found in the materials edited by Joharāpurakara (1958), he discussed neither the rank nor individual *maṇḍalācārya*s in his analysis of these sources. Joharāpurakara and Kāsalīvāla (1975: 117) later held that 16th century CE-*bhaṭṭāraka*s seated in Delhi appointed *maṇḍalācārya*s to conduct icon consecrations (*pratiṣṭhā*), rituals (*pūjā*), and festivals (*samāroha*) on their behalf. With reference to the Cambalaśākhās, N.K. Jaina (2013: 188-9) more recently argued that *maṇḍalācārya*s were appointed by and subordinated to *bhaṭṭāraka*s, and administered a part of their influence spheres as their authorised representatives. *Maṇḍalācārya*s are now found to have commonly operated in western and central Indian Balātkāragaṇa lineages from the 15th to the 18th century CE, and they are also attested to from the generally still lesser studied Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha tradition as well as from south India.[16]

Balātkāragaṇa consecration manuals outlining the rites of initiation into the various consecutive Digambara ascetic ranks (*kṣullaka*, *muni*, *upādhyāya*, *ācārya*, *bhaṭṭāraka*) do not include prescriptions for the consecration of a *maṇḍalācārya* (Detige 2019). Nor have I found indications of such a practice elsewhere. While, for simplicity's sake, I refer to *maṇḍalācārya*-hood as an ascetic rank, intermediately located between those of the *ācārya* and *bhaṭṭāraka*, it might be more correctly understood as a mere title or designation, distinguishing these individuals from common *ācārya*s, and probably entailing additional tasks and responsibilities.

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[15] Joharāpurakara (1958) had limited available sources to reconstruct the Cambalaśākhās, but N.K. Jaina (2013: 189-93) meanwhile established improved dates for many incumbents.

[16] An early attestation of one Śrīkīrti receiving the title of *maṇḍalācārya* is found in an inscription from western India from around the turn of the 13th century CE (s. 12[5X], Dhaky 2001: 53). A Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha Māthuragaccha *maṇḍalācārya* is attested in a manuscript colophon from s. 1582 recording Muni Maṇḍalācārya Kṣemakīrti as a pupil of Bhaṭṭāraka Guṇabhadra (Kāsalīvāla 1950: 149, n. 27c). And the unpublished inscription of a pillar in Chand Kheri (Rajasthan) records one Maṇḍalācārya Keśavasena in an unspecified relation to Bhaṭṭāraka Sumatikīrti, an incumbent of the Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha Nandītaṭagaccha Laghuśākhā. 12th and 13th century CE *maṇḍalācārya*s are attested from Karnataka (Settar 1989: 34, 40).

I presume that the authority to select and appoint a new *maṇḍalācārya* lay with the incumbent *bhaṭṭāraka* of the main lineage, rather than with the previous *maṇḍalācārya*s or the lay and ascetic communities directly connected to them. Since *maṇḍalācārya*s were subordinate to *bhaṭṭāraka*s, they can also be considered as belonging to the *bhaṭṭāraka saṅgha*s and lineages. Yet, successions of *maṇḍalācārya*s are often recorded with the same terminology of succession as used in the records of *bhaṭṭāraka* lineages ('*tatpaṭṭe*'), which indicates that they conceived of themselves as proper lineages in their own right. It usually remains unclear whether *maṇḍalācārya*s were granted the promotion to *bhaṭṭāraka*-hood by their former superiors or claimed this rank, and with that de facto independence, in defiance of their superiors. Only in the case of the Vāgaḍāśākhās, evidence of friction concerning the Laghuśākhā's territorial expansion from Naugama into the former Brhatśākhā home-base, Sagwara under the first Laghuśākhā *bhaṭṭāraka* Ratnacandra indicates that his promotion may also have been contested by the Brhatśākhā (Detige 2024a: 302).

Gough (2017: 296-7) concludes that the early modern *bhaṭṭāraka*s' monopoly over the *sūri-mantra* set them apart from *ācārya*s, but does not discuss *maṇḍalācārya*s. The secreted *sūri-mantra* is crucial in the performance of Digambara icon consecrations and was indeed transmitted to early modern *bhaṭṭāraka*s as part of their initiation to the seat (Detige 2019: 14-6). Yet, inscribed ritual diagrams (*yantra*) consecrated by early modern *ācārya*s are found with some frequency, and *yantra*s and icons (*mūrti*) consecrated by *maṇḍalācārya*s are also known, even if these are relatively few compared to the actual prevalence of *maṇḍalācārya*s. Specific contexts like the unavailability of a *bhaṭṭāraka* to perform a *pratiṣṭhā* may have called for pragmatic solutions in individual cases. Yet, it is also possible that there existed a division of tasks, with *maṇḍalācārya*s and even common *ācārya*s occasionally consecrating minor ritual objects like *yantra*s, but *bhaṭṭāraka*s typically monopolising the more elaborate and more prestigious consecration of *mūrti*s. Attestations of renouncers initiated by *maṇḍalācārya*s are very rare, and probably the performance of ascetic initiations (*dīkṣā*) remained a prerogative of the *bhaṭṭāraka*s. Memorial inscriptions and manuscript colophons, however, do regularly attest to *brahmacārī*s, *muni*s, and even *ācārya*s as pupils of *maṇḍalācārya*s. And a few sources record considerably large pupillary circles of lower-ranking renouncers connected to specific *maṇḍalācārya*s. These ascetic communities may have played a role in the *maṇḍalācārya*s' tendency towards autonomy. A parallel dynamic is observed in the Śvetāmbara Tapāgaccha, where small ascetic groups coming to see their supervising *ācārya* as their sole source of authority developed into new Tapāgaccha subdivisions (Cort 1991: 661).

The history of the early Laghuvāgaḍāśākhā forms a particularly clear illustration of the gradual formation of *bhaṭṭāraka* lineages. The first three incumbents, who flourished from the late 15th century CE onwards, Jñānakīrti (fl. s. 1534), Ratnakīrti (*paṭṭa* s. 1535), and Yaśaḥkīrti (d. s. 1613), were *ācārya*s. The next three Laghuśākhā incumbents Guṇacandra (fl. s. 1618?, d. s. 1653), Jinacandra (*paṭṭa* s. 1654-8), and Sakalacandra (fl. s. 1658, d. s. 1670) were *maṇḍalācārya*s. The 7th incumbent Ratnacandra (p. s. 1670-99, d. s. 1707), who flourished in the first half of the 17th century CE, is recorded as a *maṇḍalācārya* in early attestations. But mid-way through his term, he came to carry the *bhaṭṭāraka* rank, which his successors also held. The Laghuśākhā's development thus took place in three distinct steps, taking place over a period of a century and a half. The first Śākambharīśākhā incumbent Ratnakīrti (I) (*paṭṭa* s. 1572?) is recorded as a *bhaṭṭāraka* in some sources that are coeval or roughly coeval to him, but as a *maṇḍalācārya* in others. Yet, the undivided Śākambharīśākhā was a *maṇḍalācārya* lineage throughout its further existence, from Ratnakīrti (I)'s successors in the early 16th century CE until its trifurcation in the early 18th century CE following Maṇḍalācārya Ratnakīrti (II). The Ajamera-paṭṭa probably remained a *maṇḍalācārya* lineage until its 5th incumbent Vijayakīrti in the mid-18th century CE. The undivided Śākambharīśākhā and its continuation in

the Ajamera-paṭṭa thus was a *maṇḍalācārya* lineage for no less than two centuries and a half. Information on the early incumbents of the Nāgaura-paṭṭa is missing, but this lineage may have gone through a roughly synchronous evolution.

Devendrakīrti (fl. s. 1473-93), who stood at the origins of the Lāṭa- and Mālavāśākhās, is only found attested as a *muni* in sources that are contemporary to him. Vidyānandi (fl. s. 1499-1537), his first successor in the Lāṭaśākhā, is consecutively attested as *muni*, *ācārya*, and *maṇḍalācārya*. Vidyānandi's successor Mallibhūṣaṇa (fl. s. 1544) was the first Lāṭaśākhā incumbent to hold the *bhaṭṭāraka* rank. The first Mālavāśākhā incumbent Tribhuvanakīrti (fl. s. 1525-52) was also a *maṇḍalācārya*. The ranks (and dates) of his successors Sahasrakīrti, Padmanandi, and Yaśaḥkīrti are unconfirmed, but the next incumbents Lalitakīrti (n.d.) and Dharmakīrti (fl. s. 1645-83) are known to have been *bhaṭṭāraka*s. The first Ḍhūṇḍhāḍaśākhā incumbent Bhaṭṭāraka Prabhācandra (*paṭṭa* s. 1571-81?) was succeeded by two *maṇḍalācārya*s, Dharmacandra (*paṭṭa* s. 1581-1603) and Lalitakīrti (*paṭṭa* s. 1603-22). The next incumbent Candrakīrti (*paṭṭa* s. 1622-?) is attested as a *maṇḍalācārya* until s. 1645, but as a *bhaṭṭāraka* from s. 1653 onwards. Almost exceptionally, the Cambalaśākhā seems to have been a *bhaṭṭāraka* lineage from its very origin in the second half of the 15th century CE. Yet, while the first Cambalaśākhā incumbent Bhaṭṭāraka Siṅhakīrti (fl. s. 1520-31) is recorded as a successor to the Uttaraśākhā Bhaṭṭāraka Jinacandra (*paṭṭa* s. 1507-71) in some sources, the notable frequency of attestations of Siṅhakīrti without any record of his predecessors (otherwise rarely encountered by this time) may indicate discomfort about his *bhaṭṭāraka*-hood, side by side with the flourishing Uttaraśākhā *Bhaṭṭāraka*.

Socio-political Conditions

Socio-political contexts and economic conditions were often key factors in the development of ascetic lineages and the relocations of their seats, as becomes clear when mapping the development of the Balātkāragaṇa onto imperial and regional, political histories. In their frequent relocations, ascetic leaders and their *saṅgha*s undoubtedly followed in the track of lay communities migrating away from declining polities in search of professional opportunities at newly founded capital cities and in flourishing trading towns. The Indo-Persian polities of the Delhi Sultanate, the regional Sultanates, and the Mughal Empire, and their capitals Delhi, Agra, Mandu, and Ahmedabad often proved as attractive to lay and ascetic Digambara communities as rising Hindu kingdoms, like those of the Sisodiyā and the Kachavāhā Rajput dynasties, and their respective capitals Chittorgarh, Amer, and Jaipur.

The Sultanate and Mughal capital Delhi attracted the seat of several *bhaṭṭāraka* traditions throughout the centuries (Detige 2024a: 5-6). A spurt of Digambara temple construction also took place in Agra, which was founded as the new capital of the Delhi Sultanate by Sikandar Lodi (r. 1489-1517) in 1505 CE and intermittently served as the Mughal capital up to 1648 CE. By the end of the 16th century CE, various Digambara temples in Agra were connected to at least five different Balātkāragaṇa and Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha lineages, and two *bhaṭṭāraka*s resided in the city (Detige 2020: 196; 2024a: 108). In Agra, Delhi, and Jaipur, Jain neighbourhoods were located close to the imperial and royal courts, indicating the importance of Jain merchants and administrators in the Sultanate, Mughal, and Kachavāhā polities. Frequent attestations are found of *bhaṭṭāraka*s visiting and being honoured at the courts of the Delhi, Gujarat, Malwa, and Bahmani sultanates, where they represented their lay Digambara constituencies and especially curried the favour of the Indo-Persian rulers by performing miraculous feats like flying their palanquins (Detige in preparation). This conveyance was itself one of many courtly symbols and practices which the *bhaṭṭāraka*s adopted from sovereign rulers. We can thus conceptualise the *bhaṭṭāraka*s as the kingpins of their own polities (Detige 2024a: 103-17).

The 14th century CE Uttaraśākhā Bhaṭṭāraka Padmanandi is recorded to have relocated from Ajmer to Delhi, then capital of the Tughluq dynasty (1320-1413 CE), and, as discussed, various pupils of Padmanandi stood at the origin of Balātkāragaṇa lineages, active in western and central India. Under Muhammad Tuġluq (r. 1325-51 CE), the Delhi Sultanate for a short while expanded across much of the Indian subcontinent. This may well have been a factor in the sudden proliferation of the Balātkāragaṇa a few decades later, reminiscent of how the Tughluq era political unification, and especially the conquest and annexation of Gujarat, led the Śvetāmbara Kharataragaccha to imagine a pilgrimage network that spread across western India (Vose 2013: 17, 83). As Digambara lay communities became connected across larger swathes of territory through safe trade routes and integrated markets, Padmanandi's pupils also circulated throughout the extended Sultanate dominion, in response to new opportunities for patronage, with *maṇḍalācārya*s appointed to facilitate the administration of the Balātkāragaṇa's enlarged sphere of influence. While the proliferation of the Balātkāragaṇa thus seems to have depended on the strength and expanse of the Delhi Sultanate, its decline and the rise of the regional, breakaway Sultanates of Malwa and Gujarat in turn formed the incentive for the development of the formerly subordinate Mālavāśākhā and Lāṭaśākhā *maṇḍalācārya* lineages into independent *bhaṭṭāraka* lineages.[17]

The now particularly well-known history of the late Balātkāragaṇa Uttaraśākhā and its continuation in the Ḍhūṇḍhāḍaśākhā forms a particularly clear illustration of the connection between ascetic lineages' repeated relocations and political histories.[18] From the late 14th to the early 16th centuries, the Uttaraśākhā *bhaṭṭāraka* seat was based in the capital of the Delhi Sultanate. Yet, when the political and economic situation of the Lodi dynasty deteriorated, the Lodis were defeated by the Mughals in 1526 CE, and the rule of the early Mughals was itself interrupted by the Sur Empire (1540-56 CE), the Ḍhūṇḍhāḍaśākhā moved to Chittorgarh, the capital of the powerful Sisodiyā Rajput dynasty in the Mewar region. Chittorgarh later fell prey to tensions between the Mughals and the defiant Sisodiyā *raṇa*s, and was besieged and sacked by the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605 CE) in 1567-8. Around this time the Ḍhūṇḍhāḍaśākhā was attracted to the Ḍhūṇḍhāḍa region, where it established its seat in quick succession in Chaksu, Sanganer, and Amer. The kingdom of the Kachavāhā dynasty was at the time a rising regional polity owing to its alliance with the Mughals. The latter connection probably also opened the avenue to Shahjahanabad (Delhi) for the Ḍhūṇḍhāḍaśākhā seat. In 1735 CE, a Ḍhūṇḍhāḍaśākhā incumbent was consecrated in Jayasiṅhapura, a neighbourhood of the Mughal capital founded by the Kachavāhā ruler Mahārāja Savāī Jaya Siṅha (II) (r. 1688–1743). A few years later, in 1739 CE, the founder of the Persian Afsharid dynasty, Nāder Šāh (r. 1736–1747) invaded the Mughal Empire and shortly occupied and looted Delhi. The Ḍhūṇḍhāḍaśākhā left the city and settled in Jaipur, the new Kachavāhā capital founded in 1727 CE by Jaya Siṅha (II). Jaipur by then was a flourishing trade post with Digambara laymen in important functions at the royal court. When in late colonial times the glory of the princely states waned, the Ḍhūṇḍhāḍaśākhā seat retired from Jaipur to the pilgrimage place of Mahāvīrajī.

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[17] Cort (1991: 661) also identified geographic separation and regional identification among the factors leading to the formation of new subdivisions (*samudāya*) of the 20th century CE Śvetāmbara Tapāgaccha. The Lāṭaśākhā established itself in the trading centres of coastal Gujarat, and not in the Gujarat Sultanate capitals Ahmedabad and Champaner. The earliest available evidence of Balātkāragaṇa presence in Ahmedabad dates to the last quarter of the 17th century CE. Yet, the Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha Nanditaṭagaccha is known to have been active in Ahmedabad already in the second half of the 15th century CE (Kāsalīvāla 1982: 6, with n. 2-3).

[18] This paragraph summarises an analysis developed in Detige 2024a: 211-22. See also Detige 2024b.

Caste and Patronage

The formation and development of early modern Digambara ascetic lineages also related to issues of patronage, caste identities, and sub-caste group dynamics. The incumbents of the Balātkāragaṇa Uttaraśākhā between the 13th and mid-15th century CE are recorded as coming from various Digambara castes, for example the Bagheravāla, Huṃbaḍa (= Hūmaṛa, Humaḍa, Hummaḍa), Padmāvatī Poravāla, Agravāla (= Agrotakānvaya), and Nāgadrahā castes.[19] This can probably be taken to indicate that the Uttaraśākhā was also supported by these various Digambara castes. The multiplied Balātkāragaṇa lineages were later supported by the Khaṇḍelavāla, Huṃbaḍa, Paravāra (= Paurapāṭa), and the Laveñcu (= Laṃbakañcuka) castes, while the Agravāla and Narasiṅhapurā castes were associated with the Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha. Purportedly half of the 52 clans (gotra) of the Bagheravāla caste were related to the Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha and the other half to the Balātkāragaṇa. Individual Balātkāragaṇa lineages often became closely associated to specific, regionally dominant castes. The Vāgaḍāśākhās received patronage from the Huṃbaḍa and Pūrvī Golālāre castes, while the Ḍhūṇḍhāḍaśākhā and the Śākambharīśākhā served the Khaṇḍelavāla caste. The latter is confirmed by recruitment patterns. Paṭṭāvalīs record all Ḍhūṇḍhāḍaśākhā and Śākambharīśākhā incumbents as Khaṇḍelavālas (Kāsalīvāla 1989: 146-61). Lay people maintained their connections to specific bhaṭṭāraka seats even after they migrated elsewhere. Śākambharīśākhā incumbents consecrated temples and icons in the Ḍhūṇḍhāḍaśākhā home base of Jaipur, serving communities which had migrated into the Kachavāhā capital from nearby towns within the Śākambharīśākhā sphere of influence. And in the 19th and 20th century CE, 'Māravāṛī' communities in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh also continued to call upon the services of the Śākambharīśākhā bhaṭṭārakas, even though other Balātkāragaṇa seats functioned in or nearer to their new hometowns (Detige 2024a: 387).

Subcaste group dynamics also played a role in the creation of new seats and the promotion of ascetic leaders. The Brhad- and Laghuvāgaḍāśākhās of the Balātkāragaṇa were connected to respectively the Baḍa Sājana and the Lohaḍa Sājana groups of the Huṃbaḍa caste, which in some sources are themselves also referred to as the Brhatśākhā and the Laghuśākhā (Detige 2024a: 294). Two lineages arising from a 16th century CE bifurcation of the Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha Nanditaṭagaccha were similarly connected to the Laghuśākhā and Brhatśākhā of the Narasiṅhapurā caste (Jaina 2011: 98). And in the mid-17th century CE, the Lātūraśākhā maṇḍalācārya seat was established as an offshoot of the Balātkāragaṇa Kārañjāśākhā bhaṭṭāraka seat to serve the Saitavāla caste because of their custom of widow-remarriage, which had caused a disagreement in the lay community (Detige 2015: 151). While it is possible that a conflict between multiple claimants to the seat was a factor behind the simultaneous arising of three Śākambharīśākhā lineages, increased opportunities for patronage and caste concerns may also have played a role. Sufficient resources would always have been required to support the different factions within the region. No trace is found of the ācārya lineage after the other two Śākambharīśākhā lineages transitioned from maṇḍalācārya to bhaṭṭāraka seats in the 18th century CE, and its discontinuation might indicate that resources came to be focused on the former two seats only. The promotion of lineage incumbents from the maṇḍalācārya to the bhaṭṭāraka rank may itself also have related to caste factors, as individual castes or sub-caste constituencies desired to propel their own gurus to the highest ascetic

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[19] Joharāpurakara 1958: 89-98 lekhas 223, 230, 232, Kāsalīvāla 1989: 146. Some paṭṭāvalīs record the last three Uttaraśākhā bhaṭṭārakas Prabhācandra, Padmanandi, and Śubhacandra as brahmans (Joharāpurakara 1958: 91-8, lekhas 233, 237, 246). Elsewhere they are noted as respectively Padmāvatī Poravāla, unspecified, and Agravāla (Kāsalīvāla 1989: 146).

rank and the associated prestige and ritual prerogatives, like the authority to consecrate icons and initiate renouncers.[20]

Conclusions

To date, scholarship has not adequately analysed the processes behind the formation of pre-20th century CE Digambara ascetic lineages, has been insufficiently aware of the frequent relocations of their seats, and wrongly conceived of all Balātkāragaṇa lineage bifurcations as involving the direct multiplication of a *bhaṭṭāraka* seat. It is now clear that new *bhaṭṭāraka* seats originated more often as the final outcome of sometimes long-drawn out processes that involved successions of lower-ranking *maṇḍalācārya*s, originally appointed in response to newly arisen opportunities for patronage across expanded spheres of influence. Meanwhile, the changing fates of kingdoms and empires and the attendant socio-economic conditions, the sacking of cities, the foundation of new capitals, and the flourishing of trade centres, formed push and pull factors that guided the relocation of lay and renunciant Digambara communities and sometimes led to the creation of new ascetic lineages. The mobility of the western Indian *bhaṭṭāraka* seats related to the migration of their lay supporters, who were traders, merchants, administrators, and courtiers. The more stationary *bhaṭṭāraka* monasteries (*maṭha*) of south India on the other hand were related to the sedentary agriculturalist and artisan Digambara castes. In the north, flourishing Indo-Persian polities often proved as attractive to Digambara communities as rising Rajput kingdoms. The territorial expansion of the Delhi Sultanate under the Tughluq dynasty formed the background to the Balātkāragaṇa's proliferation across western and central India. And the regional Sultanates formed the cradle for the development of formerly subordinate *maṇḍalācārya* lineages into independent and further bifurcating *bhaṭṭāraka* lineages. Bolstered caste identities and sub-caste group dynamics also played a role, as lay communities' quest for prestige led to the formation of new lineages and the higher ascetic promotion of their incumbents.

A number of western and central Indian Balātkāragaṇa and Kāṣṭhāsaṅgha lineages are now known to have flourished beyond the successions reconstructed by Joharāpurakara (1958). The majority, including possibly all Balātkāragaṇa branches, were continued up to the 19th century CE, and about half of these even lasted into the 20th century CE (Detige 2020: 210-1; 2024a: 36-9). The discontinuation of these traditions was thus not a direct consequence of the rise of the anti-*bhaṭṭāraka* Terāpantha in the 17th and 18th century CE. The ultimate fall from grace of the *bhaṭṭāraka*s was instead caused by modernistic reform movements sweeping through Digambara lay communities and the coeval reappearance of naked Digambara *muni*s in the first half of the 20th century CE. Increasingly large segments of the Bīsapanthī communities formerly associated to specific *bhaṭṭāraka* seats withdrew their support. Incumbent *bhaṭṭāraka*s were opposed, sometimes even deposed, or upon their demise no new successors were consecrated. Lay trusts were formed to organise the management of temples and other aspects of community life formerly overseen by *Bhaṭṭāraka*s, and lay

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[20] Some interesting parallels to the processes discussed in this section can be cited from the Śvetāmbara tradition. At Khambhat (Cambay) in coastal Gujarat in the 13th century CE, the bifurcation of the Tapāgaccha into the 'Little Hallers' (Laghuśālika) and the 'Big Hallers' (Vrddhaśālika) was concurrent with a split of the Prāgvāṭa caste into the Laghu (Lesser) and Brhat (Greater) or Vṛddha (Senior) branches. This process involved the influential layman and minister Vastupāla, who belonged to the former subcaste group. Dundas (2007: 51) thought that the narratives of these ascetic and lay genealogical irregularities may have arisen in tandem, and they certainly became connected in the historical memory of later generations. In the 17th century CE, Śāntidāsa Jhaverī, a wealthy merchant and leader of the Śvetāmbara community in Ahmedabad, attempted to promote his monk of choice to the paramount Śvetāmbara rank of *ācārya*, thereby instigating the split of the Tapāgaccha into the Vijaya and Sāgara branches (Ibid.: 26).

*pandit*s formed in new Digambara educational institutions took on ritual and educational roles. The ascetics of the growing *muni saṅgha*s also took over many of the *bhaṭṭāraka*s' former functions, operating as gurus, preachers, spokespersons, authors, and as ritual specialists (especially performing the consecration of temple icons). They became objects of devotion, sources of authority, and functioned as sources of inspiration in building projects, publishing, and societal projects. In their icon inscriptions (*mūrtilekha*) and elsewhere, contemporary Digambara ascetic lineages refer to themselves with the Balātkāragaṇa appellations (Balātkāragaṇa Sarasvatīgaccha, etc.). Many of their ritual practices, like initiation praxis (*dīkṣā*, Detige 2019), have indeed been adopted from the *bhaṭṭāraka* traditions. And some of the key renouncers of the early 20th century CE Digambara *muni* revival seem to have come out of south Indian *bhaṭṭāraka* milieus. Yet, contemporary Digambara *muni*s disclaim any actual, pupillary or institutional affiliation to the *bhaṭṭāraka* lineages of western and central India. The legacy of the *bhaṭṭāraka*s is instead increasingly forgotten and erased.

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Book Review

Farah Noor. (2024). *Leisurely Feelings: Emotions and Concepts of Otium in South Asia*. Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing. Open Access.

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Farah Noor's book, *Leisurely Feelings: Emotions and Concepts of Otium in South Asia* presents a unique perspective on the conceptual differences, cultural encounters, and gaps created through (mis)understanding South Asian leisurely traditions and practices, which were disregarded as an outcome of the colonial mindset. The author offers readers a conceptual-emotional comprehension of the term *śauq*, understood as idleness, leisureliness, indolence, or otium (also understood as an archaic Latin term). The book explores the representation of this term in Urdu and Bengali literary traditions to understand how these traditions could be comprehended by global/ Western readers/ audiences. This book encompasses three major parts, and each chapter focuses on the discourse of otium in various literary genres that includes autobiography, personal letters, poetry, and novels.

Diverting from Western or colonial perceptions of the term, Part I introduces the central concept of the book titled as *Literature, Otium, and Emotions: Conceptualising Leisurely Feelings in Modern Urdu and Bengali Prose*. The distinct emotional connotations of the term otium, and its shifting usage and manifestations under colonial imposition in South Asia are discussed in this chapter. In comparison, the European approach to this term is discussed as reprieve and retirement, its association with religion, asceticism, creative writing, feelings of happiness, melancholy, and alienation created by pre-industrial/ industrial societies. The author reflects on the ambiguity, spatial and temporal limits of this term that place it beyond the binaries of good and bad leisure, or outside Western notions of work-life balance. The author's objective here is to approach otium as an analytical term, to read diverse emotional experiences and debates surrounding the overlapping aspects of leisure, idleness, and indolence, primarily in South Asia, where it may also be approached as a sign of productivity, non-productivity, and entertainment. The author identifies otium at multiple levels in South Asian literature. While it is a symbol of freedom from obligation towards work, and freedom for contemplative, artistic or aesthetic engagements that is devoid of official bindings, it can also constitute an idleness that is productive without any force or a resistance towards structured obligations of work. It might also indicate resistance to a lifestyle driven by capitalist economy, or the yearning or desire for a leisurely state of being. The phrase 'leisurely feelings' here describes the shared aspects of the above-mentioned states to address several emotions and concepts that are associated with this feeling, as elaborated in the following chapters. This extensive introductory section identifies a conceptual gap in research surrounding leisure, idleness, and otium in a South Asian context that goes beyond literary research, by focusing on its historical or sociological aspects.

Reviewing a broad canvas of literature, the author explores how the feeling of otium is reflected in literary representations in South Asia, examining experiences, attitudes, and associative experiences that use 'leisurely' as an umbrella term. Leisure is incorporated within the Nehruvian ideals of national building in the postcolonial context, and in experiential Urdu and Bengali cultural contexts within the same postcolonial nation (India) that emphasizes the vernacular literary contexts of these terms. A key aspect of this focus is reflected in the author's

approach to colonialism as a single variable parameter that shifts the methodological approach of the discussion to cultural contexts rather than an over-reliance on English language texts. This discussion, therefore, focuses on the understanding of otium in South Asian literary history as a symbol of elite privilege. The overlap between otium, leisure, and idleness also results in a sense of exclusion for many communities who do not experience it (eg, soldiers, slaves). The author also analyses here the ambivalence of nostalgia that is about the loss of leisurely otium, which is then itself a manifestation of otium.

Part II, entitled *The Ambivalences of Nostalgia in Late-Nineteenth Century Urdu Literary Sphere*, explores the conflicting nature of nostalgia through a close analysis of the Urdu genre of novels by Nazir Ahmad and Hadi Rusva, and through Hali's poetic expression in *Musaddas* to explore the utilitarian ethos of Urdu literature and the nostalgia and emotional journey about the leisurely past in their texts. This section of the book also explores the concepts of enchantment, topophilia, and idle leisure in Rabindranath Tagore's modern Bengali literature, apart from the colonial melancholy, and post-Partition nostalgia in the short fiction of Saʿadat Hasan Manto and Qurratulʿain Hyder. Finally, the discussion in this section focuses on culture, intellect, and emotions in the detective novels of Satyajit Ray through his romantic writings on the subject of masculinity and leisure. The objective of this section is to discuss the connection between nostalgia and otium or nostalgia as a manifestation of otium while arguing that the understanding of these emotions varies across different contexts, as for instance observed through examples of Urdu literature.

Chapter 2 focuses on Hali's *Musaddas,* which, in Noor's view, retains its thematic unity by turning itself into a critical investigation of social (dis)order that awakens Indian Muslims through emotions of shame, disgrace, and hope. The poem is regarded as a probing investigation of the depressing state of Muslims in India, hinged on the dichotomy of the two concepts, *taraqqī* (progress) and *tanazzul* (decay). Noor emphasizes Hali's central claim, that the present degradation of Indian Muslims is an outcome of their weak understanding of Islamic teachings, and their expectations and longing for a glorious Islamic past that would act as a resource for reconstructing their future. Hali resists complex poetry conventions, of aristocratic culture and idleness, as a heedless attitude towards time, despite of realizing that his critics used this to challenge his loyalty to the British government. The two poetic devices that Hali employs are the rigid dichotomies between East and West (*maśriq va maġrib*), and progress and decay (*taraqqī va tanazzul*), with a cyclical movement of time between the two opposites that destabilises their seemingly fixed positions. There is hence a sense of tension between these dichotomies based on the unnatural perception of time, due to human toil and morality. This discussion identifies a sense of restorative nostalgia in the poem based on a longing for Islamic glory that counters complex poetic traditions, young aristocratic culture, and a reckless attitude towards time.

Whereas the Urdu novel is explored through the colonial influences and sociopolitical changes in India; it is hailed as the strongest amongst all other prose genres to explore the themes of reform, morality, and education as indicated in Nazir Ahmad Dehlavi's *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ* (1874) and Mirza Hadi Rusva's *Umrāʾo Jān Adā* (1899). These novels reflect on the relationship between two intertextual and the socially interdependent figures, of the young aristocrat and the courtesan. Nazir explores the cultural, temporal, and emotional dilemmas faced by these characters and comments specially on women's lives. The quandary between the past world of carefree, leisurely existence and the present world of discipline and control is identified by the novelist who is torn between inescapable nostalgia and the urgency to rush towards modernity. This chapter also suggests that the ambivalence of nostalgia is reflected through the failure of the 1857 rebellion in colonial India that changed perceptions about lifestyle, time, and literature, as reflected in the discussion between Urdu language writers. The perception

of Urdu itself changed for writers who saw literature as an object of change. The pre-rebellion period of calm and peace stood in contrast to the post-rebellion period, and came to embody nostalgia, longing, and the importance of a historic and glorified, bygone past. The author observes the closeness between the Urdu of elite and British officials before the rebellion, as reflected in the culture of leisurely pleasure depicted in Urdu literary traditions. Whereas the contradictions reflected in Ghalib's *Dastanbu* (1858), in the author's view, conveys contradictory messages of critiquing the British soldiers and praising the colonials as wise rulers, it was also evident that Ghalib toned down his poetic resilience against the British to win their patronage. The author asserts that this is when the sense of nostalgia in Urdu poetry turns ambivalent as a yearning for the loss of otium and leisurely time, reflected through various examples of several Urdu writers. The realization that the decline of the leisurely past also resulted in the decline of Muslim civilization, Urdu literary work was considered to be a critical response to nostalgia itself as seen in poetry that expressed anxiety of the future. This produced nostalgia as a manifestation of otium, as represented in the conflicting nature of nostalgia in Nazir Ahmed and Hadi Rusva's novels. Both authors critique and mourn the lost past as an emerging form in the Urdu novel genre as they attempted to break ties with their peaceful, leisurely, and paradoxically wasteful pasts. Nevertheless, this new trend was also beyond the individual perceptions of writers, and more located within the renewed context of diverse South Asian contexts, communities, and literary spheres.

Chapter 3 is entitled *Enchantment, Topophilia, and Idle Leisure: Rabindranath Tagore and Literary Creativity in Modern Bengali Literature*. The discussion builds on the shifting dynamics of Bengali literature and Tagore's popularity in Europe by the early 20th century that was mainly due to his inclination towards Eastern mysticism. In the author's view, there was a gap in the understandings about Tagore based on his translations, and based on the differentiation he made between Eastern and Western values. Unlike the relationship between the colonial presence and Urdu writers/ intellectuals, Tagore's example reflects on an active absorption and assimilation of English and European cultural and literary thought by Bengali intellectuals that was hailed as the Bengali Renaissance. Tagore believed 'lonely leisure' to be the utmost and most necessary element of the creative process. This complex relationship of leisure, freedom, and civilisation for Tagore paralleled his passion for the natural landscape of Bengal and its association with idle, fulfilling leisure that was entangled and reflected in his multi-genre literary creativity, as expressed in the four volumes of *Sahaj Pāṭh* (Easy reading/ lessons) dated to the 1930s and onward and the establishment of Śantiniketan, his institute of learning, in 1901. The leisurely feelings involving literature and a physical shift from Calcutta to Santiniketan that impacted the development of Bengali identity. Like Urdu, Bengali too had inhabited the leisurely ethos in its literature before the technological boom of print, and the encounter with the West. These leisurely-literary engagements before the Western encounter were typically social in nature, like the Urdu *muśhā'irāh* that was experienced in public or in the company of others. However, in contrast to Urdu writers, Noor observes a positive response among the Bengali elite towards print culture, new knowledge, and new institutions that developed a cultural elite and superior sense of intellectualism as compared to other vernacular cultures.

Against this context, this section primarily explores Tagore's earliest collection of published letters that were written in response to his travels in Europe, published as *Ẏūrop Prabāsīr Patra* (Letters from a Sojourner in Europe) in 1881. These emotional letters were written to his niece, and approached by the author as impressions of Tagore's travels in Europe that expressed Bengali literary culture, artistic freedom, love, leisureliness, and a cultural response to tradition and civilization as opposed to modern discourse. These values were later inculcated in children's books and in history school books in India after the turn of the century. Unlike colonial and western concepts of civilization, Tagore's philosophy was centred on being open

to enchantment and to the generation of emotional spaces that were helpful for reflection and for connecting to nature. He embraced the bareness of rural life and the sublime beauty of the natural Bengali landscape that the author describes as 'topohilia' (a strong sense of attachment to space) as reflected in his songs, music, and poetry. The materialism of nature, his immersion in natural, sensory, and the sensual, tactile, visual, and emotional experiences, or his comfort in solitude (contrasted to the hectic life of urban cities like London), his abstractness of space, and appreciation of Bengali seasons (as opposed to the English weather) are clearly reflected in his letters. His letters capture the feelings of daydreaming, encompassed by the immense expanse of nature, and his reflection of it through solitude. The author considers Tagore's four volumes of *Sahaj Pāṭh* to have incorporated his philosophy and pedagogical approaches that then served to establish the universality of Tagore's work.

Chapter 4 is entitled *Colonial Melancholy and Post-Partition Nostalgia: Feelings of Dissonance in the Short Fiction of Saʿadat Hasan Manto and Qurratulʿain Hyder*. The emergence of the Urdu genre of short story at the beginning of the 20th century and the impact that the experience of idleness had on this genre are closely observed by the author. The flash of life and microscopic approach in short stories is differentiated from the elaboration of a novel. Diverse temporalities perceived by Urdu writers and their affective responses and resistance towards bridging this gap within the context of the 1947 partition, emphasizes the importance of idleness, nostalgia, and emotional context within a specific context of South Asia. In the backdrop of Partition, this genre conveys ideas of idleness that are also promoted by the Progressive Writers' Movement or the *taraqqī pasand* writers' movement (*Anjuman-i Taraqqī Pasand Muṣannifīn*) in the 1930s-50s that impacted Urdu literature. In the later years, the *taraqqī pasand adab* or the progressive literature produced by this group was also critiqued for its exclusivist ideology and lack of self-criticism. This discussion is contextualized within the development of print culture in the late 19th century, the transition and maturity of short Urdu narratives and sketches patterned on the *qiṣṣa* and *fasānah* that were popularly read in journals like *The Avadh* and *Punch of Lucknow*. In the early 20th century, the socio-political thought of Urdu-speaking Muslims impacted their literary attitudes and responses. Some critics regarded the genres of the Urdu novel and the short story as being influenced by Western (foreign) traditions and different from the existing prose genre of the dāstān. Noor has closely discussed the short collection called *Angāre* that is thematically centred on the shallow traditions of contemporary conservative Muslim society, its poverty, the sexual oppression of women, and the pretentious piety that caused it to be banned. Noor observes that while western stylistic techniques such as stream-of-consciousness style was critiqued, the short story collection was nevertheless supported by the progressive writers' movement. Being 'Progressive' in this context was identified as contributing to the betterment of society.

The focus on Manto builds on the previous literary exploration of Manto's writings that were stigmatized as perverted and obscene. The author traces the influence of Western writers like Wilde, Gorky, Chekhov, Hugo, and particularly, Maupassant on Manto's short stories. The context of colonial capitalism, melancholy, and partition nostalgia, combined with Western influences, is observed through his sceptical approach to progressiveness and progressive temporality that was pursued by the Progressive Writers' Movement. Manto's portrayal of the marginalised and outcasts is discussed by the author through an example of six short stories charged with obscenity, three in India written before 1947 called *Dhūʾāṉ* (Smoke), *Bū* (Odour), and *Kālī Śalvār* (Black Veil), and three written in Pakistan after Partition called *Khol do* (Open it), *Ṭhanḍā Gośt* (Cold Meat) and *Ūpar Nīce aur Darmiyāṉ* (Upstairs, Downstairs and in Between). Noor discusses Manto's pre-Partition stories set in Bombay as portraying idleness, conveying a sense of static-ness (in terms of time) and aimlessness *āvārahgardī* (strolling) that is often critiqued for their depiction of loneliness and escapism. Most importantly, the idleness (*āvārah*) in his stories is explored beyond the Western lexeme (*flânerie*), and is placed in the

context of colonial melancholia, cultural capitalism, and *āvārahgardī* (the physicality of idleness) that the cosmopolitanism of colonial and urban Bombay, Delhi, and Lahore afforded. His idleness is primarily depicted in the image of an unemployed man resisting the social order of nationalist progress, industrialization, and colonial capitalism, and him seeking of refuge with friends/ acquaintances in the city, as later depicted in films based on his stories.

As a pioneer of the modern Urdu novel, Hyder's depiction of the leisured class in the cosmopolitan South Asian context is observed by the author as being influenced by her literary background. Noor discusses Hyder's persistent quest for an alternate temporality that resists the post-Independence and Partitioned futures of the two nations. Hyder relies on nostalgic memories recounted through a metaphoric childhood that expresses the conflicting binaries of the past. These stories negotiate the emotion of loss expressed through postcolonial and post-Partition nostalgia while recounting a childhood that was impacted by imperialism. Her reminisces of an idealistic past often blurs the lines between fiction and reality through the voice of a child or an adolescent narrator. The overlapping style of diary writing, memoir, anecdotes, conversations, and memories is playfully integrated in her work. A unique aspect of Hyder's writing is her consciousness of the imperial experience that was part of Indian cultural heritage, while also resisting the sociocultural hierarchies, critiqued by peers. Noor considers Hyder's work as a retrospective narrative, reflecting on the impact of Partition, sectarian violence, and on the childhood experiences of innocence and leisureliness, a nostalgia experienced by both colonizers (collaborators), and the colonized (resisters). The author discusses all this through a closed reading of selected short stories by Hyder and through the example of these two writers, explores the nature of the trauma experienced by them nostalgically expressed through happy, traumatic, guilty, or regretful memories, and by emotional affinities.

Chapter 5 is entitled *Culture, Intellect, and Emotions: The Romance of Masculinity and Leisure in the Detective Novels of Satyajit Ray*. This chapter links Tagore's concept of self-cultivation with Ray's approach and treats it as a reflection of culture in the Bengali context of Ray's detective novels. Culture in this context is marked by civility, gentility, and the *Bhadraalok* through whom Ray represented Bengal Renaissance. In this chapter, Noor analyses the fictional world of *Pheludā* novels, novelas, and stories focused on the postcolonial binaries that created dichotomies like the past, present, history, postcoloniality, empire, metropole, nation, periphery, work, leisure, idleness, and engagement. The chapter explores intellect and culture through the nexus between emotions, *bhadratā* or civility, and how these remain entangled with otium and the gendered perceptions of leisureliness. The masculinity in Ray's narratives is differentiated from postcolonial Bengali perceptions of respectability and culture, and this chapter critiques the romanticised notions of leisureliness among the postcolonial urban and Hindu Bengali *bhadralok* as depicted in Ray's detective novels. The author identifies the *Pheluda* brand of masculinity as a challenge to the notion of effeminate Bengali men.

Finally, Part III of the book that includes Chapter 6 which is entitled, *Haunting, Resonance, and Requiem for Otium: Contemporary South Asian Literature*. This chapter deconstructs the sense of othering and discrimination through which literature manifests otium. The haunting nature of otium here is relevant for both the present and the future. This is discussed through selected literary examples from Bangla and Urdu that includes fictional works by Intezar Hussain, Khalid Jawed, Bani Basu, and Nabarun Bhattacharya. Hussain's work, amalgamating diverse storytelling traditions in Urdu. These works are analysed as an instrument that decentres nationalist identity and promotes 'subcontinental syncretism' with a focus the on mythological aspects of life and human-nature entanglements. In Bani Basu's work, which is the Bengali novel called *Gāndharbī*, otium is explored through artistic immersion in music that resists the societal limitations of leisurely pursuits for a young woman. In this discussion, music

is associated with memory and nostalgia as a means to leisurely pleasure. In Nabarun Bhattacharya's novel *Hārlbārṭ* (1993), otium is approached through the protagonist's alienation and melancholy with urban life in Calcutta as depicted in the *Phyātāṛu* stories. These stories offer political satire. The surreal characters and fantasy fiction nature of these stories is combined with dark humor to resist the high culture. These stories challenge the political, social order and capitalist regimes that suppress the marginalized communities. The discussion focused on Khalid Jawed's *Tafrīḥ kī Ek Dopahar* approaches the text as a monologue narrated by a ghost that expresses ambivalent haunting as a form of absence. The *tafrīḥ* or aimless wandering of the ghost becomes a signifier of otium. The author's discussion of otium in this chapter analyses it through a manifestation of emotions that surround loss (the loss of loved ones, and the loss of past times) and absence.

This book is a treat for those passionate about South Asian literary history, literary trends of the time, colonial influences and postcolonial developments on the literary front. It also offers readers a significant theoretical perspective on vernacular literature based on a contextualized literary history of South Asia that does not rely on Western scholarship for its precepts. The author's comparative and critical engagement with Urdu and Bengali literary spheres is based on a discussion focused on trendsetters across time, which is one of the unique contributions of this project. While reflecting on cultural differences or philosophical approaches, the discussion in this book focuses attention on comprehending the concept of otium in South Asia that converges on the impact of colonialism, literary trends, and the literary representation of identity. In conclusion, the enriching close analysis of selected works substantiates the theorization of the term otium as a rich offering engaging with multilayered perspectives.

Book Review

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Anirudh Deshpande, one of India's most thoughtful historians of war and colonial modernity, turns his critical eye towards the making of Indian historical consciousness in *King, Country and War*. The book is neither a narrative of battles nor a chronological survey. Instead, it is an inquiry into how Indian history has been written and remembered, and how ideology and memory have structured that writing. The work builds on Deshpande's earlier studies concerning ideas of nationalism and the British army in colonial India. In the present volume, he widens the frame to explore the intellectual foundations of Indian historiography, arguing that both colonial and nationalist writers have imposed distorting and, at times, oversimplified binaries, like king and country, war and peace, and empire and nation, upon a far more complex historical reality. According to him, it is only after deconstructing such binaries, which condition the Indian minds that we may begin our search for a critical appraisal of India's past.

Divided into 5 chapters (apart from Introduction and an Epilogue), the book focusses on 6 interlinked themes, viz., historicization of the Indian mind, the role of individuals in history, *desh* and *rashtra* in pre-colonial India, forts in Indian history, the Third Battle of Panipat (1761), and hybridity in Indian history. Together these themes trace the intersection of ideology, power, and historical writing between roughly 1600 and 1900. In a short but crisp introductory section, *Colonial Ideology and the Historicization of the Modern Indian Mind*, the author, through a study of the emergence and growth of colonialist, nationalist, and communal historiographies, examines the idea of an unchanging 'Indian mentality'. The introduction provides a scathing critique of both colonial essentialism, which saw Indians as mystical and passive, and nationalist romanticism that inverted those stereotypes. Importantly, communal historiography, which perceived religion "as the basis of identity and history" (p. xii), was partly influenced by colonialist historiography that produced prejudices. Communal history writing thus became an "essential ingredient of communalism used politically by communal organizations and politicians" (p. xii). Based on a detailed analyses of the ways in which colonial and nationalist historians have constructed categories of Indian identity, consciousness, and agency, the introduction argues that labels like collectivist, spiritual, backward, etc., need to be historicized. In this sense, the present study presents a serious interrogation of the theoretical assumptions of colonialist and nationalist historiographies, which continue to influence contemporary historical thinking.

In the initial chapter, *Shivaji: Nationalist Epitome, Contested Histories* (pp. 39-64) that concerns Shivaji and his times, the author makes a case against 'great man' narratives. Through an in-depth examination of Shivaji, his military policies, and his socio-political and religious worldviews, Deshpande has attempted to highlight the role of individuals in history. He argues that narratives like the 'great man' over-emphasize individuals, rather than structural factors. According to him, institutions, class structures, and collective processes play a far greater role than individual political personalities in the making of history. By exaggerating the achievements of individuals like Shivaji, the 'great man' argument provides a skewed and jaundiced view of the country's past. In fact, according to Deshpande, 'magnifying the individual in history is attractive to those who use or misuse history for political reasons

because politicians love identity politics and blind loyalty' (p. xiv). The author, in fact, notes in this context that even if Shivaji, or anyone else for that matter, had not appeared on the scene "things would have happened pretty much as they did" (p. xiv). Citing the scholarship of Fernand Braudel, Karl Marx and E.H. Carr, the chapter argues that historical continuity and change is shaped primarily by the structures of history, viz., geographical, economic, and cultural. And the role of individuals or 'great men' is marginal. Deshpande has drawn heavily from Karl Marx's, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), written during a period when France was undergoing significant socio-economic transition (19th century). According to Marx, men make their own history, but not under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances transmitted from the past. For Deshpande this is the most accurate assessment of the individual's role in history.

In a fascinating chapter, *Desh: Country, Nation and Indian History* (pp. 65-83), the author examines the vocabulary of belonging. At the outset he notes that, "unless the historian is alive to the resonance and dissonance between his language and the vocabulary of his sources, he will end up misinterpreting them (p. 20)." The term *desh* appears repeatedly in pre-colonial Maratha sources and an important portion of the chapter deals with how the meaning of this term changed over time. It notes that while our 'ancestors' also used terms like *desh*, *mulk*, *dakshin* and *watan*, which are familiar to us today, their meanings in the past were different. Citing a late 19th century Marathi text, *Majha Pravas* (1883), in which the Brahmin author, Vishnubhat Godse, deployed terms like *desh*, *dakshin*, and *Hindustan* interchangeably, he avoided using the term *Maharashtra* or *Maharashtrian*. Deshpande argues that it took time for nationalist ideas "born of an elite nationalism, which drew its ideological sustenance from an anachronistic reading of Indian history, to percolate down to society and , finally , become its common sense" (p. 80). Taking a cue from Marc Bloch, the author, in this context, warns that projecting such terms backward—a practice unique to nationalist historiography—misreads the texture of pre-colonial polity. For Deshpande, a critical and unbiased historian is one who "reads historical sources carefully and explains the difference between the vocabulary of our ancestors and ourselves" (p. 79). It may, in fact, be suggested that it is in such situations that the historian's craft is tested! After all a historian should know that he is "neither the humble slave, nor the tyrannical master, of his facts (p. 20)." So, while every historian possesses ideological inclinations, professional integrity, according to this section, requires that he/she not be overtly influenced by them. Deshpande, thus, adopts here a micro-historical method, combining long-period reflection with focused case studies.

Forts: Synergy of Military, Politics and Commerce (pp. 84-129), is perhaps, the most important and, at the same time, engaging chapter in the book. It is a micro-historical case study of forts and their architecture, their strategic importance and symbolic meanings in Indian polities. Deshpande apparently uses the 'fort' over here as a lens for understanding power, memory, and military culture. The section visualizes forts, not simply as military-structures, but as sites that are at the intersection of ideology, memory, power, trade and urban development. Again, the chapter challenges nationalist and colonial historiographical tropes, which usually perceives forts as simply relics. By delineating at length on prominent Maratha and colonial forts, the author highlights their social, political, and economic relevance in early modern India. Indian merchants, he notes in this context, sometimes sought shelter in European-fortified port cities, like those of the East India Company at Surat, Bombay, and Madras, since these offered stability and protection during political flux. While over time, with modern artillery and air power, the military relevance of the traditional fort declined, their symbolic power remained important. Forts are thus presented as a lens for understanding state-formation, the projection of power, the memory of conquest and of defeat, and of the writing of history itself. According to Deshpande, forts should be used as tools to explore continuity and change rather than seeing Indian military or architectural culture as simply 'lagging behind' Europe.

An equally fascinating chapter in the book is *Panipat, 1761: Battles and Polyphonic Narratives* (pp. 130-161) focuses on the critical battle between a northern expeditionary force of the Maratha Empire and a coalition comprising of Ahmad Shah Durrani (born Ahmed Shah Abdali), founder and the first ruler of the Durrani dynasty in Afghanistan, the Rohilla Afghans of the Doab, and Shuja-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Awadh on the 14th of January 1761 in Panipat (modern day state of Haryana, in north India). This section provides fascinating details about the battle, throwing light on little-known aspects of the clash. We are informed that while the actual clash took place in the second week of January in 1761, the tensions between the parties involved had started from December 1760 itself. Deshpande's study of the Battle rejects the popular (and communal) interpretation which is centred on religious identities, viz., Hindus and Muslims. A micro-study, his investigation of the event demonstrates how memory and ideology refashion historical developments. Panipat, remembered as a national tragedy or turning point, has been repeatedly reinterpreted—by colonial chroniclers to illustrate Indian weakness, by nationalist writers as heroic defeat, and by regional historians as Maratha martyrdom. The chapter, rather convincingly shows that during the 18th century "religion did not determine politics" (p. 148). The Panipat Battle of 1761 attests to this fact. We, for instance, read that Ibrahim Khan, till the end of the conflict, remained loyal to the Marathas, while the Gosain ascetic warriors, namely, Anupgiri and Umraogiri, strongly supported Shuja in the clash. Anupgiri's *naga* corps, in fact, helped Shuja in the Battle of Buxar (1764) also. Subsequently, the former for his unwavering loyalty received the sobriquet 'Himmat Bahadur from the latter. Similarly, the so-called 'villains' of the Battle—Abdali, Shuja and Najib-ud-Daulah (the prominent Rohilla Afghan chief)—had gone out of their way to prevent the violent clash. In fact, it was the Maratha commander Sadashiv Rao 'Bhau' who, we are told, vehemently supported the idea of entering into a conflict with Abdali and his colleagues, without considering the consequences. It was also the former group, particularly Shuja, who strongly supported the idea that the bodies of the fallen soldiers be returned to their families. In fact, according to extant archival records, Shuja, on one occasion, told Abdali that "enmity should be limited to the life of the enemy" (p. 150). It seems that Shuja and Najib were aware of the fact that, unlike Abdali, they were here to stay and would thus have to interact with the Marathas in the near future, who would not fail to recall their past conduct. Again, the present essay highlights the internal differences that plagued the Maratha force. That senior Maratha chiefs had major internal differences on issues relating to military strategies against the combined forces of Abdali, Shuja and Najib, themes that have been discussed at length by the author. Deshpande argues that pre-colonial written Maratha sources are quite revealing in that they highlight the "temporal value of strategic flexibility, the dangers of cultural and military emulation and the crisis of military finance of the Indian warrior polities of the eighteenth century" (p. 149). Moreover, by throwing light on diverse issues, some of which created the conditions for the Battle, these sources highlight the complex nature of the political landscape of 18th-century India which, to say the least, spoke in multiple voices. Impermanence, according to the historian, was one of the defining features of this period. Political relations between Maratha sardars, like Holkar, and Hindustanis, constantly changed, despite occasional oaths. Diplomacy and conflict between the two groups, as a matter of fact, co-existed in this shared landscape.

The closing chapter, *Navy and Sailors: Towards Hybrid Histories* (pp. 162-198), shows that hybrid formations such as the Bombay Marine, formed in the early decades of the 19th century, played a critical role in the British colonial expansion, not just in South Asia, but also in regions like China. In fact, it was the Bombay Marine, along with the Sepoy army, which made it possible for the British to establish their dominance in China during the First Opium War (1839-1842). The Marine, which remained more or less unaffected by the Revolt of 1857, helped salvage the position of the colonial state in India. However, the services of this military formation, unlike the Brigade formed by the Royal Navy went, according to the author,

"unrewarded and unremembered" (p. 168). By demonstrating the close association that Bombay Marine, an indigenous formation, had with the British colonial state, a non-indigenous entity, the author convincingly rejects the binaries of native and foreign. The chapter underscores that armies, ideas, and identities, were, in this era, like other ages, defined by exchange, rather than by isolation. Deshpande, based on a close reading of contemporary sources, argues that "during the 18th and 19th centuries the Bombay Marine generated employment and sustained some trade in the coastal districts near Bombay due to its demand for shipbuilding material and provisions" (p. 189). In an important portion of this chapter, the author observes that the abolition of the Bombay Marine was primarily predicated upon a "growing belief in the invincibility of the Royal Navy in British circles after the Napoleonic Wars" (p. 189). That rather than being on same page, British officials, including Lord William Bentinck, Sir Charles Metcalf, and Sir Charles Malcolm, strongly differed with each other as far as the role of Bombay Marine, and its abolition was concerned.

In the concluding section— 'Epilogue'— Anirudh Deshpande provides a bird's eye view of the evolutionary history of military. The close association that it has with the state and the ways in which the latter shape the army has been discussed thoroughly here. Again, rather than focusing only on the sources of early-modern and modern periods, the author takes into account evidence from ancient and medieval ages to highlight the various military traditions as well as the ways in which the concept of military has changed over time. Significantly, the historian also mentions Greek and Chinese sources in order to showcase the multiple military heritage which co-existed. Importantly, the modern professional military history, that most of us are familiar with, developed in Europe in the 18th century. Its emergence was closely associated with the rise of modern states. In the final analyses, the author notes, "our viewpoint on the military and military history ultimately depends upon our view of state and society and our theory and philosophy of history, a classical discipline" (p. 212).

Anirudh Deshpande's *King, Country and War*, is an important academic intervention. Lucid and brisk, it is an intellectually ambitious and deeply readable book. Deshpande has done a commendable job, as far as making specialized military and historical writing feel urgent and vivid. The author is adept at explaining the complex facets of military and diplomacy, without ignoring readers who are unfamiliar with military doctrines. The two Appendices towards the end of the book, concerning the soldiers—European, Lascars and Parsis—in the Bombay Marine, Indian Navy, as well as, Royal Indian Marine in the 19th and 20th centuries— and a Peshwa family tree (drawn from Kashiraj Pandit's, *An Account of Battle of Panipat and the Events Leading to it*, 1791), adds a layer of richness to the narrative. The present study presents a serious interrogation of theoretical assumptions undergirding colonialist and nationalist historiographies that continue to influence the historical thinking of contemporary Indians. The book also brings insights that are provided by micro history to bear on the subject matter of methodology when reading and writing history. After all, critical history is produced by the inevitable tension between the historian and his sources. Interspersed with colourful images of important Maratha forts and a set of rare archival maps relating to the 1761 Battle of Panipat, the narrative, gracefully argues against the tunnel vision of Indian history, vividly documenting its complexities. *King, Country and War* is thus a book that will keep its place on shelves and in scholarly debates for a long time.

Book Review

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Wonder in South Asia is a journey into the jubilant, rich, curious, and generative expressions of wonder across complimentary realms of imagination, storytelling, celebration, choreography, and veneration which are all at home in South Asia. Volume editor Tulasi Srinivas has collected anthropologists, religionists, and ethnohistorians who probe, tease, and consider otherness and wonder across a generous survey of South Asian contexts, texts, and regions. The volume is attuned to both the theories and the practices of its authors and is thus divided into three sections: the histories, aesthetics, and ethics of wonder. In her guiding introduction, Srinivas presses for a future-looking ethics of curiosity and with this volume aims to incite hope for "an ethnography rescued from its poisonous inheritances, through South Asian examples" (p. 6). The editor notes at the outset and in her concluding afterword that the volume does not have a tight frame, and some authors have certainly travelled further than others toward or past the bounds of wonder as a working concept. Nonetheless, the reader will find that the volume as a whole is quite committed to the future-looking call issued by Srinivas. And, in this way, it contributes a fresh and thoughtful contribution to the fields of religious and South Asian studies, where scholars and students alike are hungry for ethical, forward-looking methodologies of thinking and thriving.

Section 1, Histories of Wonder, begins with Ann Grodzins Gold's ethnographic panorama based in rural and provincial Rajasthan. To Srinivas's existing rubric for wonder, namely curiosity, creativity, and compassion, Gold adds connection and communication (p. 24). In this chapter, a cobra in a well, a Muslim healer, a Hindu merchant's wife, and the beating wings of pigeons become storytellers. Led by Gold's deft analysis, readers are able to identify and join in the dance across permeable boundaries between the ordinary and the wonderous extraordinary in one North Indian community's cosmology. William Elison takes wonder into the weird of American pulp fiction. In the hands of Kipling, Lovecraft, and others, India and especially the Hindu god Ganesh became an excuse to play with fantasy, according to Elison, an Oriental dreamland where gods wield power against unbelievers and eastern idols curse rational subjects at the turn of the 20th century (pp. 48, 54). This chapter concludes not only with the possibilities—again of curiosity and compassion—in this weird world but also with a proposal to consider *samvega* as wonder (p. 76). Mary Hancock offers a different kind of American imaginary: that of 19th century Evangelicals. Hancock takes up Srinivas' invitation for a comparative anthropology as a cognitive and affective device for imagining alterity (p. 97). She investigates how Protestant missionaries who framed South Asia generally as Hindu ushered racialized formations of Orientalist knowledge and power into American popular imagination (p. 82). At the same time, these Christians, through their collection of religious artifacts, documentation of local ways of life, and dutiful cataloguing of linguistic and scientific data, found unexpected moments of passion, wonder, and even spiritual affinities with Hindu metaphysics (p. 91). Like Elison, Hancock shows how the power of Hindu gods and idols captured the attention of American audiences and presented a challenge to their claims of spiritual and so-called rational supremacy. Gold's panorama also uses wonder to challenge notions of what is real, scientific, or rational to her more contemporary interlocutors. Together these chapters propose some ideas about how we got here, and in what ways and through

what means we inherited expectations for the possibilities, horrors, and limits of wonder. I think these authors would agree that these histories and wonders of the past are instructive but not necessarily prescriptive for the future.

Section 2, focused on the Aesthetics of Wonder, is composed of five chapters and makes up the bulk of this volume, beginning with the work of Jazmin Graves Eyssallenne. Eyssallenne examines wonder through saintly healing and blessings and the musical environment of a Sidi Sufi devotional tradition in Gujarat and Mumbai. This chapter is a significant development to the sound of wonder studies with its sustained attention to the charisma, ecstatic states, and various healing energies instigated and sustained by musical instruments, drum rhythms, and dance (pp. 117-118). These powerful environments orchestrate experiences of wonder for devotees seeking the favour of saints. As yet another gloss, Eyssallenne proposes wonder as *wajd* in the Sidi tradition. Harshita Mruthinti Kamath takes wonder to the Kuchipudi stage to interrogate the utility of Indian aesthetic theory and proposes affect theory as an efficacious tool for reading wonder in Indian dance more broadly (p. 126). Kamath argues that wonder and, relatedly, beauty are both produced by the embodied movements of the dancer and created inside of the viewer (p. 133). This chapter challenges readers in search of the beautiful to move beyond Brahminical structures of rasa to more capacious notions of the extraordinary and other exceptional beauties (p. 141).

Aniruddhan Vasudevan focuses on the moral astonishment cultivated by transgender women in urban Tamil Nadu in their devotional service to the goddess Angalamman. This community maintains archives through storytelling, fundraising accounts, and photo albums of years past to remember their unique sponsorship of the goddess's festival. At the same time, these various activities aim to astound neighbours, vendors, family members, and other stakeholders who share a commitment to the goddess. In this chapter wonder is located in their "capacity for giving", a shared social intimacy, the grandness, and the remarkably exhaustive manner in which they organize the annual celebration (p. 154). Amy Allocco presents her ethnographic research similarly located in an urban Tamil Nadu festival landscape and one similarly expressing abundance and renewal. However, Allocco takes the reader to the less often studied yet no less transformative ritual space of the cremation ground. In conversation with Srinivas, Allocco demonstrates that spectacle can be understood as transformative and thus can engender wonder—and wonder itself is generative (p. 168). Over the course of this South Indian festival, devotees scatter food items, arrange lush flower garlands, hide and reveal the procession deity, gather cremation ash, and decorate gravestones. Allocco identifies the cremation ground festival as a place of wonder in that it is a place of possibility and coalescence between pollution and purity, the living and the dead (p. 188).

In the final chapter on the Aesthetics of Wonder, Amanda Lucia revels in the multilayered sensorial extravaganza that is the Kumbh Mela. Lucia describes several loci of wonder that revolve around the expansive guru camps, extreme ascetic practices, and surging numbers of diverse pilgrims. However, the magnanimous scale of the mela simultaneously ushers in danger, unpredictability, and environmental devastation—the other side of wonder. And, Lucia argues, this is the side of wonder that calls into question the religious, political, and environmental sustainability of the festival's infinite expansion. These three festivals for the goddess, the dead, and the Kumbh Mela provide readers with three expressions of expansion, grandness, and, significantly, social buy-in. We find in these chapters that wonder requires or perhaps draws to itself an audience. Accordingly, we can partner these chapters back with the first two contributions to the Aesthetics of Wonder, in which Eyssallenne and Kamath explicitly centre performance as a transformative practice. Their analysis of music and dance provides an instructive lens for all of the wonder generated in Part 2 of the volume.

Section 3 is a collective Ethics of Wonder that begins at a Muslim Sufi shrine in North India. Quinn A. Clark presents the precarity of ordinary life, the related ephemerality of money, and the ultimate stability of God's love (p. 228). However, Clark shows that when money, a physical object associated with scarcity, is combined with the invisible abundant love of barakah, money slips from the realm of transaction to the realm of wonder (p. 239). This incredible transformation allows for money to be exchanged, given, and present in abundance without corrupting the ritual life of the shrine. Hanna H. Kim approaches wonder as a deliberate temporal and ritual space that provides a short trip outside the ordinary for ritual participants in the Hindu devotional community known as BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha (p. 251). Kim identifies a way of knowing that is affirming and by which narratives of tolerance and service to oneself and to others are motivated by experiences of wonder (p. 258). Ultimately, she demonstrates that the affective state of wonder—especially in moments of surprise—can be the basis for an ethics of sociality. Jacob Copeman and Koonal Duggal identify and describe three ways by which the rockstar guruship of Dera Sacha Sauda achieves wonderous effects. He projects his larger-than-life persona as an inclusive expandable unity, he temporarily inhabits different identities, and he employs a mixing together of opposites (p. 274). Copeman and Duggal probe the effects of wonder or *wondertraps*—a kind of wonder that provokes entrapment, instigates more wondertraps, as well as leaves room for mutuality and love in a devotional setting. The wonder of this chapter glitters, exaggerates, and is constantly intensified by cameramen. Considered together, all three Ethics of Wonder propose that an intense experience of positive emotions associated with a central religious power can motivate and, in some cases, ensure the ethical transformation of devotees.

The volume concludes with an afterword by the editor that reminds the reader of her objectives: to offer non-Western illustrations of wonder—a positive force—in order to decolonize our thinking and to draw it outward, departing from Western philosophy to illuminate other corners of the world (p. 308). Srinivas embraces the highly interpretive nature of the chapters as well as any lingering residue of uncertainty, curiosity, weirdness, or tedium. Her vision for the book, I believe, is matched by the contributing collective of scholars. Together they have revealed to readers the expansive possibilities of "wonderwork" by demonstrating the compatibility of the concept with many different fields of study and methodologies. It remains up to the volume's audiences to pursue a different horizon, a future anterior, and other worlds that have just begun to rise (p. 310).

Sourit Bhattacharya. (2025). *Postcolonialism Now: Literature, Reading, Decolonising.* Orient Black Swan. ISBN: 9789354426568 (Paperback)

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> The postcolonial intellectual […] will need to decolonise intellectual and material conditions in their own knowledge systems and their own countries by standing in solidarity with the 'minorities' there (as working class, anti-patriarchy, Dalit peasant and student activism in these countries have done) and mark the internationalism of these struggles (p. 25).

Bhattacharya's book is a testimony to this statement. It captures the decolonial impulse in postcolonial literature, while arguing for the importance of representation "to fight oppression and build communities of trust, inclusion and solidarity" (p. 27). Bhattacharya divides his book into six chapters, wherein he works with certain broad conceptual rubrics: minorities, migrations, traumas, ecologies, and futures, contrapuntally reading literary and cultural narratives. These narratives are drawn from different parts of the postcolonial world like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Israel/ Palestine, Nigeria, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, USA, Scotland/ UK, Antigua, and Granada/ Canada. The list is impressive, aiming to highlight the comparative misfortunes and/ or struggles of oppressed populations across these countries. In doing so, Bhattacharya redefines the concept of decolonisation and alongside that also proposes new horizons that can forge solidarities across these postcolonial contexts.

Chapter One titled *The Decolonising Impulse in Postcolonial Studies, or Why Now?* offers a theoretical exposition on the term postcolonial that focuses on why and how the concept should widen its scope. Bhattacharya explains that postcolonialism must imbricate a study of material histories of oppression caused by neocolonial and neo-imperialist mechanisms. At a time when postcolonialism has been institutionalised as a discipline based on theories of migrancy, post-nation and hybridity on the one hand and consecration of a handful of writers through prizes and critical work on the other, this suggestion to retrieve voices and markers of material struggles (with respect to colonialism) infuses fresh perspectives in postcolonial reading practices. In doing so, Bhattacharya seeks to distinguish his emphasis on decolonising agenda from decolonial studies. While decoloniality interrogates the colonial matrix of power and the diverse ways in which these "structures of colonial Western modernity are imposed on ex-colonised populations by postcolonial educated elites" (p. 9), the use of the "transitive action verb 'decolonising' involves a process of pedagogic unlearning" (p. 9). According to Bhattacharya, postcolonial literary and cultural narratives can effectively highlight the decolonising impulse, representing and reflecting (neo)colonial dominations and movements/ rebellions on the ground, showing alongside that how they are "key to continuous (anticolonial) initiatives and struggles for full decolonisation" (p. 9).

Chapter Two, *Minorities*, engages with Bama's *Karukku*, Jackie Jay's *The Adoption Papers* and *Black British Poetry*, and Dionne Brand's *No Language is Neutral*, by probing the rubric of minorities via the critical lenses of caste, race and sexuality. This chapter highlights that even

as literary works deploy autobiographical lenses such as confession, testimonio, or life writing, they "powerfully displace and dismantle the bourgeoise colonialist, standardised and Eurocentric usage of these lenses to retrieve their decolonising agenda" (p. 44). Bhattacharya represents how Bama's rejection of the institution of nunnery and her thrust on self-respect and Dalit organisation to fight casteism recall Fanon's call for "reclaiming dignity and humanity through decolonisation" (p. 50). This further explores political (and literary) alliances between Dalit and Black British writings, highlighting how they interrogate the nations' (India and the United Kingdom) obsession with the idea of belonging. Even as Scotland shares a complicated history with respect to Britain, it cannot be gainsaid that Scotland "benefitted from the British empire and developed values and cultures that were manifestly Eurocentric" (p. 54). Kay's work then foregrounds the visceral experience of growing up as a black child in a working-class family in a white majority area. The text foregrounds the need to pin one's struggles and existence in civic nationalism that questions the mythology of Scottish exceptionalism. Brand's poetry takes these themes forward as it highlights the question of "postcolonial queer sexuality and solidarity" (p. 63). Bhattacharya makes a perceptive remark over here when he argues about how queerness is not simply rooted in the radical homosexual love but reaches outwards, expanding this love to forge solidarities with all those women who have struggled to survive even as they were bonded in chains and forced to work under white masters (p. 67).

Chapter Three titled *Migration* focuses on Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave*, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *Americanah* and Thui Bui's *The Best We Could Do,* analysing entanglements between "historical slavery, forced displacement and trauma in the contemporary refugee and asylum crises" (p. 80). This chapter is significant as it highlights how contemporary theorisations on diaspora and immigration gain traction when read within the framework of neo-slave narratives. Also, films/ cinematic adaptations of slave narratives can shed new aesthetic light on the "migratory selves of enslaved people" (p. 84). The chapter further highlights, through a reading of Hamid and Adichie's texts, how the global diaspora is shaped by the forces of capitalism, colonialism and nationalism. These forces further produce refugees in a systemic way whereby certain categories of citizens become abject and more prone to displacement. They are forced to vacate their homelands, ironically seeking refuge in those very host lands that condition their citizens to hate different-looking people (p. 110).

Bhattacharya illustrates how religion and race play a fundamental role in aggravating the cultural otherisation of diaspora trapped in host lands. In fact, he goes a step further, suggesting in his analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* that the diasporic subject continues to be haunted by old colonialist concepts even after they return to their homelands' (p. 95):

> When his [Changez's] mother warns him to shave before leaving, he feels tremendously resistant to the global acceptance of the American hatred towards a Muslim identity- a hatred that Pakistanis were now swallowing without criticism on their part, recalling again Fanon's classic concept of the guilt and inferiority imposed upon the colonised by the coloniser.

Chapter Four is called *Traumas* and explores themes of genocide, sexual violence and exile through a reading of Zahir Raihan's *Stop Genocide*, Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*, and Darwesh's *A River Dies of Thirst.* Raihan's documentary on the Bangladeshi War of Liberation draws from socialist-realist cinema to address the collective trauma of the nation. It simultaneously emphasises the importance of an ongoing struggle to free one's mind (and thought) from orthodox and fundamentalist ideologies. Nottage's *Ruined* focuses on how sexual violence is entwined with war and resource 'extractivism'. The play based on civil wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo emphasises how feminist and political solidarities are crucial to negotiating

trauma. Darwesh's poetry, focusing on the phenomenon of statelessness, argues how displacement due to conflict and war can marginalise people from their sense of history and belonging. This displacement takes place both externally and internally, when forced migrations and evictions from one's homeland reduce people into a state of marginality, robbing them of their homelands, citizenship and humanity (p. 147). Taken together, these texts emphasise the significance of forging international solidarities to mitigate trauma.

Chapter Five and Six titled *Ecologies* and *Futures* focus on the urgency of imagining and reimagining alternative and sustainable futures even as postcolonial nations are immersed in the colonial matrix of power, comprising hunger, epidemics, and resource grabbing on the one hand, and social violence on the other. Bhattacharya states: "The rise of colonial modernity, through railways and dams is also the demise of forests and lives (human and non-human) based on the forested ecosystem. This is the beginning of a monstrous machine reality of the Anthropocene which announces itself thunderously, cheered on by mainstream societies" (p. 174). However, in embedding counter-imageries of resistances through body, language and epistemology, literary narratives equip us to aesthetically move beyond the extractive zones of capitalist modernity (p. 191). Ranging across texts like Mahasweta Devi's *Mahadu: Ekti Rupkatha*, Phaswane MPE's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Oliver Sinior's *Gardening in the Tropics* (Chapter 4) and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream,* Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti* (Chapter 5), these chapters emphasise the importance of envisioning alternative futures of care and solidarities in order to interrogate colonial and neocolonial systems of oppression and the anthropocentric desires of controlling the globe (p. 238).

As mentioned above, Bhattacharya's book stands out especially as it re-conceptualises and re-reads postcolonial literatures in terms of the anti-colonial struggles taking place on the ground. In doing so, he moves beyond the impasse whereby postcolonial theory has been institutionalised as an academic discipline. Even as the theory's emphasis on provincializing Europe is noteworthy, it often lapses into homogenising the West and ways by which it perpetrates Otherness. It also ends up endorsing a kind of subaltern identity politics which does not consider or overlooks the complexity and interdependence of knowledge systems across the globe. As Meera Nanda avers (2025), the thrust on indigenous ways of knowing and living, outside and beyond the bogey of Enlightenment rationalism was appropriated as a tool by right-wing regimes. Also, the failure to account for the actual struggles of marginalised populations was disguised as a quest to construct the other- "with this 'postcolonial turn' the object of the investigation shifted from the subaltern consciousness to elite modes of knowing and representing that were, presumably, making the colonised intellectuals deaf to the voices of the subaltern"(Nanda 2025: 63). Bhattacharya's attempt to demonstrate the decolonising impulse in the postcolonial social, economic and political contexts, therefore, is impressive as it recognises the importance of linking people's movements on the ground with theoretical manoeuvres within the academia.

As Bhattacharya also notes, the book is important in terms of its methodology: 'reading for decolonising'. His deployment of historical materialism is significant in terms of assembling a multidimensional framework of reading across genres (such as novels, short stories, poems, plays, graphic novels, films and non-fiction), cultures, and contexts. For instance, Bhattacharya highlights in his reading of Leila Aboulela's short story *The Museum* that even as Shadia, the story's protagonist feels alienated by the majoritarian population of white people and their culture in a Scottish university, and gets frustrated by the imperialist one-sidedness of their narratives, she also judges her Scottish classmate "Bryan's working class character through the same shirt he wears everyday and through his rough accent against her 'BBC World' English" (p. 24). Bhattacharya is therefore discerning of the multidimensional ways in which hierarchies are foregrounded and practised. In doing so, he calls upon upper caste/ class, middle class,

upwardly mobile citizens across these postcolonial contexts, to reflect upon their privileged contexts, which have disabled them from recognising inter-epistemic alliances that may be so crucial for building affective solidarities within and without their own countries.

Lastly, this book is also significant in terms of its larger vision of capturing the decolonial impulse in postcolonial literatures. The methodology of reading for decolonising reminds readers and critics of the internationalist ethos that the 'third world project' stood for in the decades of decolonialisation (1950-60s), whereby countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America sought to work together, to move beyond the political impasse created by Cold War. In doing so, they redefined theories of nation and nationalism as not based on racial, monocultural, monolingual grounds but, what Vijay Prashad (2017) calls "an internationalist ethos, one that looked onward to other anticolonial nations as their fellows" (p. 12). Bhattacharya's method and pedagogy for reading literatures across the postcolonial contexts then testifies to this spirit of reframing nationalism as not rooted in narrow identity politics and majoritarian politics, but closely aligned with people's aspirations and struggles for dignity and freedom.

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Book Review

Mukesh Kumar. (2024). *Between Muslim Pīr and Hindu Saint: Laldas and the Devotional Culture in North India*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978100942403 (Hardback).

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The book *Between Muslim Pīr and Hindu Saint* (henceforth *Between Muslim*) is divided into 8 extensive and theoretically-rich chapters. As Kumar begins his well-argued book, Chapter 1 (*The Spectre of Binaries*) describes the order and worship of the Mewati or Meo saint Laldas (1540-1648 CE), whose religious precepts straddle Islamic and Hindu devotion and whose followers included both Hindus and Muslims. Choosing to go beyond debates of syncretism that have dominated the study of shared shrines and 'Indic' religiosity in the last couple of decades, Kumar prefers to identify Laldas's conjoint Hindu-Muslim identity and worship with liminality (Mayaram 1997), a state that both reflects and has a history of co-creating north Indian devotion. Shared devotion is not neutral. It is contextualised, as in the Laldas case, in larger debates about conversion, vegetarianism, and cow-protection, in an environment of shifting identities and religious polarization. These shifts, Kumar argues, have adversely affected the Laldas Order, its shrine, and its devotees. As both the Arya Samaj and the Tablighi Jamaat in the region struggle to 'purify' the shrine as either exclusively Hindu or Muslim, this hardline approach has resulted in the emergence of clandestine devotion among the women Laldasis. Located on the border of Rajasthan and Haryana, Laldas is buried along with his family members in Sherpur (Alwar) in a shrine that consists of Islamic-style graves. In addition, there are many newly emerging proxy shrines of the saint, instituted by his devotees. The saint's Hindu devotees, mostly from the Baniya caste (traders), are interested in the Hinduisation of the shrine and rebuild their Laldas shrines in a Hindu style. Laldas's Muslim devotees, consisting of local Meos, are mostly agrarian, but claim warrior status due to their association with Rajput warrior traditions in the region. While Meos converted to Islam in precolonial times, their everyday practices remain anchored in Indic cosmologies. The gradual dismantling of the Laldas Order, polarized between reified Hindu and Muslim identities, thus also serves to shatter the Meo identity under pressure from religious groups.

Chapter 2, *Laldas and Religious Duality of Pīr and Sant*, examines the history of the Laldas tradition, its precepts and teachings, and its worship. Kumar provides us with an extensive description of Laldas as a Mughal-period saint who was born Muslim but practiced Islam in an Indic context, shared with Hindu devotion and devotees. Characterized by miracles, Laldas's life story is popular in Alwar and Bharatpur, where the saint was active among both Hindu and Muslim devotees: "The teachings and biographies of Laldas provide evidence of such patterns of Hindu-Islamic cultural interaction and the nature of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' identities prior to the twentieth century" (p. 46). Having been on Hajj several times, Laldas built two mosques near his shrine called Mecca and Medina by using bricks from Meccan and Medina brought back from his Hajj journey. Laldas was known to meditate in these mosques by reciting Ram's name. Separating himself from the Muslim identity of his birth, he encouraged Meo devotees to venerate cows and imbibe vegetarianism—an important virtue that Kumar identifies with an agrarian/ peasant economy. Laldas separated himself from orthodox forms of Hinduism as well by not condoning idol worship, and unsettling fixed religion for both Hindus and Muslims (p. 53). The Laldas Order is described as a *sampradaya* or sect in which Hindu and Muslim

followers demonstrated their adherence by tending to the Muslim shrines and mosques near Laldas's grave-shrine at Sherpur.

Chapter 3 (*The Laldas Shrines and Inter-religious Disputes*), Chapter 4 (*A Fait Accomplí: The Complete Hinduisation of the Laldas Order*) and Chapter 5 (*Religious Reform and Sacred Shrines)* explore how the Laldas tradition came to be disputed and separately claimed by the Arya Samaj and the Tablighi Jamaat. Both groups attempted to purify and polarize the order, and as Kumar argues, this dispute served to refashion the shrine's worship as exclusively Hindu. Chapter 3 engages with the Hinduisation of the Laldasi Order by Baniya devotees who deploy Hindu identarian symbols as instruments that remove or overpower Islamic symbols. This dispute is historically traced to the early decades of the 20th century and reached its peak in 1945 and 1947 during the Partition of India and Pakistan, where Meo Muslims were arrested for offering *namaz* at the saint's parents' grave shrine. These contestations were renewed after Partition, with Hindu Laldasis gaining more control over the shrine, encouraged in turn by the Tablighi Jamaat that dissociated itself from Laldas. The mosques and minarets of the shrine were thus abandoned or remodelled as Hindu domes, to match what Kumar argues was a terminological shift and radicalized reification of the terms 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'. This shift reflected the shifts taking place in Alwar itself, that experienced a change in state policy, defined by the adoption of Hindu symbols (p. 87). The Arya Samaj attempted to reconvert Meo Muslims back to Hinduism (p. 88), an activity that accompanied the demise of traditional economic relationships between Hindus and Muslims in the region.

In Chapter 4, Kumar describes the Hinduisation of Laldas by Baniya devotees in further detail that involves assigning Laldas with a new role to restructure his Hindu identity, even at the cost of undermining his teachings. Kumar asserts, "This subversion of Laldas's original teachings implies a shift towards a more homogeneous understanding of the order, where the liminal elements of this belief are now incorporated into the broader narrative of neo 'Hinduism' (p. 110)." This remodelling takes the form of an incorporated mythology that "depict[s] Laldas as a timeless figure who has existed in different incarnations throughout the four distinct Hindu epochs, representing the cyclical concept of time in Hinduism (p. 116)." Chapter 5 continues with the discussion, describing how the Hinduisation of Laldas is expressed through increasing resentment among Hindus about the worship of a Muslim saint by Hindus. The Arya Samaj's strictness of adhering to Hindu scripture that mimics monotheism undercuts Laldas and distances Laldasis: "Many of Laldas's new devotees had to relinquish their previous devotion to a particular goddess in order to embrace their newfound affiliation with Laldas and receive his blessings and miracles (p. 141)." The Tablighi Jamaat, on the other hand, that has played a dominant role in the region since the 20th century in defining Meo Muslim identity, has rejected Laldas and his worship, thereby itself encouraging Hinduisation.

This is where concealed religiosity and the secret worship of Laldas comes into picture, a question Kumar discusses in Chapter 6 (*Concealment and Secrecy: Hidden in Plain Sight*) with a focus on how it defines gender relations among devotees. Kumar's analysis comes close to what Lee (2021) argues about the concealed religiosity or *taqiyya* of deemed-untouchable communities of north India that must hide their religious practices. With the Tablighi Jamaat functioning as a 'bastion of power' for Meo Muslim men, "many Meo and non-Meo Muslims, mostly women, still venerate these saints, although they conceal their devotion to evade the wrath of Meo men and other Tablighis (p. 163)." Analysing various ethnographic case studies of concealed devotion in this chapter, Kumar describes how: "Secrecy helps to negotiate an intimate form of power to enable smooth functioning of family relationships and societal values, and to evade the wrath of patriarchal control… these relationships, every lie, whatever its content, is a promotion of error with reference to the mendacious subject (p. 179)." In those cases where women hide their faith, men must also acknowledge and respect this act of

concealment (p. 174). Linked to the shared-differential power practices of women—in the Laldas case, mostly of Muslim women, though Hindu women conceal their faith in a Muslim figure, too—concealment served to sustain family relationships, preserve the masculine honour of patriarchal society, and avoid interpersonal conflict. In Chapter 7 (*Poetic Response to Religious Puritanism*), Kumar discusses the interesting question of Muslim bards who, drawing from Indic traditions and traditionally patronized by affluent Meos, respond to this shift of Hindu-Muslim polarization. Reflected in their oral performance of folksongs that mix Hinduism and Islam, they resist this polarization. Though the author implies it, whether bards responded specifically to the religious shifts in the Laldasi tradition is not immediately clear to me. However, Kumar describes how bards, even as they lose their traditional audiences and patronage, emerge as the new (perhaps digital) voices of resistance, expressed through new songs that synthesize Hindu-Muslim religious practices: "Mewati bards indirectly questioned the ascendant Islamic purist ideologies and reform groups on the one hand and the divisive Hindu versus Muslim politics on the other (p. 204)."

Summarizing the arguments in Chapter 8 (*An Ephemeral Line in the Sand*), Kumar argues how the shifts among Laldasis can be considered a model for the shifting religiosity of modern India more generally. Interestingly, the conclusion chapter is also followed by extensive appendices that contain an (undated) lithographed Nagari hagiography of Laldas (*Sri Laldas Maharaj ki Paricawali*). Probably a 19th-century text, it is authored by Dundarisi Sadh and others (Appendix A.1: pp. 235-274), and followed by a printed hagiography from 2015 (Appendix A.2: pp. 275-326). In the conclusion chapter, Kumar draws our attention to the historical context of Laldas's emergence in the 16th century, in which mixing Hindu-Muslim religious ideas served to create a more rooted Mewati culture that countered religious competitions between Hindus and Muslims. Kumar states, "…the religious path of Laldas emerged in the 16th century at a time when the devotional aspects of the saint's teaching reflected the concerns of a rural world that were at odds with both institutional Islam and Hinduism (p. 227)." Kumar further recommends that shared saint traditions and their shrines, like in the case of Laldas, be viewed as composite heritage sites that are a greater phenomenon than what is entailed by just the convergence of religions. Such mixture phenomena express the emergence of new religions, an argument that is seconded to an extent by Deak's writing on Hindu-Muslim saint veneration in Maharashtra (2020), and by McLain's argument (2016) on Sai Baba.

This is where the argument of the book grows a little circular. Since the context of Laldas's emergence is also defined by religious competition and responds to it by remoulding it radically—a 16th century shift—the remoulding in itself contains traces of religious competition or hybridity (cf. Bhabha 1994). This resonates with the Religion-1 and Religion-2 argument, in which institutionalised religion, Religion-1 is reconstituted by empirical investigations in the field of religion or Religion-2 (Bergunder 2014). Kumar also argues that "the idea of 'religion' should take intermixing as an origin point" (p. 226), with all religions manifesting a control mechanism that responds to its own context, while co-creating and remoulding it in an ongoing loop. This circularity is perhaps partly due to the way in which the book's introduction and conclusion chapters are structured. The introduction presents us with a somewhat static vision of the Laldasi Order and its worship: he is a mixed and shared entity, this mixture lying at the very core of his power as an integrator of Meo agrarian-martial identity that unites Hindus and Muslims. The conclusion indicates that Laldas's mixed religion was a response to competitive Hindu and Muslim religiosity in the 16th century, a concern that led to the *sampradaya* borrowing from prevailing Indic Sufi, Natha-Shaiva, and Vaishnava traditions. Knowing from the start that Laldas emerged as a response to religious competition would have helped us to better appreciate how Laldas was proposing an alternative and viable Meo identity in order to respond to this competition. He was not 'mixed' in a static and given way, but in a strategic way. Thus, that the Laldas Order would split once the Meo identity was no longer viable is a

self-fulfilling prophecy that lies at the core of the order. That Laldas was now a mostly-Hindu saint in Alwar, where the state too was defined by Hindu symbolisms, is also unsurprising—*A Fait Accomplí* as Kumar puts it. If Sherpur had conversely fallen into Pakistan, where a collective Hindu-Muslim Meo identity was no longer viable, then it would be equally unsurprising for Laldas to become a mostly-Muslim saint. Perhaps a small section in the introduction on the emergence of Laldas in the 16th century would prove useful for readers to understand why and how his tradition continued to uphold the same mixture that was strategically located at the base of being Meo. But this is perhaps an organizational issue to be reviewed for the book's second edition—I am sure there will be one. The book *Between Muslim Pīr and Hindu Saint* is a fascinating study of a shrine caught up within the motion of a swinging pendulum. It is an excellent read for all those interested in the history and anthropology of mixed shrines and north Indian devotion.

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