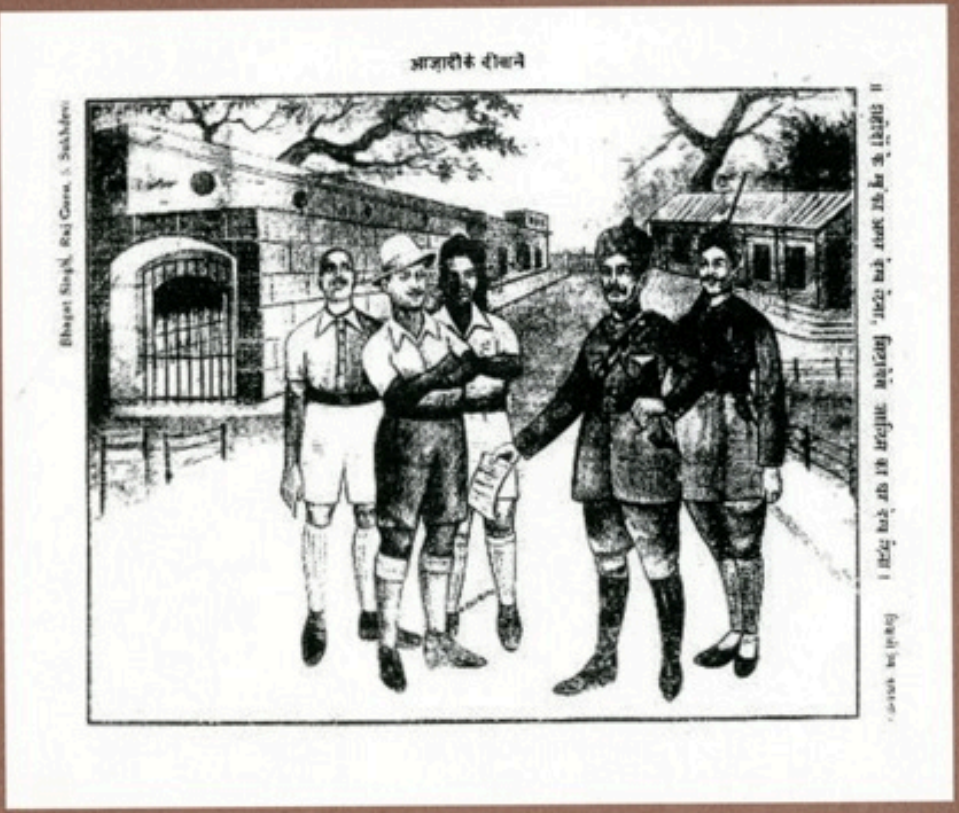
Sagar

A South Asia Research Journal



VOLUME 7, 2001

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Volume 7 ♦ 2001

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Editors' Note

Over the past decade, mass media in South Asia has received critical attention across disciplines. Technological breakthroughs and an expanding diaspora have contributed to the accessibility and popularity of South Asian media beyond its regional boundaries. This, in turn, has resulted in an upsurge in the study of media and representation. Scholarly interest in the subject has aimed at studying not only the local roots of such modern forms, but also their historical antecedents. The trend has paralleled large-scale digitization of various archives of newspapers, music, and films that has revolutionized research methods and possibilities. Further, the events of September 11 and the subsequent splurge of stereotypes in the mass media is a grim reminder that Edward Said's cautionary note, reiterated in "Covering Islam," remains unheeded. Said's call for a sensitivity to the politics of representation continues to be relevant today.

This issue of *Sagar* engages with some of the ongoing debates on mass media and the politics of representation in the context of South Asia. The editorial collective hopes the contributions in this issue will encourage its audience to read the politics of every representation.

Working on this issue has been a rewarding experience for us. We would like to thank all the authors for their contributions. We thank Dr. Susan Seizer for her paper, which she presented at the "Mass Media and Violence in South Asia" conference held at University of Texas at Austin in the spring of 2001. We also acknowledge Dr. Rupal Oza and the University of Chicago Press for permission to reprint the article "Showcasing India: Gender, Geography, and Globalization."

Nusrat Chowdhury
Ritu Khanduri
Shubhra Sharma (The Editorial Collective)

Showcasing India: Gender, Geography, and Globalization[1]

Rupal Oza

Georgetown University

Introduction

On a cool late November evening in Bangalore, India, a city held under siege by a 12,500 strong security contingent, Irene Skliva from Greece was crowned Miss World 1996. Since August of 1996, when it was announced that India was to host the Miss World Pageant, controversy and debate had surrounded local women's organizations, farmers, students, and trade unions from various parts of the country demonstrated, wrote petitions, filed public interest litigations in court, and threatened to damage the venue of the pageant. Opposition to the pageant spanned a broad enough spectrum to accommodate an entire range of concerns. For instance, opposition to imperialism, resentment against the retreating role of the state, high inflation, threatened

[1] I would like to thank the editors of the special issue for their comments on earlier drafts. To Paula Chakravartty, I am grateful for her contribution to this article. In addition, I would like to thank Lawrence Grossberg, Hillary Hinds, Ranjani Mazumdar, Arvind Rajgopal, and Jackie Stacy for their comments. I am indebted to Karen Barad, Leela Fernandes, and Laura Liu for sustained engagement with this piece and for their support.

Sagar: South Asia Research Journal 7 (2001)
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Indian culture, and an anxiety with the "foreign" all crystallized in response to the pageant. Conversely, for the state and domestic capital, the pageant provided an international opportunity to "showcase" new, liberalized India to the world. The pageant, therefore, was a site at which political protest and anxiety with "globalization" as well as the opportunity to showcase India to the world was articulated. It is in this tension between sentiments of proving national worth, on the one hand, and the protests against the pageant, on the other, that I examine the staging of discourses of gender, nation, sexuality, and place in this article.

A month prior to the event, in the Times of India, a major English-language newspaper, an advertisement for the pageant read "the time has come for the world to see . . . what real India is all about, Indian hospitality, Indian culture, Indian beauty, Indian capability."[2] What is striking about the advertisement is the statement that "real" India—its capability and culture—will be showcased through an international beauty pageant. Recent work on beauty pageants reveals that, rather than dismissing these events as misogynist cultural kitsch, "these contests showcase values, concepts, and behavior that exist at the center of a group's sense of itself and exhibit values of morality, gender, and place" (Cohen, Wilk, and Stoeltje 1996, 2). Pageants are spectacles whose performances showcase important ways that gender and sexuality are linked with geography. Whether pageants are performed at the national scale, such as the Miss America Pageant (Banet-Weiser 1999), or as local community events (Wu 1997), they are remarkably similar in the ways in which they link gender and sexual identity with particular places.

In this article I examine the 1996 Miss World beauty pageant and, in particular, the protests that marked the event. While the pageant itself showcased gender and nation, I am more

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[2] New Delhi, October 24, 1996.

concerned with the way in which the protests invoked a fidelity to nation and place in response to globalization. There are three analytical tasks with which I engage: first, I explore the way in which the pageant signified globalization in India and became the target of local opposition; second, I trace the politics of opposition and its attempts to redefine the nation in globalization; and third, I reveal the manner in which gender and sexuality became inextricable with imagining contemporary India in the rhetoric of the supporters as well as the opposition to the pageant.

The pageant provides an excellent empirical opportunity to examine the contours of globalization and local opposition in India. Rather than implicitly endorsing local opposition to globalization, I argue for a critical understanding of the formation of "the local" in the politics of opposition. Within anthropology, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997) have argued the need to destabilize and denaturalize the fixity of place, identity, and culture. Drawing on this assessment in combination with geographical literature on space, I critically examine how opposing groups' ideological and political positions manifest themselves by considering "place" as fixed and bounded.[3] Toward this effort, then, I examine the ways in which opposition to the pageant employed a politics of place, whereby local opposition was spatially manifested as preserving the nation against the larger forces of globalization. In so doing, the nation in opposition to globalization rested on deeply problematic constructions of gender and sexuality. Three problems arose from these constructions. First, women's bodies and sexuality became the material and discursive sites where the nation was performed, values were contested, and borders and

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[3] Emerging geographic literature examines space and structure intersectionally. See, for instance, Liu 2000. For a critique of resistance, I particularly draw on Abu-Lughod 1990.

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boundaries were policed and controlled.[4] Second, the nation's resistance to globalization was structured on and through maintaining oppressive gender and sexual codes. Such oppositional praxis alerts us to the ways in which some structures may "borrow" from each other, at times across different scales, to perpetuate structures that are oppressive to women.[5] Finally, the formulation of such oppositional praxis reinforced the idea that spaces such as the nation or the global are discrete and fixed "places" rather than persistently dynamic and mutable.

I begin with a brief outline of the analytical category of globalization and suggest the way the pageant was considered iconic of globalization in India. Next, I outline the rhetoric used by the organizers and the state to support the pageant primarily as a vehicle to showcase the "new" India to the world. It is here that the nation is reconstructed primarily as Hindu and gendered in terms of masculine capability and feminine compassion. If the support of the pageant sought to create a fixed identity of the nation in globalization, in the opposition to the pageant this was further evident. In this section I examine the opposition stemming from those allied with feminist and other progressive groups and those allied with the Hindu right-wing political party—Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Finally, I dismantle the fixed notion of place and nation that emerged in the rhetoric of the supporters and the opposition in the face of globalization. I argue that this fixed notion had to do with a concern for belonging and with an attempt to fortify against border crossings, which is indicative of an anxiety with sexual transgression in globalization. I suggest that a more nuanced understanding of geography and globalization will open opportunities for

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[4] For the way in which women and nation are collapsed in pageants, see Banet-Weiser 1999. With regard to gender, nation and sexuality, see Parker et.al.1992.

[5] Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994) draw our attention to the way various patriarchies may collaborate to reinforce oppressive practices.

oppositional politics that preclude considering place and position as fixed and immutable and local resistance as always subversive. The political concern with such a project is to formulate a nuanced politics of opposition, one that is responsive to both the possibilities and predicaments that globalization generates.[6]

The research for this essay was conducted in 1996 over a period of four months, preceding and during the Miss World Pageant in Bangalore. I interviewed officials, participants, organizers, set designers, and several opposing groups. Additionally, I drew on the extensive media coverage in newspapers and magazines and on ethnographic observations of the pageant. As a researcher and participant, I worked with some of the progressive and left allied women's organizations to mobilize opposition to the pageant. I am therefore implicated in the complex politics generated from the protests against the pageant.

Globalization and the Pageant

> We live in a world where everyone seems to be watching satellite television and drinking Coke; it is also a world where making, claiming, and maintaining local identity and culture is increasingly important.
> --Colleen Cohen, Richard Wilk, and Beverly Stoelje, 1996, 2

There is now a significant literature on globalization that supports the claim that the contemporary era is marked by the greater mobility and faster circulation of capital.[7] According to David Harvey (2000), globalization per se is not new and can be

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[6] I draw on Arif Dirlik's (1996) use of the terms promise and predicament in relation to globalization.

[7] See, among others, Featherstone 1990; Wallerstein 1991; Appadurai 1996; Wilson and Dissanayake 1996, Harvey 2000.

dated back at least to 1492 with the internationalization of trade and commerce. This current phase, however, is significant for the profound reorganization of geography, where prior configurations of borders and boundaries are rapidly reshaped, effecting change in the politics of gender, class, and place. These changes have caused some to speculate on the demise of prior configurations of boundaries such as the nation-state (Appadurai 1996), while others see this more as a "nexus" between global and local scales (Wilson and Dissanayake 1996).

In this article, I consider globalization in terms of the ways in which place is reconfigured. This is not to suggest that globalization is a one-way process whereby the global "creates" the local, precluding its converse (the local creates the global),[8] but rather that globalization is considered here as the dynamic reorganization of borders and boundaries from the most local and intimate scale of the body to that of the global. In the reorganization of these borders, prior established boundaries are challenged, and the politics around public spectacles such as the pageant afford the possibility to open new and perhaps more emancipatory spaces of political expression. My focus here is on the assertion of place in response to globalization. In my analysis, I examine place in terms of the scales of the body and the nation, and I look at how these borders overlap and signify each other. My attention, then, is to boundaries that were being formed and contested in response to the pageant as iconic of globalization and to how particular boundaries, such as the nation-state, were forcefully established against others.

The factors that contributed to the pageant as an icon of globalization in contemporary India arose from the intersection of complex political, economic, and cultural changes. These changes began roughly in the mid-1970s with a series of economic liberalization policies and led up to globalization in the

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[8] For an interesting account of the production of the global through nationalist imagination, see Fernandes 2000.

early 1990s.[9] The distinction between a period of "economic liberalization" and one of "globalization" is somewhat arbitrary, since globalization per se in India can be traced back to the beginning of its history of trade with various parts of the world. The difference between the two, however, is based on the emphasis on marketing India in the early 1990s as an important global destination for foreign investment versus the domestic liberalization policies of the 1970s and 1980s that set the precedent for the changes initiated in 1991.

The early 1990s were preceded by a decade and a half of significant political and economic changes made manifest particularly in the policy shift from investment in infrastructure development to an emphasis on consumer durables. Beginning with Indira Gandhi's regime and continuing later with her son Rajiv Gandhi's government, this change in policy combined materially and discursively a discourse of modernity with the middle class in India. According to Purnima Mankekar, the emphasis on consumer durables during the mid-1970s was based on "the premise that India could become a modern nation when its citizens acquired middle-class lifestyles through the acquisition of consumer goods" (1999, 75). By the mid-1980s, the policy changes and attention to the middle class were evident. For instance, one magazine reported that, for the first time in India, the prime minister understood the importance of owning a color television in the aspirations of the middle class (Ninan 1985). Along with the political visibility of the middle class, the late 1980s also witnessed the dramatic rise of the religious right. Through a series of, often violent, campaigns, the Hindu right repeatedly sought to define the nation in terms of a unified virile masculine Hindu identity.

Subsequent to the economic liberalization of the 1970s and 1980s, the economic reforms initiated in the early 1990s were anticipated by a series of factors manifested most

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[9] For further details, see Kohli 1989.

particularly in the depletion of foreign exchange reserves (Jalan 1991). Advised by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, India initiated aggressive measures to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). Following the economic logic established in the 1980s, that of the middle class and consumer durables, the 1990s also saw a renewed emphasis on India's consumer base, projecting it as a "land of opportunity."[10] For instance, one investment brochure declared the emergence of a "new" India, claiming: "India today is a whole 'new' country. Vibrant. Active. Alive . . . You can feel a sense of urgency permeating just about every sector. A determination to catch up."[11]

In addition to these dramatic changes in the political economy, city landscapes and cultural politics also witnessed a shift. Retail outlets replaced local brand names with multinational merchandise; across cities, billboards advertised Citibank and Levi's jeans, while walls and store shutters were painted over with Coca-Cola and Pepsi logos, marking the urban landscape with perceptible signs of an opening economy. One of the most dramatic changes witnessed in cultural politics was the privatization of television. From three state-run channels available in metropolitan areas in 1987, by 1996 approximately forty international and domestic satellite and cable channels, such as CNN, BBC, Zee, and STAR TV, made their presence felt.[12] The increase in channels led to a burgeoning of the television software industry to fill the available airtime and presented an alternative to the imported English-language fare of soap operas and game shows.

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[10] For an account of the politics of gender, commodity class, and caste politics in advertising, see Rajagopal 1999.

[11] Director General of Toursism, quoted in investment brochure by the Ministry of tourism (Government of India).

[12] For an extensive review of these changes, see Oza 1999.

This dramatic change in the visual spectrum fostered a discourse of public anxiety at multiple locations; from the parliament and print media to public interest groups and some women's organizations.[13] This discourse was primarily focused on measures to control "obscenity and violence" on satellite and cable television. Women and children recurred persistently in the rhetoric as those most in need of protection against the corrupting influences of the new media. Of even greater concern was that several satellite channels were beamed from outside Indian borders and thus were structurally outside the jurisdiction of the state which limited its ability to control the medium.[14] By 1996 this concern with television resulted in four writ petitions filed by a few women's organizations in the Delhi high court against several satellite and cable companies (see Oza 1999). These petitions claimed that the satellite and cable channels violated the 1986 Indecent Representation of Women (prohibition) Act and the Customs Act that threatened the integrity of Indian borders. These court cases were significant because they were able to intertwine, ideologically and symbolically, the representation of women with the integrity of the nation's borders. In the context of increasing concern with the integrity of Indian borders, the cases solidified the link between women and the nation's borders within the state apparatus. These court cases were part of a larger and increasingly conservative campaign, begun in the early 1990s that echoed the concern with Indian borders. From banned advertisements and film songs to the burning of M. F. Hussain's

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[13] My reference to anxiety in this sense is not personal or intimate; rather, it is "public" where concern is expressed *in the name of* public morality, Indian tradition, and the nation.

[14] Measures by which satellite and cable television can and should be regulated was a significant part of the debate in formulating the Broadcast Bill. The bill emerged in response to a landmark Supreme Court directive where the court claimed that the airwaves were public property and should thus be governed by an autonomous body. For further details, see Oza 1999.

tapestries—in protest of his rendering of a Hindu goddess in the nude—these instances of censorship in popular culture signaled systematic measures to curtail women's sexuality and sexual expression.[15]

Each of these instances, and particularly the rhetoric of opposition to the Miss World Pageant, was remarkable for the manner in which representations of women's bodies and sexuality were considered a threat to borders. In some of the Hindu right's opposition to the pageant, the perceived threat to borders resulted in efforts to protect Indian culture and tradition. For the progressive women's groups, the pageant signified the threat of the reentrenchment of imperialism in the country. Significantly, for both groups this concern with borders was gendered and sexualized. For the Hindu right, the threat was expressed in terms of rampant transgressive women's sexuality and body exposure, while for the left the concern was with the commodification of women's bodies and the spread of sex trade. In both cases, the borders of the nation were symbolized through women's bodies. Such concern with borders and scales demonstrates, according to Sankaran Krishna (1996), a "cartographic anxiety." Instances such as the pageant therefore allow a way to understand how globalization was negotiated and contested and the manner in which borders were constantly recreated and policed at the scale of the gendered and sexualized body.

The opposition to the pageant, therefore, arose from a broad context of concerns that coalesced in the protests surrounding the pageant. High inflation, increasing rural poverty, and the rise of the Hindu right combined with images of "Baywatch," cellular phones, and Citibank billboards to create a

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[15] Some of these instances include controversy around the popular Hindi song "Choli ke peeche," banned advertisements, and confiscated magazines and later the controversy around the film *Fire*.

fractured and dislocated image of a globalizing nation.[16] Consumers and activist groups were faced with the question: "To whom should [we] address [our] protests?" (Butalia and Chakravarti 1996, 5). Oppositional praxis was frustrated on the one hand by the state's retreating role and on the other by often inaccessible corporate owners. It is within this context, then, that the pageant became a viable target for opposition to globalization, because the event made visible the alliance between the state and domestic and global capital. Measures such as providing financial assistance for tourist spots, rather than infrastructure, and extensive police protection for the pageant visibly reinforced state alliances with corporate capital. Because of the visibility of such alliances and the identification of specific companies that sponsored the event, it was possible to name and identify the companies and people responsible for the pageant. The ability to name and identify was significant, because it was then possible to implicate particular people and power relationships in the social and discursive critique of the pageant.

Showcasing India: The State, ABCL, and the Miss World Organization

For the state, the managers, and the sponsors, the opportunity to showcase India to the world through the pageant crystallized multiple agendas. For each, the opportunity was saturated with the promise of a worldwide audience. The collaboration between the managers of the event, the state, and domestic capital was thus forged to safeguard this opportunity.

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[16] National sample survey suggests that rural poverty increased steadily, from 35.04 percent in 1990-91 to approximately 44 percent in 1993-94, and those constituting rural poor increased from 230 million in 1987-88 to 245 million by 1993-94. For further details, see Ghosh 1996. The average rate of inflation between 1991 and 1995 was 10.6 percent. For further details, see Upadhyay 1996.

For instance, Amitabh Bachchan Corporation Limited (ABCL), the Indian event managers of the pageant, claimed: "The pageant will showcase India and will provide a tremendous opportunity for Indian tourism, as a global audience of nearly 3 billion will watch this show."[17] For Godrej, the corporation that was the official domestic sponsor of the event, the pageant was an advertising opportunity to expand its large domestic market beyond India's borders. Meanwhile, for the state, the pageant would help put Karnataka on the global tourist map. The chief minister of Karnataka justified the pageant by claiming it would "elevate the spirit of Indian women," adding that the pageant would be like a traditional Indian *mela* (a carnival or fair) and that it should be viewed as an international *mela* where "there will be buyers and sellers" (quoted in Menon 1996, 13).

The pageant served as a televisual exhibit for a worldwide audience of 2.3 billion. It was carefully marketed as an opportunity for India to be "exhibited" on the world stage — to be viewed and experienced from afar (Mitchell 1989, 220). In a telling instance, Julia Morley, the managing director of the Miss World organization, stated that the pageant allowed the opportunity for "many people to know about Indian women. And I think that it's good that people have been able to get to know the Indian woman *without visiting*."[18] As with exhibitions, the pageant allowed spectators the distance of viewing India "without visiting," a window through which India came packaged and ready to be consumed. Gender and sexuality occupied a carefully balanced position in the language of the pageant; on the one hand there was the veiled eroticism of viewing India without visiting, while on the other, the participant's sexual codes were held in check through traditional displays of femininity and compassion. The discourses of the

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[17] ABCL press release, November 4, 1996.

[18] Press conference November 4, 1996, New Delhi, India. Emphasis added.

political and economic opportunities that the pageant would generate was able to balance a particular tension between the erotic possibilities of exoticized land and geography and strictly controlled displays of respectable sexuality of the participants within its borders.[19] The pageant presented therefore the opportunity for erotic, voyeuristic pleasure "without visiting."

The idea of "Showcasing India" generated strong sentiments of proving masculine capability. For instance, Amitabh Bachchan, the chief executive officer of ABCL, claimed, "I wanted to prove that an Indian show can be a world class event . . . I've heard so many people treating India as a backward country that I wanted to prove them wrong . . . They will realize that we can do it better than a western country" (quoted in Sanghvi 1996).[20] The pageant as an international exhibit of India that also provided the opportunity to prove Indian capability tapped into a particularly middle-and upper-class engagement with a discourse on India's worth in the global arena. Articulating the reasons for hosting the pageant in terms of Indian capability, Bachchan sought the endorsement of the middle-and upper-classes for the event.

The pageant sought to construct India as a modern, economically liberalized nation. These representational efforts were attentive to the shift in the balance of power in the post–Cold War era and therefore at great pains to demonstrate a nation that determined its own modernity.[21] The selection of the venue of the pageant–Bangalore–was crucial towards these efforts. As a modern metropolis that did not show the scars of the communal riots from a few years earlier, Bangalore, which exports thousands of software engineers all over the world, claimed to be

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[19] For similar arguments about eroticized land, see Alexander 1994.

[20] Bachchan was one of the biggest superstars of Indian cinema during the 1970s and 1980s.

[21] For a detailed account of Indian modernity created through television discourses in the 1980s and early 1990s, see Mankekar 1999.

India's Silicon Valley. Therefore, strategically removed from associations such as the communal riots that would mark the nation as "primitive" and "third world," Bangalore's burgeoning computer industry was the icon of modern India. Modernity in India, however, was not to be confused with Westernization and a loss of tradition. This balance was achieved through an extravagantly designed stage on which the main pageant would be held and telecast worldwide. The stage, designed to reflect India's ancient culture, drew on architectural motifs of traditional temples and caves. Additionally, the theme of the pageant, "Kanyakumari to Kashmir," was crafted to show India's cultural diversity and, according to an official press release, sought to "project unity amidst diversity to remind the people of mother Earth that all human beings belong to one big global family."[22]

According to Lisa Malkki, international spectacles such as the Miss World Pageant and Olympic games serve as ceremonial arenas for nations—in this case, for India—to take their place among the "family of nations"(1994, 50). Therefore, internationalisms, in essence, are not about a dissolving of national borders toward the larger goal of a unified humanity but about recognition of the nation in the international, thus reinforcing particularly nationalist paradigms in the global era.[23] Within the international arena of the pageant, therefore, India was not only to prove masculine capability but also to display feminine compassion. To this end, the pageant was advertised as "beauty with a purpose." In India, the pageant would raise money to be shared by the Spastics Society of Karnataka and the Variety Club International. Both agencies raise funds to help children. ABCL organized a children's party for the eighty-eight international contestants in "a touching function . . . commemorating the concern for the child who is not normal."[24]

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[22] ABCL press release, "Miss World Spectacle."

[23] Ibid.

[24] ABCL press release, November 14, 1996, Bangalore, India.

Raising money for children through an international beauty pageant inevitably highlights the assumption of an implicit connection between women and children. The contestants are shown as women with a natural compassion for children, an image that also serves to contain their sexuality within respectable boundaries. Children with disabilities are meant to evoke immediate support and empathy and are politically safe avenues of support.

In her discussion of international beauty pageants, Sarah Banet-Weiser comments on the way in which contestants are linked with geography. Each contestant embodies an exotic locale worth visiting, particularly with reference to third world countries (Banet-Weiser 1999). As the host country, India displayed its cultural diversity in the encompassing theme—Kanyakumari to Kashmir, which spans the length of nation, peppered with exotic tourist destinations. The portrayal of a unified geography, however, erased the landscape of conflict, so that borderlands such as Kashmir were co-opted within the universal theme of the pageant—"peace on Earth, and belonging to one big global family." Furthermore, the unified rhetoric erased India of minority groups and thus crafted the country as primarily Hindu. In one particularly telling instance, during an interview with the stage designer Sabu Cyril, I asked whether—the ancient Indian motifs used for the set design also included those from Mughal architecture.[25] In reply, he claimed, "Mughal was not part of Indian culture." Cyril's judgments of what constitutes Indian culture brought into focus the recent history of Hindu/Muslim conflicts in India. Thus, the Indian dance forms and the stage design were to show a markedly Hindu India that did not acknowledge Muslim influence and presence as constitutive of Indian culture.

Reconstructing the nation as Hindu was an attempt to link space with ideology. Satish Deshpande suggests, "successful

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[25] Interview by author, 16 November 1996, Bangalore, India.

spatial strategies are able to link, in a durable and ideologically credible way, abstract (imagined) spaces to concrete (physical) spaces" (1998, 250). Conflict and protest around spectacles such as the pageant thus expose how meanings are created that link places, and borders around places, to particular ideologies and identities. In one significant response to the protests surrounding the swimwear part of the pageant, spaces and nation's borders were fortified against obscenity and transgression. The objections to obscenity and vulgarity in the swimwear event, raised primarily by the political right, resulted in moving the event outside of India's borders to Seychelles, a small island country in the Indian Ocean. The integrity of Indian borders was therefore maintained and shielded against any obscenity. The protests as well as the decision to hold the swimwear event outside India's borders reinforced a linear logic whereby body exposure is akin to obscenity and, by extension, a threat to the nation. The shift in the event reinforced a linking of conservative gender and body codes with the nation and its borders.

The pageant, therefore, was framed within complex structures of power that made safeguarding the event as well as its success paramount. In efforts to make the event successful, the alliances of the state with domestic and international capital were most visible. Efforts by the state, for instance, included the allotment of one hundred million rupees by the central government "to beautify its tourist spots" for the pageant.[26] Financial assistance specifically for the pageant stood in stark relief against prior requests to the central government for infrastructure support in Bangalore. In addition, faced with increasing protests by both the right and left coalitions against the pageant, the state mobilized a 12,500 member police force in Bangalore consisting of central paramilitary contingents, including National Security Guard personnel, to safeguard its

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[26] Times of India, 7 October 1996. One hundred million rupees are approximately three million U.S. dollars.

opportunity to advertise the new India. It was the first time in India that the police force was mobilized with such extensive detail to protect what was, in essence, a private multinational venture.

The pageant, for its supporters, was a vehicle to showcase liberalized India to the world. For the state, the pageant advertised India as a tourist destination; for ABCL, it served as an opportunity to display Indian capability; and for the corporate sponsors, the pageant would help create worldwide markets. To create these opportunities, structural alliances between the state and capital were forged, while choreography and set design helped to reinvent India as primarily Hindu, erased of other communities. For those opposed to the pageant, in these multiple registers some of the anxieties with globalization were reflected.

The Opposition: Cultural Protectionism and Imperial Domination

Feminist theory has destabilized the notion of gender as a stable category. In its place, critical work on gender now reflects on gender performativity (Butler 1990). The controversy over the pageant created a space where meaning about gender and sexuality in contemporary India was expressed and debated. Consequently, as a public arena, the pageant was significant for the important political positions about gender and sexuality that emerged from the pageant itself as well as in the protests. While for the organizers and the state, the event would showcase India, for the opposition, the pageant signified a threat to the nation. The opposition to the pageant emerged from many different political positions, producing a complex discourse on gender and sexuality in contemporary India.

Groups opposing the pageant included students, farmers, unions, the political religious right, and a series of women's organizations that formed a loosely defined progressive coalition.

The sharpest distinctions emerged between the political religious right and the progressive coalition, which strategically distanced itself from the right. While these groups diverged ideologically and politically on several issues, there were several instances in which the progressive group's rhetoric came surprisingly close to the views expressed by the political right. The resultant blurring of boundaries between the progressive coalition and the political right is indicative of the ways in which the right effectively used some feminist politics to construct its opposition. It is also indicative of the challenge of formulating a coherent and nuanced radical critique of the pageant.

In a period of tremendous flux, the contours that defined the nation, in terms of not only political economy but also cultural politics, gender, and sexuality were in transition. The pageant provided a stage on which to define these contours and to secure meaning and identity to the space within its boundaries. Within this context, the opposition to the pageant mapped onto women's representation and body politic the debate of globalization in India. Concerns with perforated borders and the loss of autonomy with political, cultural, and economic changes were displaced onto women's sexuality and bodies. Therefore, containment entailed securing the female body and sexuality against transgression.

Among the various groups that voiced their protest of the pageant, none received as much media attention as the political religious right—Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Mahila Jagran, a women's organization allied with the BJP. The BJP's form and articulation of protest, which included threats to destroy the venue of the pageant, self-immolation, strikes, and mass violent demonstrations resulted in extensive media coverage. According to BJP and Mahila Jagran, the Miss World Pageant was a "show of obscenity" and "against Indian culture." In a large BJP demonstration in Bangalore, placards read "Stop Miss World Pageant — Save National Honor" and "Big B [Amitabh

Bachchan] means bring bad culture to Bharat" (Srikanth 1996, 1).

The progressive women's coalitions, allied with the political left, categorically distanced themselves from the right-wing arguments and focused their critique of the pageant on imperialism, arguing that the pageant encouraged the entry of multinational corporations in to the country. The Center for Indian Trade Union (CITU) voiced a typical position adopted by the political left: "Selection of India/Bangalore for the Beauty Pageant to select Miss World is nothing but an attempt to smoothen [sic] the entry of Multi Nationals into our country in a big way. It is also an attempt to divert the attention of the toiling people from their real problems adversely affecting their livelihood."[27]

A significant aspect of the differences between various groups that were critical of the pageant was the ways in which their political campaigns were organized. Political campaigning and demonstrations by the religious right gained immediate attention in the media, and often the positions adopted by progressive organizations were deliberately left out. Opposition to the pageant consequently was most visibly marked by a rightist political position with relatively few alternate arguments. In the face of the primarily right-wing position visible in the media, progressive and left-allied political organizations sought to present a different opinion and critique of the pageant. For instance, the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), a women's organization allied with the political left, made a point of presenting an alternative to the right-wing political position. In a press release, AIDWA claimed: "We do not agree with those who are opposing the contest in the name of 'Indian culture' and 'Indian womanhood.' We reject the notion of any one definition of culture, womanhood, and tradition being

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[27] CITU pamphlet distributed at a mass demonstration against pageant, 17 November 1996, Bangalore, India.

imposed on women."[28] Instead, AIDWA focused its critique on state expenditure on the pageant and sought to expose to public scrutiny the state's priorities and its alliance with global and domestic capital.

However, in the strategic rejection of the political right wing's version of culture, progressive groups relinquished the issue of culture, so that the only opinion about culture that was visible was the conservative view of threatened Indian tradition and culture. In the context of rapid political, economic, and cultural changes, about which there already existed concern with the corrupting impact of the media, the political right effectively mobilized sympathy for its concern for threatened Indian culture. Moreover, indigenous notions of sexuality that draw on a rich tradition of myth and legend remained silent in discourses of the opposition, so that it became easier for the right-wing to claim that any discourse on sexuality was other, foreign, and not within the parameters of what is considered Indian culture.

A significant distinction between political parties affiliated with the religious right, such as BJP, and those that distanced themselves from the right were the particular ways in which gender and body politics were framed in their arguments against the pageant.[29] For the right-wing, such concern was primarily a link between body exposure and the perceived threat to the sanctity of the nation. An extremely vocal right-wing opponent of the pageant, Pramila Nesargi, a BJP Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) in Bangalore, articulated the political right's position as: "The portions of the body which has to be covered, which women knows which has to be covered, which in the society it should not be shown it should not be meant for public places, and in other words, such portion of the body which will arouse the sensual or the sexual parts of man

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[28] AIDWA press release 16 November 1996, Bangalore, India.

[29] I would like to acknowledge Laura Liu for drawing my attention to this point.

that must not be shown" (quoted in Menon 1996, 13). Nesargi's statement affords a particular kind of slippage between women's sexuality, body exposure, and femininity, such that "women must know" which parts of their body should be covered so as to not "arouse" men. They prescribe a certain kind of femininity that controls women's bodies and sexuality, since men's sexuality is naturalized as uncontrollable. Women's bodies, sexuality, and femininity then are intricately woven together so that perceived transgression of any one threatens others and subsequently threatens Indian culture. This is the other slippage evidenced in the arguments by the BJP: exposure of certain parts of the female body was perceived as a threat to Indian culture and, by extension, to national sovereignty.

Conversely, for women's organizations, gender and body politics were expressed primarily in terms of commodification of women and exploitation by structures of patriarchy and capital. However, in some instances, the rhetoric of a few organizations mirrored the slippage between women's bodies and sexuality articulated by the political right. For instance, the Active Opposition Association, a consortium of six women's organizations in Bangalore, alleged, "the concept of prosperity of tourism through the exhibition of beautiful bodies is questionable. This is not the prosperity of tourism, instead this is the prosperity of sex trade in the country."[30] Other organizations voiced a similar rhetoric, asking: "Do we need to be watched and admired on such issues or as a nation hosting an almost pornographic show for the benefit of a few organizations who want to exploit us for profit?"[31] Such positions assume that the exhibition of women's bodies will inevitable lead to "sex trade" in the country; they articulate the slippage between exposure of

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[30] Pamphlet distributed by the Active Opposition Association, Bangalore.

[31] Pamphlet distributed during a CPI (M) and AIDWA demonstration, November 17, 1996, Bangalore, India.

women's bodies and the encouragement of deviant sexualities, which are a threat to the nation.

Significant similarities in rhetoric between the political right and the progressive coalitions also occurred because of the ways in which the right borrowed and adapted particular feminist agendas within their terms. For instance, most progressive groups that criticized the pageant and its impact were concerned with the commodification of women and the exploitation of women through patriarchy and capital. The political right used the argument against the commodification of women to suggest that the selling of women's bodies offended Indian culture. For example, AIDWA based their critique on the claim that "the media attention that they [the pageant's contestants] receive contributes greatly to the commercialization of social relations and the commodification of women and their bodies that in turn reinforce their subordinate status."[32] In another instance, Mahila Sangharsha Okkuta (MSO), a consortium of fifteen women's organizations in Bangalore, linked the pageant with multinational business and the denigration of women, stating that "at the altar of capital, a women's body is turned into a salable commodity . . . It is this market created fraudulent image of beauty that we resist. An image that is falsely liberating and modern but which in reality pushes women into stereotypical, subordinate roles."[33] Adapting these arguments about the commodification and exploitation of women's bodies to fit the agenda of the right-wing, Nesargi claimed: "In India women are not meant to be sold. Women are not treated as a commodity available for sale in the bazaar. If she sells herself, either her flesh, or body or beauty, she is offending every law in India . . .Beauty cannot be sold" (quoted in Menon 1996, 13). The distinction between the two positions was that, for the right, the commodification of women

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Pamphlet distributed by Mahila Sangharsha Okkuta, Bangalore, India.

was an offense against Indian culture, while for the women's groups the commodification of women was a consequence of capitalist relations of power.

However, political arguments concerning the commodification of women's bodies need to be rethought. The problem with this conceptualization, besides its conservative reenactment, is that it rests on the assumption that there are "pure" spaces outside a commodified realm. This inevitably raises questions: What would the outside of commodification be? Why and how must women occupy this realm? Furthermore, this outside of commodification then allows quite easily for the right to claim that women must occupy some sanctified, pure realm; this argument is politically dangerous precisely because it easily slips to fit the religious right-wing agenda.

While the political positions adopted by the religious right and the progressive organizations often came close and were at times remarkably similar, a significant arena of difference between them has been their positions on women and work. Historically, women's paid and unpaid labor has been an important site of political struggle for progressive groups.[34] Conversely, the right has continued to recreate the public/private division, with women's primary responsibility structured from within the domestic sphere. This reiteration of the inside/outside division has been perpetuated in spite of the presence of more women in public spaces, some occupying prominent political positions in the right-wing political apparatus. Tanika Sarkar (1993) points out that, with several women in such prominent positions, more women within the right-wing political movement have mobility in public spaces earlier deemed closed to them. While the inclusion of women in the public and their agency in the right-wing political movement may be seen as signs of

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[34] Since structural adjustment in 1991, more attention has been given to the impact of the reforms on women's labor. See Shah et. al. 1994; John 1996.

progressive factions within a conservative movement, Sarkar cautions against such claims, stating that "limited public identity and mobility that has become available to these women is made conditional on their submission to a new form of patriarchy" (1993, 42). Therefore, political organizing has to be attentive not only to what kinds of gender and sexual politics are enabled but through which structures they are enabled.

In the context of the pageant, I am concerned with the particular gender and sexual politics that were sanctioned conditional to new grids of oppression. A particularly interesting instance of such grids was evidenced when a prominent BJP Member of Parliament, Uma Bharti, voiced her protest of the pageant, stating that she was against "Westernization," not "modernity," in India. She distinguished modernization from Westernization, saying: "We want women to become doctors, engineers, IAS [Indian Administrative Service] and IPS [Indian Police Service] officers and ministers. But we don't want them to smoke, drink and adopt Western styles of living."[35] While Bharti's carefully crafted distinction is emblematic of the crisis perceived in the contemporary moment, attempts to articulate the distinction between modernity and Westernization have historically recurred since the middle of the nineteenth century. Partha Chatterjee (1989, 237) for instance, claims that within the nationalist struggle the woman question, in the middle of the nineteenth century, was resolved in the separation of the outside material sphere from the internal spiritual sphere. The inner spiritual sphere was occupied by women and shielded from the influences of Western civilization. Post independence, the issue of India's modernity was evidenced in Nehru's rhetoric by the importance given to institutions and heavy industry, and toward the latter part of the century this recurs in the vision of his grandson, Rajiv Gandhi, for India's modernity realized through computerization.

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[35] *Times of India*, 25 October 1996, 1.

The reason for the recurrence of this debate on Indian modernity as distinguished from Westernization, Chatterjee argues, is because "of the way in which the history of our modernity has been intertwined with the history of colonialism[;] we have never quite been able to believe that there exists a universal domain of free discourse, unfettered by differences of race or nationality" (1997, 275). The recurrence of this debate in contemporary India and through various points in history is indicative of the persistence to craft an Indian modernity.

Anxiety with crafting a specifically Indian modernity is particularly evident in both Nesargi's and Bharti's statements, where modernity is distinguished from Westernization, and this distinction is effected through the intersections of gender, class, and caste. Women are encouraged to join respectable middle-class public service professions such as medicine and engineering but not to smoke or drink. Women's participation in waged labor is encouraged, but only as prescribed from within particular parameters through which India's modernity is defined. Thus, while Indian borders must be open to economic investment, Western value systems, seen as corrupting influences, must be policed and even censored. This dichotomy is enacted on women's bodies and representational praxis; women must balance the desired modern against the undesirable Western values. For the political right, then, women are used to define modernity but are not active participants in crafting India's modernity.

The concern that women will adopt Western styles of living is a ruse for the anxiety related to women's sexuality in liberalized India. The balancing of Westernization versus modernity is particularly indicative of Bharti's statement that modernity in terms of women as doctors and lawyers is acceptable, but women smoking or drinking and adopting Western values is not. Defining "smoking or drinking" as Westernization echoes vamp images in Hindi films from the 1960s and 1970s (Mazumdar 1996). The image of the vamp,

according to Ranjani Mazumdar, "was the visible intrusion of the West into the cinematic space of Indian films, signifying an unrestrained sexuality and license, given to vices 'unknown' to 'Indian' women" (1996, 29). The recurrence of women's bodies as a site of control and containment is registered in other geographic locations.[36] For instance, Aihwa Ong remarks that in Malaysia, "women's bodily containment was key to the envisaged order that would contain those social forces unleashed by state policies and the capitalist economy" (1990, 270).

The opposition between Westernization and modernization therefore placed into public discourse regulatory norms about body and sexuality. Smoking and drinking were associated with transgressive sexuality and the contamination by Western cultural influences made possible through globalization. It is through public spectacles, such as the pageant, that norms and ideas about sexuality and gender are fixed or, in the words of Butler (1993), "materialized."[37] In place of gender construction, Butler contends that gender is materialized through "a process . . that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (1993, 9). My concern with the fixity of "matter" on the body stems from the ways in which bodies and sexualities then become regulated and prescribed within structures of state, patriarchy, and capital.

In the context of the pageant, such fixity was evident when the Bangalore High Court ruled in a landmark judgment that the pageant could not be stopped but would, however, be monitored by the director general of Police for Indecent Exposure of Women. Although the court ruled against the political right's petition to have the pageant banned, the judgment nevertheless served to endorse the concern that

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[36] See, for instance, Ong 1990; Layoun 1994.

[37] Gender is constantly being fixed and unfixed; by highlighting the pageant I do not mean that there are not other spaces, but rather that the pageant was a critical space in the contemporary moment.

exposure of women's bodies constitutes obscenity and indecent exposure and therefore must be policed. Such judgments by structures of the state are crucial because particular ideas of gender and sexuality become, in the words of Davina Cooper, "embedded within the state's technologies of power" (1995, 2).

Sexuality, Nation, Globalization

Thus far I have argued that the pageant was iconic of globalization in India for those who supported as well as those who opposed the event. For the supporters, the pageant provided an international forum to advertise India's capability to stage a world event successfully and its compassion in raising money for disabled children. The contours of the nation defined here, it was hoped, would draw the world's attention to the new "modern" India and secure its future as a world tourist destination. Meanwhile, for the opposition, the pageant as an icon of globalization in India signified a threat. The discourses of the opponents and the supporters of the pageant defined the contours of the nation through women's bodies and sexuality. From both, there emerged a particular politics of place that accorded primacy to the nation in globalization and, in so doing, asserted boundaries that were deeply problematic for gender and sexual politics in India. In this concluding section, I argue that attention to gender and sexual politics warrants a more nuanced understanding of the politics of place that precludes automatic endorsement of local opposition to globalization.

Politics of place is critical to formulate oppositional praxis. That is, oppositional praxis locates itself in some place—defined through an ideological, political, and geographical grid. According to Stuart Hall, "the rediscovery of place, a past, of one's roots, of one's context, [is] a necessary moment of enunciation" (1991, 36). He adds, "I do not think the margins could speak up without first grounding themselves somewhere" (36). The opponents of the pageant grounded themselves and

located their critique in the nation. The attempt reestablished the contours of the nation in a period when the sanctity of boundaries was perceived to be under threat. The political right and the progressive coalition therefore constructed their opposition to the pageant by arguing for the autonomy of the nation. Within the framework of globalization, then, local opposition was formulated as the nation against globalization. However, for the two groups the nation as local opposition signified different things.

For the political right, the pageant afforded the public possibility to articulate a national Hindu identity in a period of change. Women's bodies became the trope of "mother India," who had to be protected against the contaminating influences of globalization. For members of the progressive coalition, this was more complicated. Articulating the nation-state as their place of opposition was based on an argument that the pageant symbolized the imperialist power of globalization. Their concern with globalization was the dissolving power of the nation-state; consequently, their opposition attempted to reassert the responsibility of the nation-state. The progressive coalition's political opposition recognized the impossibility of doing away with the nation in globalization; they thus acknowledged that the jurisdiction of the state is still the only structural unit of power with whom they can negotiate issues of rights and responsibility. Consequently, much of the opposition to the pageant focused on the funds allocated to the pageant by the federal and state governments and the deployment of 12,500 security personnel. The structure of their position, however, was predicated on the following linear argument: the pageant symbolized globalization, which encouraged imperialism, resulting in the commodification of women and the encouragement of sex trade. Within this structure, opposition to commodification and sex trade entailed implementing structural measures prohibiting events, images, and representational praxis deemed to commodify women. Since only the state has the jurisdiction to implement these measures,

the progressive coalitions sought to draw the state's attention to its responsibility towards women. Thus, unlike the political right-wing—for whom women were symbolic signifiers of the nation and therefore must be protected and policed—for the progressive coalition opposition to the pageant was based on opposition to structures of patriarchy and imperialism. The different ways the political right and the progressive coalition linked gender with the nation-state emerged from different critiques. For the right-wing and progressive coalitions, clearly, there are both structural and discursive ways in which gender and nation-state were linked. However, the difference I want to highlight is the way in which the opposing groups constructed their critique of globalization by connecting gender with the nation-state.

For political organizing, the position of gender implicated, symbolically and structurally, in the nation-state raises the question: Can radical feminist politics emerge from within nationalist discourses? Why, for instance, do both right and progressive political parties critique the pageant at the site of women's bodies and sexuality because of a perceived threat to the nation? My attempt here is not to suggest that radical feminist politics is realizable only by "wishing away" the nation.[38] Rather, my aim is to point out that our efforts to rethink contemporary feminist politics and praxis attempt a reworking of their imbrication within the nation-state. Such rethinking is possible through a critical look at the politics of place as played out in the opposition to the pageant. Two threads of argument follow: first, opposition to the pageant and, by extension, against globalization rested on the identity of the nation as conceived in terms of desexualized womanhood. Second, this construction set

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[38]My use of "wishing away" is drawn from Leela Fernandes's comments at a panel discussion on "Developing Women's Studies: Confronting the Legacies of Colonialism, Imperialism and Racism" at the University of Pennsylvania conference, "Unleashing Our Legacies: Exploring Third World Feminisms," March 1998.

up the nation in opposition to globalization as a fixed and bounded sphere of power.

While beauty pageants clearly reinforce traditional and limited notions of sexuality and gender that, in turn, reinforce the cosmetic industry with its narrow heterosexual notions of beauty, these criticisms do not account for their continued popularity or, as Mary John points out, "the aspirations and anxieties symptomatic of the desire for beauty" (1998, 375). In India, beauty pageants have gained immense popularity in the past few years, with pageants occurring in schools, at community events, and as part of intercollegiate competitions. These pageants, quite successfully, link beauty and femininity with group identity. This is even more evident in international beauty pageants, where each woman is representative of a nation. For instance, Rhenuma Dilruba, the Miss World contestant from Bangladesh, stated, "I was chosen from among 1,000-odd women in Bangladesh. This is to prove how liberal we are."[39] Through her participation as a representative of Bangladesh, she embodied, quite literally, national qualities of liberalism. In another interesting instance, Joan Rani Jeyraj, who is of Indian parentage but was born and brought up in Zambia and had recently decided to live in India, claimed, "I think I'm representative of India because I made a choice to make it my home."[40] For Jeyraj, representing the nation is based on deciding which place is "home." Being considered to represent the nation on an international stage is a powerfully strong sentiment that anchors a complex frame of justifications and desires.

Responding to the opposition's criticism that the women who participated in the pageant were exploited, Jeyraj defended the pageant and justified the participation of the contestants: "I do not think that the women here feel exploited. I do not think that 88 countries could have forced the women to come here. It

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[39] *The Hindu* (Bangalore), November 24, 1996.

[40] *Express Magazine* (Delhi), November 17, 1996.

was each one's individual choice to come here."[41] The discourse of individual choice and freedom to participate forcefully asserts the agency of the eighty-eight contestants. Agency and individual choice attempt to counter the argument that the contestant's willingness to participate simply indicates the extent to which they have absorbed the ideas of the beauty industry, suspending their own agency and judgment. However, it simultaneously suggests that freedom and choice are unmediated by social structures and constraints. There is also the assumption, as with other international events, that all eighty-eight contestants participate in a fair contest, where each is given equal consideration. In the 1996 Miss World Pageant, however, the issue of fair competition was challenged by some of the African contestants, who alleged that the India media paid them little attention in contrast with the media frenzy that surrounded other participants. For instance, Miss Tanzania claimed: "The Indian Press has totally ignored us (black Africans) from the day we have landed in your country. Just about everyone in the press is paying attention only to the whites."[42] Structures of racism thus are ignored in the discourse of "free and fair" participation. This complicates the assumption that, for each of the contestants, "willingness to participate" means the same thing, and that each occupies the position of a participant within the structure of the pageant in the same way.

These dual conceptions force us to understand the contestants' willingness to participate "as neither complete victims nor entirely free agents" (Banet-Weiser 1999, 23). The opposition, however, predicated its arguments on considering the eighty-eight contestants of the pageant as victims erased of autonomy over their bodies and sexuality. This was a critical facet of the opponents' positions because it allowed the argument that women's bodies and sexuality must be controlled in public.

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[41] *The Hindu* (Bangalore), November 24, 1996.

[42] *Asian Age* (Mumbai), November 18, 1996.

For instance, in her response to the rights of women over their bodies and sexuality, Nesargi, of the political right-wing BJP, claimed that a woman is free to use her body, "at her home. Free to do within the four walls . . . free to do in her bedroom. Not before the public where youngsters are there, young children are there, where they will have an impact on the minds, weaker section of the society."[43] The progressive coalition asserted that the representation of women's bodies and sexuality in public encouraged prostitution and commodified women. For both, there is a direct link between the representation of women's bodies and sexuality and its "effect," and consequently the assumption that reception of images and representations is unmediated by discursive practices and structures and open to multiple interpretive frames.

Therefore, women's engagement with desire and pleasure through events such as the pageant remained silent, in the discourse of the opposition. Instead, a desexualized Indian womanhood as emblematic of the nation became an effective icon to protect the nation against globalization (John 1998, 373). A desexualized iconic figure does not threaten the nation with sexual transgression. This desexualized narrative was most particularly evidenced in the rhetoric of the political right, which held that women's modernity is acceptable but not Westernization—which was symbolic of uncontrolled sexuality. Conversely, while the progressive coalitions were critical of the conceptions of womanhood adopted by the right, they too did not consider women's agency and sexuality, so that the primary arguments about women's sexuality concerned commodification and the threat of sex trade. In effect, then, for the progressive coalition, women remained desexualized. By fashioning resistance to globalization in terms of desexualized icons and symbols, the right affected a slide whereby this resistance was

[43] Interview with author, November 20, 1996, Bangalore, India.

predicated on erasing women's autonomy over their bodies and sexualities.

The construction of resistance at any level that is predicated on structures of oppression or suppression at other levels or is contained through them is problematic from the start. Equally problematic are the assumptions of political hierarchy whereby gender and sexual politics are put on hold against the priority of local resistance to the overarching force of globalization. The underlying assumption here is that gender and sexuality can be put on hold or that gender and sexuality are not already constitutive of globalization and of local resistance. The political hierarchy in this context, then, is a ruse for denying agency to gender and sexuality. These issues have been raised in the context of the struggles for women's rights and the structural place of the women's movement within nationalism.[44] Therefore, conceptually progressive politics, when framed in terms of local resistance to globalization yet dependent on adherence to hegemonic structural positions within a "new" patriarchy, is politically dangerous and theoretically precarious.

My second thread of argument entails examining geography and the politics of location that was played out in the opposition to the pageant. Events like the pageant have significance because they allow the public possibility to deepen the contours of national imaginings and to color in homogenous identity. The possibility of imagining the nation, according to Gupta, "involves the creation of a new order of difference, a new alignment of 'self' in relation to 'other'" (1997, 196). This self–other distinction was fundamental for constructing a politics of opposition. It entailed a dynamic drawing of boundaries enclosing, as in the case of the pageant, the nation from the outside influence of globalization. These boundaries of the nation, as I have argued, were predicated on the construction of the nation in terms of desexualized womanhood. In the

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[44] In particular, see McClintock 1997.

construction of the self-other distinction, the other is rendered outside the boundaries and therefore always suspect. For instance, in her study of refugees Malkki (1997) points out that attachment to place is naturalized, while displacement is pathologized. Drawing on this construct, attachment and belonging to a nation is naturalized, whereas borderlands of the nation occupied by those that transgress or are refugees are suspect. It is this construction of the self versus the other that is reminiscent of India's persistence with crafting its own modernity. Particularly in the perceived threat from globalization, the construction of the nation entails fixing or solidifying identity of the self, of constantly defining boundaries and borders that mark the self/nation from the other/global.

The pageant symbolized a threat to the self so that defense was based on fortifying the self as the nation against the outside. In so doing, the nation became defined and prescribed through fixed contours. This self/nation—other/global distinction raises the question: Who in the nation feels invaded, and whom does fortifying the nation's boundaries protect?[45] Particular structures of class, caste, gender, and sexuality are implicitly assumed to stand for the nation. These structures fix the location of the opposition where other configurations of these structures become erased. Furthermore, the concern with the threat from the other becomes a trope that is then available to level against a multitude of others. Additionally, the concern with perforated boundaries assumes that the boundaries around the nation have not historically been made and remade in a process that propels the articulation of multiple modernities. Lastly, the nation/ global distinctions are gendered so that the nation is coded as enclosed and feminine while the global is coded as free floating and masculine, mirroring the public/private divide. In the vision of more emancipatory politics, rather than envisioning the politics

[45] Massey directs this question to those who perceive a threat to home and homeland in globalization. See Massey 1994.

of place as the production of fixed locations, we may consider instead, to use Caren Kaplan's terms, location as an "axis" (1996, 183). In such a formulation, the nation can be envisioned not as fixed and enclosed but as dynamic and open.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the pageant was considered iconic of globalization by the state and the organizers as well as by the opposition to the pageant. The pageant and the opposition effectively opened to scrutiny the debate with women's sexuality and autonomy in a period of tremendous political and economic change. The concern with rapid change in the country was contained and controlled through a focus on women's bodies and representation. For the opposition, the symbol of desexualized womanhood fortified the nation in globalization and effectively secured the borders and boundaries of the nation against sexual transgression. In so doing, the opposition to the pageant refashioned gender and sexuality to fit new forms of patriarchy that were structured to accommodate the concern with the "contaminating" influence of globalization in India.

Politics of opposition fashioned through new forms of oppression, such as in the case of the pageant, where the arguments against globalization were predicated on erasing women's agency and sexuality, is deeply problematic. This framework, I argue, was based on a particular politics of place, where the nation was ideologically and symbolically fixed and immutable. The structure of such oppositional praxis forecloses the possibility of considering globalization and the nation as mutually constitutive spaces where location is not fixed but an "axis." The insistence on generating a nuanced politics of place stems from an argument against the assumption of "pure" spaces of agency or oppression on either side of globalization or local opposition. Therefore, public spectacles such as the pageant are

important sites of political intervention because they create the possibility to articulate new spatial geographies.

The Mafia and Media Get Along: Notes on Contemporary Media Distribution and the Public Sphere in India[1]

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Until the 1990s, dissemination of news through print and the commercial cinema represented the most significant media presences in the Indian context. The factors that shaped the historical and political context of discussion in the public domain include: the limited nature of participation and access to print media for large segments; the pre-dominance of upper-caste agents, especially in the print media; the internal divisions, on the one hand, between English and regional language audiences, and between the regional language reading publics on the other. Within this larger scenario, the links between the big business houses and Indian news media in the post-Independence period,

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[1] A fuller version of this paper, 'The Fight for Turf and the Crisis of Ideology: Broadcasting Reform and Contemporary Media Distribution in India' is due to appear in Crispin Bates, ed., *Rethinking Political Institutions in Post-Reforms India*, Permanent Black, Delhi, forthcoming.

Sagar: South Asia Research Journal 7 (2001)
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especially the press, have been fairly well documented.[2] As Robin Jeffrey's work has valuably shown, the expansion in the market for political news and the consumer base from 1980s onwards has seen a phenomenal rise in the circulation of regional language newspapers.[3] Significant as these trends have been, it is debatable if they brought about any fundamental shifts in reversing the relations of power underlying the structure of public sphere, especially those pertaining to the nature of ownership, participation and access.

Parallel to these connections, but less analyzed for their implications for the nature of the Indian public sphere, have been the relations that the entertainment media have had with speculative capital and the informal sectors of the money markets. Students of popular Indian cinema have long known that, with its nation-wide markets and growing international audiences, the commercial film industry has always been an attractive avenue for investment of unaccounted profits. In fact, with banks unwilling to finance film-production until recently, the 'parallel' economy has been the main source of funds for the entertainment business, estimated currently to have an annual

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[2] The Goenka family is the principal shareholder in the *Indian Express whereas* the Sahu-Jains and their business associates control Bennett-Coleman and Co., publishers of *The Times of India;* Delhi's Hindustan Times is owned by the Birla family, one of the largest industrial houses in India; The Statesman is owned by a combine that includes among others, two major industrial houses, Tata Sons Pvt. Ltd., and Mafatlal Gagallbhai and Co Ltd. For estimates on the level of concentration in the print media in the post-Independence period, see 'Competition and Monopolies,' Report of Press Commission, Part I, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1954, esp. pp. 280-309; Report of the Second Press Commission, Vol. 2, Controller of Publications, Delhi, 1982, esp. pp 238-242. Both Reports suggest that the available information, especially that volunteered by newspaper managements tends to under-report the level of consolidation. For the structure of ownership in the regional language press, see Jeffrey, *India's Newspaper Revolution*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000

[3] Ibid.

turnover of approximately Rs 3750 crores.[4] Although not known for their critical content, in so far as more than any other cultural form, varieties of commercial cinema in Hindi and South Indian languages and popular music have helped define a cultural mainstream, the output of these media industries remain an important aspect of the Indian public sphere. In surpassing the limited nature of print audiences, until the growth in television audiences in the 1990s, cinema represented one of the most important sites where the experience of a general public was approximated and contested. What is particularly interesting, and perhaps, symptomatic is that, as against the patronage available to print media from national and provincial business elites, and for broadcasting through state funds, commercial cinema - whose products, above all, helped extend the public beyond that defined by upper-caste cultural elites-has survived mainly through exploiting surplus merchant capital available through parallel money markets.[5] There is a growing literature that demonstrates how the inter-dependence of legitimate big businesses/ corporations and illegitimate activities of the 'parallel' sector, such as labor racketeering, bootlegging, manipulation of unions go to sustain the efficiency of capitalist economies in different parts of the world, including those of advanced industrial,

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[4] See Report 'Cash boost for Bollywood' by Sanjeev Srivastava, July 25 2001, *BBC Online*, URL: http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/entertainment/film/newsid_1700000/1700458htmaccessed December 10 2001.

[5] Besides Films Division, the second state intervention in film production was the setting up of Film Finance Corporation in 1960. The FFC and its later *avataar*, the National Film Development Corporation aimed to finance an alternate cinema with modest budgets through production and export of Indian films, imports of foreign films, the import and distribution of raw stock, construction of cinema theatres and development of technology. For an estimate of these state-supported interventions in film finance, see Mira Reym Binford, "India's Two Cinemas," in John D. H. Downing, ed., *Film and Politics in the Third World.*

western democracies.[6] More specifically, links between organized crime and entertainment industry in the US, and elsewhere have also been documented.[7] In the US, there has been longstanding evidence of the infiltration of Hollywood labor unions, including some major ones, by the underworld. Similarly, starting off in the 1920s as a talent agency and band booking company with alleged links with the Chicago mafia, the Music Company of America has gone on to become one of Hollywood's most powerful TV, film, and recording conglomerate.[8] However, given the scale and importance of Hollywood's output, its relation vis-à-vis leading banks has been the exact reverse of the situation of the Indian film industry: the financial health of several banks remains intrinsically tied up with fortunes of Hollywood companies. Thus, quite uniquely, perhaps, within the scenario of Indian capitalistic modernity the importance of links between mainstream and informal sectors does not remain restricted to the economic context; rather it has been integral to patronage structures of popular culture and dissemination of a 'low-brow' cultural mainstream, impinging thus in important ways upon the public sphere.[9] Most notably,

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[6] Owen Lippert and Michael Walker, *The Underground Economy: Global Evidence of Its Size and Impact*, Fraser Institute, 1997; Colin Williams, Jan Windebank and J. Windeband, *Informal Employment in the Advanced Economies: Implications for Work and Welfare*, Routledge, New York, 1998; Kathleen Staudt, *Free Trade: Informal Economies at the U.S.-Mexican Border*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1998.

[7] See for example, Gerald Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood 1930-1950: Moguls, Mobsters, Stars, Reds and Trade Unionists*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2001; for an account of the foothold by the Japanese yazuka on film exhibition and entertainment shows, see also Junichi Saga, *The Gambler's Tale: A Life in Japan's Underworld*, translation, John Bester, Kodansha International, Tokyo, 1991, pp. 195-7.

[8] For an investigative account of the intertwined fortunes of Reagan, the MCA and the mafia, see Dan Moldea, *Dark Victory: Ronald Reagan, MCA and the Mob*, Viking Press, 1986.

[9] For an analysis of the colonial-modern public sphere and the political implications of the limited size of reading publics, see Veena

Jan Breman's work has emphasized the almost complete paucity of work on the informal sector.[10] This is particularly true in the context of large Indian cities such as Mumbai[11]; one may additionally emphasize the need to pose questions about the diverse ways in which intersections between formal and informal economies are increasingly implicated in shaping circuits of ideological/cultural production, distribution and consumption, especially in the Indian context.

Informal Networks and Popular Culture

Here I will merely sketch the contours of the role of under-capitalized informal networks in shaping circuits of patronage, production and distribution of popular cultural products in post-colonial India. The Indian film industry makes about 900 films per year. Most mainstream Bollywood directors consider big budgets and inflated star-fees essential for a chance at box-office success. And yet, as Madhav Prasad's work has shown, Indian film-production has been dominated by surplus merchant capital and a large number of independent producers who, at best, are small scale entrepreneurs hoping to capitalize on the availability of low-wage casual labor, the enormous wage differences between stars, 'character actors' and 'extras' and relying on renting all requisite technical resources, demonstrating that the industry remains characterized by under-capitalization and

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Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere: Western India under Colonialism*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2001.

[10] Jan Breman, 'The Study of Industrial Labor in Post-Colonial India The Informal Sector: A Concluding Review,' Eds. Jonathan Parry, Jan Breman and Karin Kapadia, *The Worlds of Indian Industrial Labor*, Sage, New Delhi, 1999.

[11] For a detailed study of the informal sector in agriculture, see Jan Breman, *Footloose Labor: Working in India's Informal Economy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

fragmentation.[12] Recent developments notwithstanding, a current industry report tells us that film-financiers comprise mainly of diamond merchants, brokers, builders and other such people with large amounts of liquid cash to spare, which they lend out at rates as high as 36-48% per annum.[13] In addition, in a situation characterized by an acute scarcity of exhibition outlets,[14] where distribution and exhibition are seen as the most profitable aspects of the film-business, the industry has long been seen as a distributors market.[15]Distributors, and more recently, music companies-the main parties to profit by a film's success-have been the other source of commercial film finance.[16] Up until the early 1980s, these links between 'black' money and commercial film production were still contained within relatively unthreatening proportions with only occasional rumors about a well-known underworld don putting up money for a film with some minor actress whom he admired.

However, with the expanding market for film-based and other media products such as audiocassettes and videos in the 1980s, and now cable and satellite TV, the under-world has got seriously interested in the lucrative returns available through the

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[12] See Madhav Prasad, 'The Economics of Ideology' in *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, Delhi, 1995, especially pp. 40-1.

[13] 'Report on the Film Industry,' *India Infoline Sector Reports*, URL: http://www.indiainfoline.com/sect/mefi/ch04.html, accessed on December 12 2001.

[14] It is estimated that there are 12,548 theatres catering to a population of over 1 billion in India, as against 31,000 theatres in the US. This means that in America there are 117 theatres per million people whereas in India there are only 12.5 theatres catering to a million people. See Report on Film Industry, *Screen* Online edition, August 31, 2001, URL: http://www.screenindia.com/20010831/freport.html, accessed December 12 2001.

[15] Madhav Prasad cited above; see also Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, Ist edition, Orient Longmans, 1963, pp. 137-9 and 160-9.

[16] See 'Report on the Film Industry,' *India Infoline Sector Reports*, URL:http://www.indiainfoline.com/sect/mefi/ch04.html, cited above

entertainment and media industry.[17] Peter Manuel's study on the audiocassette and video boom shows the extent to which this expansion in 1980s relied on piracy and use of other illegal means.[18] Clearly, the growing markets for media products tapped the potential of the informal sector in augmenting distribution networks, even as the increasing rivalry between segments of the entertainment industry such as music and film production seemed to present underworld elements with a ripe opportunity to emerge as important mediators over copyright, distribution and profit claims. This, of course, was not the first time that the help of underworld goons had been sought to resolve feuds over big money or other types of economic and industrial disputes: especially since the 1970s, Shiv Sena, the right wing party with a nativist agenda for Bombay, set up by Bal Thackeray, was able to acquire a great deal of influence by largely presenting itself as a useful intermediary for all kinds of dealings between the 'clean' capitalistic core of the economy and its parallel sectors, especially by providing quick solutions through the use of intimidation and violence.

But the extension of this role into cultural 'patronage' was novel. If evidence were needed of the growing involvement of the underworld in the entertainment business, it was provided in the gunning down of Gulshan Kumar, the ambitious and self-made 'audio cassette-king' in Bombay on August 12,1997.[19]

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[17] See interview with film-makers Benegal and Gulzar, 'The threats continue' *Rediff.com*, November 5, 2001,URL: http://www.rediff.com/entertai/2001/nov/05mafia.htm,URL accessed December 10 2001.

[18] See Peter Manuel, 'The Advent of Cassettes: New Alternatives to His Master's Voice,' in *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India*, Indian edition, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2001, pp. 60-88.

[19] See report by Syed Firdaus Ashraf and Suparn Verma, 'Gulshan Kumar shot dead!' on *Rediff.com*, URL: http://www.rediff.com/news/aug/12super.htm, URL accessed on December 10, 2001. See also Profile on Gulshan Kumar at *Rediff.com*, URL: http://www.rediff.com/entertai/aug/12super1.htm, accessed on December 10

More than anyone else, Gulshan Kumar re-wrote the rules of the music business in India through the 1980s and 90s. Starting off as small-time fresh-juice vendor in Delhi, he got into the audiocassette business in 1978, first with a petty service and repair shop. Realising that the market was ripe for an expansion, he is said to have made huge profits through bootlegging and cheap, pirated versions of the expensive HMV cassettes, the monopolist market leader at the time. Soon after he set up his own legitimate but controversial recording company, T-series introduced, what were called 'cover versions.' Initially 'cover versions' were re-recordings of old film-hits, but soon he began to issue such 'duplicates' of current movie releases. At the time of his death, besides his flagship company, Super Cassettes, Gulshan Kumar's presided over a Rs 500 crore business empire that had diversified into soap and detergents, electronics manufacture, CDs and video production, and even film production.[20] Gulshan Kumar was one of the biggest names in the film and entertainment business when he was shot dead, allegedly because he failed to acquiesce to extortionist demands. Subsequently, the difficulties in obtaining finance for filmmaking have presented the mafia with easy openings to step into film production. Industry sources claim that at a conservative estimate, underworld money finances approximately 30-35% of the films.[21] Besides, the presence of mafia money has been useful in securing dates from top stars to

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2001.

[20] Gulshan Kumar produced two major hits, including *Aashiqui*, his first film, and *Bewaafa Sanam*. Made with completely unknown faces and mediocre scripts, both films were packed with songs, sung by new entrants, but tuneful to ensure that the film would do well.

[21] See Report, 'Role of the Dons,' *The Week*, December 10, 2000, online version, URL: http://www.the-week.com/20dec10/enter.htm, accessed December 9, 2001; *India Infoline Sector Reports*, 'Film Production and Film Promotion, URL: http://www.indiainfoline.com/sect/mefi/ch04.html, accessed December 9, 2001.

keep production on schedule.[22] More recently, with the growing international attention towards Indian commercial cinema, the mafia has been mainly interested in securing overseas rights, as a way of money laundering.[23]

Until recently, the realms of commercial cinema and popular music have routinely received only utter analytical disdain from the English language press and sections of the liberal-nationalist and left-oriented intelligentsia. This stems partly from bourgeois anxiety over the possible contamination of middle class culture from contact with the 'low-brow,' even while it reflects the difficulties of posing the question of what constitutes the 'popular' in an intensely stratified and linguistically divided post-colonial society. However, the last few years has seen the growth of an interesting body of work that aims to conceptualize the cultural terrain that Indian commercial cinema occupies, and understand its modes of address, narration, and reception.[24] Mindful of the unique way in which relations between

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[22] See Report 'Cleaning up Bollywood,' *BBC News Online*, April 19, 2001, URL: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/audiovideo/programmes/crossing_continents/asia/newsid_1283000/1283350.stm accessed December 9 2001.

[23] 'See Report, 'The threat from the Underworld continues' November 5, 2001, *Rediff.com* URL: http://www.rediff.com/entertai/2001/nov/05mafia.htm, accessed December 10, 2001; also see Report by Luke Harding, 'Bollywood spins its own mobster yarn,' *Guardian Online*, January 15, 2001, URL: http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,7792,422515,00.html, accessed December 10 2001.

[24] Ashis Nandy, ed.,'Introduction,' *Secret Politics of Our Desires: Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Indian Cinema*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998; Ravi Vasudevan, 'Shifting Codes, Dissolving Identities: The Hindi Social Film of the 1950s as Popular Culture,' in *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 1993, pp. 51-85; Ravi Vasudevan, 'Addressing the Spectator of a 'third world' National Cinema: the Bombay 'social' film of the 1940s and 1950s, *Screen*, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 305-324; Rosie Thomas, 'Indian Cinema: Pleasures and Popularity,' *Screen*, Vol. 26, No. 3-4, 1985.pp. 116-31.

institutions of cinema and politics have evolved in India, recent work has also tried to probe the connections between large collectivities such as cinema audiences and political behavior[25] or, for example, the historicity of regional cinema audiences and their links with class and debates about cultural values.[26] It has been suggested that the emerging economic and ideological context of the post-reforms period has seen some important shifts in cinematic form and its mode of production, arising from a new capital base, the emergence of a nexus between cultural corporations and reputed directors the adoption of management techniques and new aesthetic strategies.[27] However, despite these developments to confer a partial belated official acknowledgement of film-production as an industry and attempts to regularize financial flows into film-making, simultaneously other media trends in recent times have only accentuated linkages between the extension of audiences, the expansion of capitalism, informal sectors of the economy and underworld elements. For clearly as much as the lure of growing profits in the media industries, it was the mafia attack on film-producer Rakish Roshan in connection with their demands for the international rights of his recent hit that apparently impelled the government to make available partial bank loans to fund film-production.[28]

It is in this context that media reform and distribution in

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[25] Madhav Prasad, 'Cine-Politics: On the Political Significance of Cinema in South India,' *Journal of the Moving Image*, Calcutta, autumn 1999, No. 1, pp. 37-52.

[26] S.V. Srinivas, 'Is there a Public in the Cinema Hall,' *Framework*, Online Edition, Summer 2000,

[27] Madhav Prasad, 'Signs of Ideological Re-form in Two Recent Hindi Films: Towards Real Subsumption?' ed., Ravi Vasudevan, *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema*, OUP, Delhi, 2000, pp. 145-167.

[28] See Report, 'Cash Boost for Bollywood,' *BBC News Online*, July 25, 2001,URL: news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/entertainment/film/newsid_1456000/1456962.stm accessed December 10 2001.

India in the post-liberalization period have to be viewed. As elsewhere, economic reforms in India went hand in hand with important changes in the media sector. Besides forcing a review of Indian media law, the introduction of new media technologies like cable and satellite television has redefined existing communicative, economic, and political networks both at the macro and local levels. Starting as an urban cottage industry, within less than a decade, cable and satellite TV reaches about 30 million people in India today, and the industry already shows strong signs of consolidation. The appearance of cable TV saw several small local operators set up shop in each locality, using the relatively cheaper co-axial overground cables to transmit the signal from their control rooms to individual homes. Subsequently, the entry of major business houses like Hindujas, Zee TV's delivery-services arm, Siticable, RPG and Rahejas as leading players in the media distribution sector have seen attempts to upgrade to the more efficient but expensive fibre-optic technology. Bearing out the lucrative possibilities in the cable industry, the entry of the big business houses into the distribution sector has impacted upon the pace of developments, enabling increased connectivity, consolidation of existing networks and major changes in the relationships between broadcasting companies and viewers. The ongoing consolidation within the industry has been accompanied by high levels of volatility, seen equally in the all-too-common allegations of the use of force between rival companies and operators, as well as in the high rate of mergers and acquisitions observed at different levels within the cable business. With revenues directly tied to the size of the cable TV networks, the right to control 'distribution territories' has emerged as key issues, thus emphasizing trends that had been pre-figured in the film and music industries. In addition to being scarcely regulated and allowing direct access to resident populations, the cash-rich nature of the cable business has been an obvious attraction to political bosses hoping to enhance their local influence. The high

returns and intense rivalry between the large distribution entities for the expansion of cable and satellite TV networks has often meant that they have been willing to take the help of underworld strongmen to establish their 'territorial rights.' Many such individuals have been appointed distributors for specific territories, resulting in the emergence of a new breed of entrepreneurs that include the relatively small number of local cable operators who now control cable transmission in each suburb. Such alliances between the world of big business, the underworld and local politics is not entirely new to Mumbai, but the very nature of cable distribution has enhanced the significance of the connection between large commercial stakes and territorial control. In other words, the extensive instability within the cable industry is related to the ways in which the new media technologies have been able to integrate communicative networks, local politics, and power equations with the interests of big corporate houses. All this has obvious implications for the changing nature of the public sphere in present times and the shifts in emphases within contemporary political discourse.

Sacrifice and Suffering: Imaging Nationalism

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Introduction*

In the period around late 1920s and 1930s in colonial India, Bhagat Singh and Gandhi came to represent two competing strands of nationalist politics; their lives and the stylization of their selves became the most vocal essence of the politics they practiced. This paper focuses on a brief moment in colonial politics when Bhagat Singh captured popular imagination. How this moment marked and transformed the political and visual vocabulary constitutes my main concern here. This paper focuses on popular prints of Bhagat Singh and Gandhi to argue that as discursive concepts in the context of nationalist politics, violence, and non violence fracture any semblance of an essentially Revolutionary and Gandhian politics. The popular prints as well as the political rhetoric of this time gesture to a nuanced relation of nationalist politics and violence. The authors themselves continuously challenged the notions of

* I have discussed the contents of this paper in detail in *The Politics of the Visual: The Image of the State and the Nationalist in Early Twentieth Century Colonial India*. Unpublished M.Phil dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1994. This paper has gained immensely from seminar courses taught by Begonia Aretxaga, Katie Stewart, Kamran Ali, and Kamala Visweswaran. I am grateful to Gail Minault for her encouragement.

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patriotism, Revolutionary politics, and Congress/ Gandhi politics. Therefore, it is not merely at the point of reception that messages can get disrupted.

I trace this visual production through the images[1] of Bhagat Singh and Gandhi, as representatives of the Revolutionaries and the Congress in the 1930s.[2] In the prints, the focus was on a politically productive complex of death, suffering, sacrifice, and deification. Nationalist politics was redirected to the varying states of patriotic sacrifice thereby projecting Gandhi and Bhagat Singh as participating in a collaborative project. Bhagat Singh was executed in 1931 for the assassination of deputy Superintendent Saunders and for hurling bombs at the Central Assembly Hall in Delhi when the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill was being discussed on April 8, 1929. The prints I examine here were produced and circulated around 1931, commemorating Bhagat Singh's imprisonment and execution. These prints were produced in presses in Lahore, and Kanpur. I draw on Ben Singer's essay on the rise of popular sensationalism, "... the images of the illustrated press are historically interesting not only as instances of discourse, as examples of the a particular set of critical or commercial or rhetorical postures towards the modern world, but also as suggestions of a condition of cultural duress surrounding the onset of urban modernity."[3] These prints capture a moment in

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[1] I use image as J. Berger has described it as, ' a sight which has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance, or a set of appearances which have been reproduced detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance...' *Ways of Seeing*, London: Penguin, 1972. p.9.

[2] Bhagat Singh's political association with the Ghaddar Party and the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association aligns him with a politics distinct from the Congress. Yet these distinctions continued to be challenged in popular prints.

[3] Ben Singer, "Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism" p.88, in Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz Eds. *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press. 1995.

nationalism in colonial India when Revolutionary passions competed with those of the Congress.[4] The attention in newspapers, the prints, the political rhetoric of this time, all converged on Bhagat Singh.[5] This was a moment of seduction and to borrow from Sommer, the context for a 'passionate patriotism,'[6] which celebrated sacrifice and devotion as the domain of the nationalist.

The Image of the Revolutionary: Visual Encounters with the Revolutionary

The First Information Report (FIR) filed on 17 December 1928 at the Anarkali police station in Lahore consists of a document mapping and charting a genealogy of the revolutionaries' assassination of Deputy Superintendent Saunders (figure1). The document maps the topography of the

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[4] I am not situating Congress/Gandhi politics and Revolutionary politics as hegemonic and resistant forms of nationalist activities. Following Jose Limon, there is a need to be critical of the idea of a seamless resistance or domination. Limon has argued that 'in varying historical moments these expressive discourses give evidence of "resistance" and "domination" but also of seduction, anxiety, internal conflict, and contradiction…' *Dancing With The Devil*, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994. p. 15.

[5] My intention is not to make a case for the popular prints as a mirroring of nationalist ideologies and rhetoric. Neither do I want to demonstrate that visual rhetoric was instrumental in negotiating the discursive quality of violence. I find useful the term "discourse network" developed by F.A. Kitler. 'Discourse networks do not disclose preexisting or hidden truths. Rather, they articulate certain phenomenon as natural or unproblematic targets or instruments of certain practices. Thus visualization, inscription, and articulation, in their contingent facticity and exteriority, are the only irreducible givens of discourse network analysis.' See M. Tapper. *In the Blood: Sickle Cell Anemia and the Politics of Race*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999. p.6.

[6] Sommer p. 33, cited in D. Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "dirty wars,"* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997. p.31.

moment where the assassination occurred, and marks the (escape) route of the revolutionaries. On a corner the assassination is detailed as a step-by-step unfolding. Each step is numbered and mapped. Names of the assassins, witnesses, officials and constables, shops, trees, the process of the assassination, a map of the site, all converge to create a map of the event and the direction in which it unfolded. In contrast to this official genealogy, popular prints offered a distinct genealogy and map of revolutionary events.

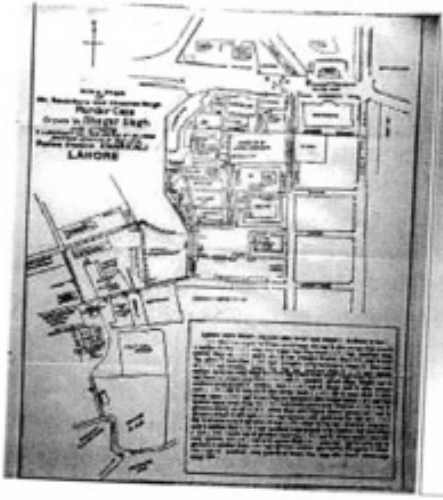

Figure 1

Figure 2

Through a focus on the sacrifice of the revolutionary, the assassination of Saunder was reinscribed with selective portrayals and images of the Revolutionary and his political act. This was achieved primarily by centering Bhagat Singh as the chief player in revolutionary politics and by creating his stereotype image in a Stetson hat (figure 2).[7] A single image

[7] The bust size photograph of Bhagat Singh with a Stetson hat, twirled moustache first appeared in several newspapers when Bhagat Singh

came to embody a politics. This process can be traced through the picturing of various encounters of the revolutionary; the encounters can in turn be seen as marking the genealogy of the revolutionary's (and specifically Bhagat Singh's) political life that begins and culminates as a sacrifice. [8] The central allocation to Bhagat Singh is also discernable in *Mr. Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev hearing the sentence of hanging with pleasure* (figure 3). Bhagat Singh is located at the forefront of the trio, along with Rajguru and Sukhdev, arms akimbo and smiling. The Stetson hat gave Bhagat Singh a specific identity, even among revolutionaries. In this frame the viewer is positioned so as to witness and read. To *witness* the encounter between state officials and the revolutionaries and to *read* the English document announcing the death sentence. The title of the print anchors our attention to the revolutionaries' response to the document--punishment and death evoked *pleasure* in the revolutionaries. The emotion of this response was strategic: it mocked at state power, and denied the state the *occasion* to demonstrate its power. The pleasure erased any traces of fear of state punishment and death, thereby constituting in one way the image of the bold revolutionary. Bhagat Singh's centrality is also achieved by an exclusive focus on his image, as in figure 3, and numerous other compositions. [9] For example in the *Three Indian*

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and his associates were arrested in 1929 and subsequently executed on March 24 1931. This image continues to circulate today, for example in calendar art as well as the popular comic series *Amar Chitra Katha*.

[8] The execution too figures as an episode in the genealogy, but due to space constraints, sacrifice and suffering as a recurring imagery are my focus here.

[9] In the context of the terrorism discourse, Zulaika and Douglass have pointed that the personal narrative of one individual is made to capture the essence of an entire people or period of violence. Zulaika and Douglass are pointing to the fictions in the discourse. Zulaika, J., Douglass, W.A., *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables and Faces of Terrorism*. New York: Routledge, 1996. p.72. Such constructions appear central in the personalizing of nationalist politics through the image of Bhagat Singh, and Gandhi.

Heroes in Prison Bhagat Singh occupies a central position in the visual frame. Bhagat Singh's arms extend to embrace his associates Rajguru, and Sukhdev in prison. Bhagat Singh's entire body is visible in contrast to the partial images of his associates. The handcuffed Rajguru and Sukhdev are attired in the same clothes as Bhagat Singh but the Stetson hat sets Bhagat Singh apart. The picture allows a face-to-face encounter of the viewer and the revolutionaries in prison. Both the visual and written texts invested the entire revolutionary project in the image of Bhagat Singh.

Figure 3[10]

[10] This poster was reproduced in two versions; the one I describe above had the English text exactly translating the Hindi text. The second version, of which only the anchoring and titular text changes, is reproduced above. The title in Hindi, translates, "The Lovers of Freedom." The caption below the picture warns, " [You will] see the effect of the murder of the

These frames also position the viewer to witness the encounter of the revolutionary and the goddess *Bharat Mata*. The revolutionary, and particularly Bhagat Singh offering his decapitated head on a platter to *Bharat Mata* directs attention to the self-sacrifice, and erases any instrumentality of the state in causing the death of Bhagat Singh.[11] This denial of state power and agency to punish marks the decapitation of the revolutionary and the depiction of revolutionary politics in popular prints. The revolutionary's death is framed along with political figures like Gandhi, Nehru and other Congress activists. This strategically aligns the Congress and the revolutionaries as participating in a collaborative nationalist project. Gandhians and Congress nationalists are mute participants, endorsing the revolutionary cause. In figure 5, Gandhi, tears open his chest to reveal and prove to the young revolutionary, his deep love for Bhagat Singh and his comrades. The effervescence emanating from Gandhi's chest connects him to the revolutionary heroes in heaven;[12] they in turn radiate and energize the new emerging revolutionary youth.[13]

The execution and death leads to the deification of the revolutionary. Scenes of deified revolutionaries capture the complex relations and appropriations of nationalist politics of this moment. In heaven, the revolutionaries join political

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martyrs. [We] shall erase the homes of the oppressors, [you will] see." Therefore the different texts to the same composition convey entirely different messages.

[11] For a continuation of the theme of decapitation in modern Bazaar prints, see W. H. Mcleod, *Popular Sikh Art*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1991.

[12] The death of the revolutionary situates him in a celestial space, which in turn becomes a mark of distinction. The evocation of the celestial space brings with it a range of artistic props, which I have not elaborated here.

[13] The uniform as a mark of the revolutionary makes the polit ics distinct, even though the theme of collaboration seems to be stressed.

luminaries of the past and add to the pantheon. Through sacrifice and death the revolutionary was the genesis of a new god.[14]

Figure 4

[14] R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p.89. Sacrifice, and suffering were central tenets of Gandhi's politics. He repeatedly evoked evoked these terms. In 1915 Rabindranath Tagore conferred the title of *Mahatma* to Gandhi. R. Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree: A Study of Indian Culture and Society*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1971. p.380. Ananda Coomaraswamy remarked that Mahatmas or "Great Souls" are those who, though having become liberated in this life, *jivan mukta*, undergo acute suffering to bring succor to ordinary men and women. A. K. Coomaraswamy, "Mahatma", in *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on his Life and Work*, ed. S. Radhakrishnan, London: George and Unwin, 1939; 1949,p.63-7. Cited in V. Lal, Nakedness, Nonviolence, and Brahmcharya, in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 9, No. 1-2, 2000. p. 107.

Figure 5

In contrast, Gandhi through his continuous suffering could be situated as an incarnation or mediator of established godly figures like Krishna.

The imposing cluster of morals and consensus as resonating[15] revolutionary activity is most evident in the poster, *The End*. Here Bhagat Singh evident through his stereotype image is shown crucified. But the crucifixion is resonant and not merely a copy. Bhagat Singh faces the viewer with a noose

[15] I refrain from seeing these visual tactics as a means of claiming legitimacy. Claiming legitimacy as the implicit strategy, further, begs the question why? And seeking whose legitimacy? Is it legitimacy from the audience or from the state? It seems that the idea of seeking legitimacy is at times implicitly presumed in forms of resistance. It may not be so.

around his neck with a part of the rope entwined around an arm of the cross. The execution is juxtaposed to the crucifixion. Arms spread across; Bhagat Singh is shown holding in each hand a head of his executed fellow revolutionaries. While a grieving Bharat Mata[16] kneels and holds Bhagat Singh's legs, four cherubs rain flowers on all the revolutionaries. Past political luminaries in heaven witness this scene of death and grief; death of the revolutionary and the grief of Bharat Mata. Among the political activists depicted one can be recognized–Lala Lajpat Rai, a former Congress leader, who died of injuries from blows in a *lathi charge* led by Saunders. This representation while appropriating the moment, history, and emotion of the crucifixion, staked a claim for continuity with a Christian past, even as in turn that past was coaxed to resonate colonial revolutionary activity. Approximating Bhagat Singh to Jesus Christ situated the nationalist activity within an arena of morality and justice with which the state was supposed to be *familiar*. In recalling the familiar (for the state), this visual strategy not merely invited the state to new, modern sites habited by the cherished familiar, but also, in a sense, tried to jolt the state out of its amnesia. This visual juxtaposition also points to other processes at work: through Bhagat Singh (and revolutionary politics) it became possible to represent a continuum of sacrifice through Hindu and Christian paradigms. And this was possible only through the death of the revolutionary. In popular prints the death of the revolutionary imparted immense potency to the representation of nationalist activity. Through the various depictions of revolutionary death, it became possible to use the moment and space to imagine revolutionary politics and the colonial state in a range of ways.

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[16] The flag and crown at the site of the crucifixion mark the woman as Bharat Mata. In a state of grief, Bharat Mata does not adorn her crown nor holds the flag. Her hair is disheveled. She is represented in direct contrast to the neatly coiffured, seated Bharat Mata in figure 4, for example.

Figure 6

The representation of the revolutionary's death as a self – sacrifice, crucifixion, and execution provided a range of contexts for framing revolutionary politics. It provided the space to establish the state's violence. Through the execution, the state was the source of violence. The generative aspect of revolutionary sacrifice and state violence abounds in these visuals. It became the point to question the validity of distinguishing between violence and non-violence as marks of nationalist politics. Through the focus on death, sacrifice, and deification these representations deflected attention away from

the violence in revolutionary politics.[17] It is necessary to note here that Gandhi too claimed Jesus Christ as a satyagrahi: 'The suffering that has to be undergone in Satyagraha is tapasya in its purest form. Only when tapasya is capable of bearing fruit do we have the fruit. This establishes the fact that when there is insufficient tapasya, the fruit is delayed. The tapasya of Jesus Christ, boundless though it was, was not sufficient for Europe's need. Europe has disapproved Christ. Through ignorance, it has disregarded Christ's pure way of life. Many Christs will have to offer themselves as sacrifice at the terrible altar of Europe...'[18]

A collective unanimity was projected by picturing revolutionary activity as endorsed by the Congress activists both living (like Gandhi and Nehru), and dead (like Lala Lajpat Rai). At the level of visual representation, the revolutionaries and the Congress, Bhagat Singh, Gandhi, the dead and living activists, were all portrayed as participating in a harmonious nationalist project.[19] While the nationalist activity was shown as unified, it was sacrifice which was stratified and marked the distinction between the two brands of nationalist politics without robbing either of its nationalist ingredient. The vocabulary of a stratified sacrifice subordinated Congress/Gandhian politics to

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[17] Does such projection and deflection of revolutionary violence signal a critique of violence, an attempt to conceal it and to mark violence as a state identity? It seems to me that such projections are not concealing but re-forming violence. Marking distinctions of violence (violence of the revolutionary versus violence of the state, and, in a general way, good versus bad violence) can be seen as strategy to mark grades of nationalism thereby claiming nationalism in revolutionary politics. Just as it discursively marks the difference in a 'revolutionary' and a 'terrorist'.

[18] In Satyagraha – not Passive Resistance dated 2 September 1917. In R. Mukherjee ed., *The Penguin Gandhi Reader*, New Delhi: Penguin, 1993. p. 128. Also see FN 59 here.

[19] Such visual resolutions were played out even in the case of Subhash Chandra Bose. For example, see figure 7.

Revolutionary politics.[20] This mimetic and an iconic resolution of Christianity and revolutionary politics widened the inclusive pantheon which continues to be evoked in postcolonial India to frame nationalist politics (figure 6).[21] The shifting realm of the gendered patriot and nation continues in the postcolonial context. As the Indian National Army leader Subhash Chandra Bose gets appropriated by a range of politics in postcolonial India. Ironically the project of the nation state replaces the suffering mother nation with the all male Hindu trinity (figure 7, *Heaven*).[22] The print *Devlok* (Heaven) depicts the Congress activist Sarojini Naidu and Kasturba Gandhi with other political luminaries. Heaven becomes the space where all brands of politics coalesce around Gandhi. It marks the peripheral feminine citizen and the abdication of the goddess as nation.[23]

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[20] I link the stratification of sacrifice as leading to the stratification of masculinities as well as femininities. I have not elaborated on this theme here.

[21] For example, see figure 6, a modern calendar. The prosperity of a 'modern' secular India, mechanized and traditional farming, commerce signified by ships, nationalist leaders, are framed by a pantheon of Christ, Buddha, and Gandhi who witness the politics of prosperity and the prospering politics. The modern state no more requires a representational feminine presence. The politics as well as economic production become an all male domain.

[22] The print here depicts Congress activist Sarojini Naidu and Kasturba Gandhi. Ironically, heaven now becomes the rendezvous of all brands of politics. It marks the peripheral feminine citizen, and the abdication of the goddess as nation.

[23] I have discussed the shifts in the visual depictions of the feminine nation in *The Politics of the Visual*.

Figure 7

Conclusion

The deflection of acts of revolutionary violence in prints and the use of a sacrificial paradigm collapses myth and history, and in turn aligns varying nationalistic strategies. At the representational level, the popular prints established a relationship between violence and sacrifice. This sacrifice directed at the nation, was inflicted on the self, resulting in the mortal annihilation of the revolutionary. It ensured his immortality as a new member of the pantheon. The sacrifice performs the function of 'concealing the real act' and as Girard points out, instilling a certain degree of misunderstanding.[24] The

[24] Girard argues that the celebrants do not and must not comprehend the true role of the sacrificial act. Following Girard, I also find useful asking the question how nationalism can be constructed on an imaginary basis. Girard, R., *Violence and the Sacred*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University

idea of Sacrifice transformed violence into a productive political, moral, and emotional act. To read this as a fiction of representation would be only a part of the story. Instead, these prints are the texts through which it is possible to 'grasp the moral drama that fuse myth and history.'[25]

Press, 1979. p.7. This is also the question that Anderson asks: why people are ready to die for these inventions? Anderson, B. *Imagined Communities*, p. 141. A productive way of seeing, what Girard calls 'concealing,' could be as a transforming act. Anderson points to the role of language, particularly the vocabulary of kinship and home in articulating political love. In the posters that I consider here, language indeed was a prominent guiding text, yet it was the predominant visual text that ciphered the political actions. It is relevant here to draw attention to Anderson's notion of a nationalism that is copyable once it is, 'out there for all to see.' Anderson draws attention to this aspect in the context of 'official nationalism.' I think this is relevant in the context of Bhagat Singh too. Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities*, p.159.

[25] K.M. George, *Showing Signs of Violence: The Cultural Politics of a Twentieth Century Headhunting Ritual*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p. 86.

"Hurt 'til it Laughs": Domestic Violence on the Tamil Popular Stage"[1]

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> In case the harvest they reap from representation is reality, ... we won't allow people to represent a woman as she hurls insults at her husband.
> -- Plato, *Republic* (395d)

Preface: The Situation That Led Me To This Essay

While sitting in the audience watching a Special Drama in April 1993, a shockingly brutal scene came on stage in the middle of the night. The audience all around me laughed riotously, women as well as men; indeed they laughed until tears ran from their eyes. I was the only person in the audience not laughing. My immediate thoughts ran: "She's bashing him in the teeth! He's kicking her in the groin! He's stomping on her while she's down -- and they're laughing! How can it be? Why would people laugh at such pain?" Given the un-jolly cultural resonance

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[1] One form of this paper was presented at the "Mass Media and Violence in South Asia" Conference held at the University of Texas at Austin (spring of 2001).

Sagar: South Asia Research Journal 7 (2001)
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this scene had for me, as a Western feminist familiar with the complexities and brutality of domestic abuse, the audience laughter unnerved me as much as the scene itself.

I wanted to understand what was going on here. I knew that anthropologists often say that jokes are the hardest thing to understand cross-culturally, but I hadn't found that to be true of the joking buffoonery in Special Drama so far in my two years of fieldwork. I had already noted how, in several fieldwork accounts, anthropologists often allowed laughter to cut a kind of firebreak line at which he or she will stop an otherwise burning interrogation of all cultural difference.

Some have done this by assuming that laughter itself is a "simple" response. Such an attitude is evident in James Peacock's writing about Javanese Proletariat Theater, when he reports that "by far the most frequent response was simply laughter" (Peacock1968: 69). But what's simple about laughter? Only its dismissal, it seems to me.

Others have assumed that those who laugh at something they themselves find tragic or horrific are simply laughing to keep from crying. Otherwise assiduous anthropologists, from Laura Bohannon to Esther Newton, have treated the laughter of others as a mask for tears, assuming that the "true feelings" of any laughers must be the same as their own (Newton 2000:27, Bowen 1954:296).

Unwilling to assume either that laughter itself was a "simple" response and that I just wasn't getting the joke, or that everyone around me was as horrified as I was but had managed to laugh it off even though they were really crying inside, I decided to interrogate my disturbing spectatorial experience more actively. I began questioning audience members and artists alike about the particular comedy scene I had witnessed, and I learned from many that they found this scene both funny and pleasurable. My task became one of trying to understand the particularity of the pleasures the audience took in this scene. In doing so, I had to begin theorizing about the general spectatorial

relations at play in Special Drama. This paper presents those thoughts, particularly as they regard spectatorial relations that foster laughter as a response to a representation of domestic abuse.

I hope today to present this material to you in a way that I usually can't manage, which is to put the primary material right up front so that you are familiar with what I am talking about before I start analyzing it. So I am going to begin by showing you a video clip of the event, and then proceed to analyze how I think the spectatorial relations in Special Drama work to encourage laughter at domestic violence, and what such a response means in the local South Indian context.

A brief description of Special Drama:

- A popular 20th century theatrical genre performed primarily at temple festivals, lasting all night from around 10 p.m. to dawn
- The story lines are taken primarily from Hindu and Christian mythological narratives
- Incorporate improvised comedy scenes, performed by buffoons and dancers (male and female)
- Performers are a mixed community, Hindu, Christian & Muslim, united by poverty, who are stigmatized for the publicness of their profession (especially the women)

The particular comedy scene we look at today is known as "Atipiti": Atipiti is a kind of rhyming twin-word compound comprised of two verb roots playfully joined together. The root "ati" means, "to hit," while "piti" means to grab or hold, or in this case, to hold while hitting. I have translated this as the thrashing scene, and also occasionally refer to it as the domestic violence scene for reasons that should become clear: we are looking at a popular "hit" here on more than one level.

In this sketch, Wife and Husband scold (and thrash) each other, in turns, for bringing their private business into the public. In one scene we meet the Wife, and learn that she has aired her problems to the women next door, who she meets in the *kollai*, the backyard of the house, a space locally coded as one where

women gossip together as they work doing domestic chores. Furthermore, she has now brought her domestic problems, even more openly, to the nattamai, or village headman–played here by the Harmonist. While the Harmonist, the leader of the Special Drama musical party, often takes on an Everyman role, a kind of stand-in for a chorus of public opinion--throughout any night of Special Drama, his role in the Atipiti scene is particularly marked in that he is overtly referred to as the nattåmai, or Panchayat leader. A nattåmai is a recognized moral arbiter of local disputes.

After the wife's scene, in which she asks the nattamai for assistance, she exits and her husband enters. He too brings his problems into the public by talking about them with other men, including the Nattamai. These men taunt him for being far too much of a wimp, who lacks manhood in the face of his wife, and prompt him to take immediate action against her behavior. Just before we pick up the scene, the husband boasts to these men that this is exactly what he is going to do, saying "Hey, look here, today something's gonna happen, I'm telling you; I'm gonna hit her (ati) and grab her (piti), and anyone who tries to interfere won't make it home whole!"

He calls backstage to his wife in a manner that is much less respectful of her than she would like (but which is indeed the way husbands usually address their wives, in the non-respectful intimate verb tense). Instead of just taking this as normal, the wife appears as a Fury, scolding him for his disrespect in precisely the language that men usually use to control their wives. The actress' portrayal of this shrew-like wife is a full reversal of normative gender roles in the Tamil household. What then ensues–his transformation, and the kudos he receives from the other men for it--you will now see.

Section I. What is Going on Here? Why Does the Audience Laugh?

In order to understand what is funny here, we need to look at how the audience looks at what they are watching. I begin with a discussion of three influential theories of spectatorship, each of which provides a model that is at least partially relevant to the spectatorial relations at play at Special Drama events. I then propose a fourth model that I think best captures the particular ways Tamil audiences view the Atipiti scene, contributing significantly to its local meanings.

It should not be unsurprising that the spectatorial relations pertaining between Special Drama and its audiences might be other than those generally held to pertain in "Western theater" (itself of course a ridiculously reductive, if conventional, notion in its own right, but not the topic of my paper today). Special Drama developed at an intersection of multiple theatrical traditions. These include the proscenium stage realism of mid- to late-19th century Parsi and British traveling troupes, as well as the indigenous theatrical traditions of Tamil *Terukkuttu* and poetic and devotional song genres. Special Drama likewise draws, I suggest, on both Western and Indian traditions of spectatorship.

The first model of spectatorship that I find useful here is the Platonic model, which is characterized by its emphasis on *imitation*. Plato saw theater as powerfully affecting its spectators, to such an extent in fact that theater scholars have characterized his attitude towards the power of the stage as "Plato's loathing of the theater" (Diamond 1992:391). Plato's problem with theatrical representation in the *Republic* is that it shows us things that should repulse us, but instead all too often attract us, and inspire imitation; Plato writes:

> Instead of being repulsed by the sight of the kind of person we'd regret and deplore being us, we enjoy the spectacle and sanction it. [...] And the same goes for sex, anger, and all the desires and feelings of pleasure and distress which, we're saying, accompany everything we do: poetic representation has the same effect in all these cases too. **It irrigates and tends to these things when they should be left to wither,** and it makes them our rulers when they should be our subjects, because otherwise we won't live better and happier lives, but quite the opposite. [...] If you admit the entertaining Muse of lyric and epic poetry, then instead of law and the shared acceptance of reason as the best guide, the kings of your community will be pleasure and pain (*Republic* 605e-607a).

Consequently, in his plan for the ideal Republic Plato recommends banishing actors from the city entirely (after anointing their heads with myrrh, to be sure) [398b]. In the Platonic/imitative model of spectatorship, the audience wants to *be* the person they see.

The second model of spectatorship is based on Aristotle's brilliant answer to Plato's fears. I call this the *inoculation* model. Aristotle effectively rescued theater from Platonic condemnation by proposing *catharsis* as a kind of homeopathic cure: through a small dose of pity or fear, a momentary identification leading to enjoyment or repulsion, the spectator *purges* himself of the same, and thereby attains moral betterment. Here the idea is that the viewer will not *copy* the bad actions of the actor, but rather *learn from them* what to avoid. By partaking in the bitterness of the tragedy or the foolishness of the comedy staged before them, spectators will be purged of any desire to go through the same experiences in their real lives: spectators will partake here, so that they won't have to partake again in real life. Thus theater is an instructive purgatory that offers a useful, inoculating dose of poison; *catharsis* can help strengthen the polity, rather than lead it astray.

The third theoretical model of spectatorship harks not from ancient Greece but rather from ancient India. This is a theory of spectatorship concerned less with the identifications made by individuals than with a collective appreciation of theater. The aesthetic theory of *rasa* derives from the classic Sanskrit theatrical tradition, codified in the early text known as *The Natyasastra*, attributed to the sage Bharatamuni around the 3rd century B.C. In this tradition of theatrical aesthetics, *rasa* is understood as the taste or mood of the performance, which is both generated by the performer's skill and dependent on the ability of the audience to taste its flavor. As it is discussed in *The Natyasastra*, "the play performed must offer the possibility of tasting," while "a capacity for tasting is likewise required of the audience" (Heckel 1989:37). In such a conception of theatrical relations, the audience relates not to a particular character or his or her traits and actions, but rather to the mood of the performance as a whole.

The goal of the audience in this model of spectatorship is to *appreciate* the artistry of the theatrical representation of human emotion; the idea is that audiences will enjoy the spectacle from a certain distance, exclaiming, "so this is how it is!" appreciating the truths it expresses about the human condition. The Natyashastra builds such theater from a palette of eight primary *bhavas*, or human emotions: Love, Humor, Anger, Compassion, Heroism, Wonder, Disgust, and Fear. These eight are then further broken down into four pairs, comprising a source emotion and a derivative emotion. The first paired set of emotions is Love (*Srngara*) and Humor (*Hasya*). Of this pair, the text notes that "Humor results when Love is parodied or imitated."

The rasa of humor is then itself divisible into six varieties, according to whether it is used by high, middle, or low status characters. Each character type is associated with two varieties of laughter. The two used most in the Atipiti scene are, not surprisingly, those associated with low characters: loud laughter

and silly laughter (as compared to the gentle laughs of the high, or the broad smiles and satirical laughter of the middle types.) The silly laughter used and provoked by low characters is described in the Natyasastra as "laughing in the wrong context with tears in the eyes and head and shoulders shaking," while loud laughter is described as "tears flowing from the eyes, voice loud and screeching and sides firmly clasped."

This third model thus recognizes the shared nature of the event that takes place between audience and performer. It suggests not that this experience of give and take leads directly to specific actions in everyday life, but rather that it leads to commentary on such actions. The *rasa* theory appreciates theater as something the audience judges from a critical distance. A similar attitude of judgment reappeared the conversations I had with both performers and audience members alike about their appreciation of the Atipiti scene.

In fact, all three of the theoretical models of spectatorship I have mentioned–the imitative Platonic model, the Aristotelian cathartic model, and the appreciative aesthetic model of *rasas* and *bhavas*--reappear in the discussions I had with those present at the Atipiti scene. The particular mix of these orienting paradigms suggests a fourth model of spectatorial relations that I now think of as a paradigm of "moral judgment." I first began to glimpse this in discussing the Atipiti scene with its performers, who spoke primarily of their overt intention to deliver a moral message.

Much like Aristotle, the performers saw staging a glimpse of "the wrong way" as teaching people what *not* to do. They took particular pleasure in the chance to be the ones to deliver such a moral lesson, as it represents a major reversal of social roles for them. Stigmatized as public performers, Special Drama artists in general rarely get a chance to be heard as purveyors of any kind of morality. This popular repertory hit provides the artists a chance to prove their ability to triumph conventional morality. The opportunity is particularly welcome

in this case, as Kalaiarasan (playing the Husband) and Sridevi (playing the Wife) occupy a marginal place even within this marginal subculture: both are Muslims working in a milieu that is predominately Hindu. Both have chosen to use Hindu stage names. On this matter, Sridevi reasoned as follows:

> If we use our own Muslim name, advertise it and go to act in some other place, people will speak of us as though we are very cheap, saying 'Look at that! A Muslim girl has come to act! What a big shame it is for Islam. They will talk thus amongst themselves, considering it a big shame for the entire village.

Kalaiarasan added, "A humiliation and a shame–they might take action through the Jamaath [a Muslim panchayat]." This is indeed what happened to Sridevi; the Jamaath in her village excommunicated her, cutting her off from all relations with her community for acting on stage. Public opinion has been a powerful disciplinary force in these artists' lives, and they are understandably wary of submitting their lives to public scrutiny. This real-life lesson seemed to color their approach to the staged moral lesson of the Atipiti scene. They emphasized throughout our discussion that family matters should properly be dealt with inside the home, and that any move to involve the public in internal domestic disputes will end in tears–or worse yet, laughter.

The moral of the story, both artists agreed, is that "One shouldn't go and tell what happens in the house to others." Opening ones marital problems to the scrutiny and gossip of outsiders should be avoided at all costs: "peace" in married life means *not* talking about problems in the marriage:

> Sridevi: We should solve all our problems amongst ourselves. Women should generally work within the house and not go around gossiping; otherwise, the family will suffer. When a husband and wife fight, they should forget it immediately. Only then will one's

> family life be peaceful. Otherwise, if we think, "my husband has bashed me up and therefore I won't give him any food" the family will be ruined. Man and woman should be united.

A general premise of feminist work against domestic violence worldwide, of course, is that the couple has to first recognize the violence in their relationship as a problem, before they can begin to address changing it. To do so one must talk about it and admit that the problem exists. The opposite paradigm is in play here. Domestic violence is, far from being seen primarily as a social problem, treated instead as an acceptable social resolution. Violence is naturalized as an unmarked male action, a given of a husband's proper behavior. The wife's "complaint" to her neighbors and to the nattamai/headman leads directly to blows; this eventually "reforms" the Husband, in the sense that it encourages him to establish "normal" husband-wife relations with her by beating her.

Sridevi explained the action of the Atipiti scene to me as follows:

> My main aim is to reform him. That's why I hit him; that's why I talked like that: so that he will get *røsham*. Once he gets *røsham*, then I promise him that I won't talk like that. I say, "We should be like everyone else, like husband and wife." And he also agrees: "Yes. It's my mistake also. Henceforth, I'll go out and earn. Let's live like all other husbands and wives. Let's live peacefully."

What the Wife seeks to reform in her Husband is his lack of sufficient masculinity, or *røsham*. Again, male "violence" is not the problem, but rather the solution, as well as the desired norm: a man's "rosham" is his proper pride and self-respect, which he attains through his domination of his wife in their home. The original problem in their marriage is the topsy-turvy

relation of their household, where the wife was working outside the home:

> Sridevi: His wife earns and feels, "Why the hell should I respect this man? I am the one who earns." So she never respects him, but rather calls him "vata, pota" [you come, you go].

Thus the Wife claims that she engaged in public talk purely as an instrumental move. Public exposure here, always a dangerous endeavor, was her last-ditch attempt to get her Husband to engage publicly with other men, and thus find or develop his masculinity. The moral of the story is that men should hit their wives, and that as long as they do, their wives will stay quiet about it.

What about the publicness of their performance, then, I asked? Their performance, the artists felt, works to reinscribe the message that public exposure of marital problems should be avoided. This is clearly understood, they emphasized, as everyone laughs at them. Even children can thus learn here the values of maintaining an orderly, self-contained Tamil household:

> Sridevi: In some families, what we show is a fact. The audience will realize "Oho! If we talk like this [with outsiders], I suppose this is what will happen." Women should not listen to other women or talk in such a manner to men.
> KA: When they see our comedy, families will reform; both some men and some women will reform. After seeing us, they will try to be more united, even if they are fighting with their husbands.

That is, reform is urged not against some locally unrecognized, abstract category "violence," but rather against the overly bold speech of a woman either to her husband or to outsiders. But why, I still wondered, is any of this funny?

It wasn't until I spoke with Sala, one of the many women laughing heartily in the audience at the Atipiti scene that night, that I finally got an answer. The performance you saw today and that both Sala and I watched that night was held in the neighborhood where I lived at the time, a suburb of Madurai called Krishnaapuram Colony. Sala fits a common profile of the kind of woman who attends Special Drama performances in urban settings such as this one. Working class and lower caste, Sala is one of the urban poor. Her husband left her several years prior to this and she was raising her two children alone, one of whom was a teenage boy. She did domestic work as a cook or maid in as many homes as she could to piece together a living wage. Due to the presence of the American Institute of Indian Studies Tamil language school in this suburb, at the time Sala was providing various domestic services to the households of several American scholars, including my own.

The day after the performance I asked Sala why she found the Atipiti scene so funny. In reply, she recounted the performance to me as she saw it. Her account differs significantly from the transcribed, denotational record I later generated from the videotape in revealing ways. Most significantly, in her account Sala replaced the critical verbal promptings and interjections of the Harmonist with the laughter of the audience. In Sala's account, the audience laughter is a collective, critically interactive public voice–and the voice of the nattamai disappears entirely ("withers," as Plato might have it). This substitution in Sala's account suggests that it is a particular subject-position, rather than a specific character, with which she as an audience member "identified." That is, in Sala's retelling of the Atipiti scene's action, the subject-position of Everyman was inhabited interchangeably by the audience and the Harmonist. Sala identified with neither the Husband nor the Wife, but rather contributed her own voice, through laughter, to a collectively voiced public.

As the following excerpts from our conversation reveal, in Sala's account the audience's enjoyment has more to do with the assertion of a collective moral sensibility, and a collective self defined by moral agreement, than with psychological notions of individual identification. Sala began:

> At the beginning, the husband is like a small child, with a mild-mannered nature. He's sort of crazy. His wife, boldly, makes him do all the housework. "You must wash my saris. You must cook. You must not speak with anyone next door. I'll go out and I'll earn like a man for you. You just eat and listen to me. Whatever I say, you listen. What man, what do you say? What I say goes. Come here! Wash my sari! Put out the food 'da!" -- this is how she talks to her husband. And like a little child, he fears her, and does anything she says: "O.K. 'ma, whatever you say I'll do it, 'ma." So for about ten minutes, he listens to everything she says.

Note immediately the slippage here between the event text and the narrated text in Sala's account: she is quoting dialogue from the narrated text, but she is framing it in the real-time of the event-text, saying "so for about ten minutes he listens to everything she says" (rather than something like "so for years he had been doing everything she said," which would have kept her own account in the single plane of the story).

She continues by saying that after about ten minutes of listening to everything his wife says (a point on which, by the way, her recollection is uncannily accurate, as testified to by my video time clock) it is finally too much for him, and as Sala put it, "he suddenly takes courage." How does this come about, I wondered? Sala explained:

> People will laugh, saying, "Ai Yo! See how he does everything his wife tells him to, he irons her saris, he cooks for her, he's so afraid of her!" People will laugh. Then/
> SS: /What's funny in that? [I interject]

> Sala: See, he is submitting to his wife. He is ironing her saris, cooking for her. He has no other go, and because he is living off her income, he is afraid of her and submits to her. If you show this to Tamil people, they'll laugh happily. Then what does he do, immediately he turns around and realizes, "Hey, shit! Everyone is looking at me and laughing!"

It is once the audience's laughter begins that the slippage between the narrated and the event text really comes into its own in Sala's account, and the event starts to fully "hang between the subjective and the objective," (as a *rasa* theorist might put it), with no separation between the juice and its tasting: the people laugh, and the performer becomes cognizant that he is laughable. He suddenly takes courage: "Whoa! Looking at me, they see that my veshti is tied like a sari, while hers is tied like a veshti! Everyone is looking at me and laughing!" and this gets him going.

Even though the artists never actually cross-dress in this performance, Sala has here literally clothed the gender reversals of this sketch in the ever-humorous stuff of cross-dressing. Cloth provides her a tidy symbol with which to condense the many issues at stake here into a single image, and Sala captures the flavor of the gender reversal through this idiomatic exclamation of the shame of psychic cross-dressing: "my veshti is tied like a sari, while hers is tied like a veshti!" [a parallel to the English idiomatic expression of a woman wearing the pants in a household]. Her account continues:

> Sala: So right away he says to her, "Hey you, you think I'm the kind of guy who will do everything for you? Cook for you and wash your clothes? I will not cook. I will not wash. I will not heed your words" -- and with that he raises his veshti [in a fighting gesture] and beats her with blows and kicks. Then she says, "Everyday I talk to you like this, so why have you suddenly taken exception today? Suddenly you are

> angry? You have been like the wife to me; I've been like the husband to you. Today what, someone taught you that you should beat me like this, kick and beat me like this! You'll come to no good! Your hand will turn leprous!" and she scolds him. And that will be pleasurable for Tamil people. **First he was afraid of his wife, but now, finally now, happily, he hits her...**
> [SS: And how did this happiness come about?]
> Sala: Right! **he realized that everyone was laughing at him.** "They must be laughing because they think I'm crazy. So, what if I should get the right character, if I should get heroism? Then I show my manliness, and she submits to me." The wife submits. And today the husband moves a step up.

I suspect that by "today" Sala again refers to a day that simultaneously occupies both story-time and telling-time, and that the husband moved up a step on both that day and this. Indeed, as Sala put it:

> Only now has he become a man. *A man*. And she a wife. And now she surrenders to her husband.

There was an almost wistfully romantic tone to this ending in Sala's account, a sigh of relief, and a contentedness like the happily-ever-after of fairy tales. This is the way it should be. Now he's a man, and she's a surrendering wife -- now everything will be o.k. When I asked, "But doesn't anyone feel sorry for her?" Sala answered "No one will feel for her, because she spoke insolently to him. She didn't treat him with respect. So we'll think, 'Beat her good! Hit her again! Hit her man! Kick her man!"

The effective role claimed for public laughter in this audience account of the event strongly recalls the turn-of-the-century French humor theorist Henri Bergson's treatment of humor as a mechanism of social control and an instrument of moral reform. The use of public laughter as a shaming corrective

is central to Bergson's theory, as it seems equally to be of Sala's. Bergson writes:

> Laughter is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. By laughter, society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it. It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness (Bergson: 1956 [1900]: 187).

Sala's retelling of the Atipiti scene casts the audience's corrective laughter in a key role, erasing any separation between the musician as everyman and the audience as everyone. Indeed, she fully replaces the Harmonist with the audience; whereas we generally talk of a chorus 'standing in' for the audience, in Sala's retrospective portrayal, the two are entirely undifferentiated subject-positions. Audience and chorus are not merely contiguous, they are coterminous. As a result, the Harmonist completely disappears from her account, and his contemptuous verbal comments are subsumed into the audience's laughter, which then acts to effect the scene's progression.

Sala's account presents a theory of causality in which shame effects are key. It is the Bergsonian laughter of the audience, "intended to humiliate," that prompts the Husband's self-realizations. Likewise it is his shame in the face of the audience that causes him to desire change and thereby to find his manly pride (*rosham*). The shared assumption in both Bergson's and Sala's logic is that shame is highly efficacious in enforcing social norms; as soon as a man realizes that everyone is laughing at him, shame will prompt him to reform and conform.[2] It's as

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[2] Silvan Tompkins's psychological affect theories would be a good place to begin thinking further about shame and contempt in this performative context, since in Tompkins' understanding, "Shame is the most reflexive of affects in that the phenomenological distinction between the subject and object of shame is lost" (Sedgwick and Frank 1995:136). Comparing

though these ten staged minutes are not a *representation* of ongoing relations (that could have existed for 10 months or 10 years), but rather *are* the very relations themselves. What is happening right here on stage, in the midst of this particular public, is what has to be corrected, and the people rights here, as a powerful instantiation of the Tamil public, are the ones doing the correcting.

In this sense Sala's account concretizes an abstract public into the current, present public. Working class women like Sala and her friends, who attended this performance together, are quite familiar with child rearing and, in Sala's case, the particular struggles of raising boy children into men. When she characterizes the psychological state of the Husband as that of a young boy towards his mother-- "And like a little child, he fears her, and does anything she says," she simultaneously notes the sudden shift in authority that marks adulthood. The figure for whom the man must properly perform is the larger public, and not simply this one woman, whether wife or mother. The young man's awareness of the broader audience and of himself breaks into consciousness simultaneously. This sudden self-awareness breaks his orientation to the parental figure, and he abruptly stops orienting his actions to his wife/mother inside the home, and starts orienting himself toward the audience, outside in public.

"Going public" is thus both a male life stage marker and a disciplinary linchpin in the proper socialization of citizens. It is right for the man, and wrong for the woman. And for everyone, going public invites the public in. Only by internalizing the public voice in the first place might you avoid shame and laughter; such are the lessons one can learn at Special Dramas.

Tompkins' psychological theory of shame to the kinds of affective continuities held to pertain between audience and performer in classical *rasa* theory could prove productive.

Here, the audience partakes of a key aspect of the classic role of the audience in Sanskritic *rasa* theory. The audience tastes the flavor of the performer's emotional evocation of the human condition. Simultaneously, they inoculate themselves, in good Aristotelian fashion, from any need to suffer the same plight as these characters when in public themselves. The audience learns the consequences of such acts through the performance event itself. And in identifying with the Harmonist's position, rather than that of the actors, they enjoy the spectacle freed from the Platonic curse of having to *be* "the kind of person we'd regret and deplore being ourselves" (in Plato's own words).

Through a particular combination of spectatorial orientations, then, audiences for Special Drama can enjoy scenes like Atipiti–its upside-down-ness as well as its uprightness--without disrupting the conventions of morality that order their own lives, for better or worse.

Public voices and public advice, and public commentary on every staged move, is what moves the whole event along, through shaming taunts and corrective laughter. The ultimate message seems to be that in order to avoid actual confrontation with any actual public, one must learn to internalize the public's attitude so thoroughly that one never trips up, or needs to go consulting anyone outside. It seems that actors are cast permanently in the role of being people who haven't learned this basic lesson in Tamil life, stuck as they are in this shameful, stigmatizing position of being on the public stage, getting laughed at by an audience who thoroughly enjoy their own ability to claim the moral high ground. Hit, and hold: a public celebrates what it knows about public shame and humiliation by re-enacting it upon actors.

So now I get it. I still don't think it's funny. But I can sort of see why Sala might.

Digest Culture: Reading Pakistani Domesticity.

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> Maulvi Saheb saw a packet with monthly "Ismat" printed on it. Beneath it, in red ink, the packet was addressed to Sheikh Irfan Ul Haq's daughter. Maulvi Mehrban Ali could not believe his eyes. He forgot his own money order and returned home with a new story to tell. He relayed that a magazine bearing the name of Irfan Ul Haq's daughter is lying at the post office to some of the more mature individuals in the neighborhood. But such news cannot be kept from people for long. Soon the news of magazines arriving for Irfan Ul Haq's virgin daughter spread like wildfire. Magazines' coming for an unmarried daughter itself was embarrassing enough; furthermore it had the daughter's name on the envelope. Delhi is far away, who knows how many and what kind of men had read her name.

This passage from Ehsan Manzil,[1] an Urdu short story by Intezar Hussein, narrates the changes within the domestic sphere in Indian Muslim households. Hussein gives us a sense of how religious reform, expanding opportunities for education for both genders and colonial modernization in the first quarter of the twentieth century, undermined and challenged the more traditional aspects of middle class Muslim life in North India.

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[1] My translation

Sagar: South Asia Research Journal 7 (2001)
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The community's anxiety over a woman's name being exposed to strangers is echoed in depictions of households from other parts of the Muslim world. For example, Assia Djebar, in her book Fantasia similarly shows how, while growing up in colonial Algeria, her female relatives were scandalized when a postcard sent by her father arrived specifically addressed to her mother. Hence the postcard, a letter or a magazine subscription to a woman in the family became a metaphor for modernity, the public and the outside penetrating the Muslim moral boundaries and domestic ethos.

In this paper, I seek to understand the process of this change within the social context of contemporary Pakistani domestic space. Using an example from popular women's writings in Pakistan, this is an initial attempt to comprehend how middle and lower middle class women articulate notions of family, individuality and sexual mores in a rapidly changing social and economic milieu of contemporary Pakistan. In short, I will explore how Urdu women's magazines and digests tend to inform and represent domestic life. This is not by any means an exhaustive survey of the literature. My example will, however, suggest ways in which popular writings for women need to be understood and analyzed beyond established reading practices of harlequin romances and popular women's writings in the West. No doubt, these writings do reflect and reinforce women's traditional roles as daughters, wives, and mothers, and predominantly portray women as sexually naive, passive, and submissive in their relationship to men. Yet my discussion of a female narrative from a recent Pakistani Urdu digest will argue that such writings need to also be read as transgressing and challenging societal norms. I admit that such texts retain the traditional and conservative facade of the genre. Their close reading, however, illuminates how this faithfulness to idiomatic priorities may yet contain within itself a critique of social expectations.

The Genesis of "Pulp"

In colonial north India, late nineteenth and early twentieth century remains a period of intense interest in women's education among the middle and upper middle class Muslim families. Women journals were competing for audience among a small group of urban literate Urdu speaking female readership. Tehzib-e-Niswan, from Lahore, was geared toward home economics, health nutrition, and education. Khatun, from Aligarh, served as a mouthpiece for the All India Mohammedan Educational Conference. Purdah Nashin, supported purdah and focused on women's household activities. There of course was Rashidul Khairi's Ismat that claimed to let women write in its pages and was ostensibly for sharif Hindustani women. All these journals also emphasized the need for women to be educated so that they could improve housekeeping and child rearing skills (Minault 1998:133). These periodicals followed earlier reformist literature that focused on middle class households, where sharif bibis could define and set themselves apart from popular and coarse street and rural culture. There was an elitist desire to reconfigure the Muslim domestic sphere into a space where practicality and reason would triumph over superstition and irresponsible behavior (Naim 1984). In the 1930s and 1940s Muslim women writers themselves exploded on to the literary scene. Ismat Chughtai, Qurutl ain Haider, Rahsid Jahan, Hajra Masroor and Khadija Mastur are some names among many that have since become eminent in this sphere. These writers were highly critical of the older reformist literature and in their writings constantly undermined the class based pedagogical underpinnings of the earlier writings. Important as social critics and in depicting the changing norm within the Muslim domestic realm, these voices, due to their literary style and publishing venues, remained limited to a narrow percentage of the reading public.

Since Pakistan's independence, expanding educational

opportunities and a commercial market for mass publication led to a production and proliferation of digest culture among the newly consolidating urban middle and lower middle classes. Until the 1960s audiences for digests were gender neutral. Except for older established magazines for women like Ismat, most digests would include specific women's section or have an interest column for them. The 1970s saw an emergence of competing women's magazines that targeted different groups of readership. Publishers sought after the younger urban working women who were leaving domestic spaces to work as stenographers, telephone operators, bank clerks and school teachers. Some digests were pitched to women studying in Urdu medium colleges in middle class neighborhoods of larger Pakistani cities. Other publishers went for the growing number of female readership in smaller towns where women in substantial numbers were acquiring at least a high school diploma if not higher college degrees. The popularity of these digests has been phenomenal. Some have circulation reaching anywhere from 10,000 to 80,000, far more than the first run of the most respectable literary publication. Moreover they have helped create and consolidate a whole industry of female writers, editors, sketch artists and designers that make a living through the publication of these digests.

Reading "Pulp"

Feminist critics like Tania Modleski (1982) have turned to analyzing Euro/American popular romance fiction due to their immense popularity among women. Modleski argues that romance stories or television Soaps should not only be seen as a conspiracy of patriarchal capitalism. The larger critical representation of these texts as portraying women happy within their domestic life and distracted from struggling for their rights, Modleski stresses, blinds us to the fact that many a college students are cutting classes to watch the Soaps, and housewives

are creating special time for their favorite romance novels. Feminists, Modleski argues, should start thinking about incorporating the study of these texts as a political task precisely to understand how and why women are attracted to these popular romances and to comprehend their potential effects on women's politicization in contemporary society.

Modleski and Janice Radaway (1984), in their respective works, see women's reading of popular romance as a space of resistance to the demands of daily life. Radaway asserts that her informants see the act of reading as combative and compensatory (Radaway 1984:211). Combative, because it enables women to refuse the prescribed social role within the institution of marriage. By reading a book they escape from the constant demands on their time and labor within the household. Compensatory, because romance reading creates in them needs that are not fulfilled by the patriarchal institutions they inhabit. Or as Modleski argues, these romances create escapist fantasies that are pregnant with potentialities of another world (Modleski 1982:113). However, both these authors affirm that these escapist and combative moments are firmly entrenched in the reaffirmation of traditional values and behaviors.

Feminist struggles of the last several decades have also had their effect on story lines (albeit in watered down form), and women now appear in these texts as professionals and even sexually assertive. Yet feminist critics complain that new models of this femininity still require marriage and heterosexual fulfillment for women to feel complete. As Modleski stresses, popular feminine texts may provide outlets for the dissatisfaction women may feel with male-female relationships, yet they never question the primacy of these relationships, the sanctity of the institution of marriage and the necessity of a family for woman (Modleski 1982:113). Although there is a symbolic negation and protest against the social order, for example, a valorization of romantic values over commodity values, the underlying system is left unchallenged.

Such arguments in their less sophisticated incarnations are echoed in Pakistani English language press to criticize the proliferation of romance stories in popular Urdu digests for women. This criticism is intrinsically linked to issues of class privilege and to the place English language occupies in Pakistan. For example, a recent article in the English press condemns the material in women's digests as intensely emotional and as stripping women of their individual identity (Ahmar 1997). Women are depicted, according to this analysis, only through their relationships with men as a mother, a daughter, or a wife. Linked to this loss of identity is women's portrayal as a commodity that is traded in the marriage act to accomplish the preordained role of procreation. The article stresses that the stories in these digests represent women as ideals of feminine virtue, as submissive to patriarchal authority and as loyal to their husband's wishes. Even when women appear as professionals working outside the home, in some stories, they are plagued with a feeling of guilt about the neglect of their domestic duties.

Such comments in the English press are partly emblematic of the larger difference between Urdu and regional languages and the hierarchically arranged symbolic power of English in Pakistan. Further, borrowing from Arvind Rajgopal's (2001)[2] argument on English and Hindi press in India, I argue that the English press in Pakistan is not only linked with secular and modernist ideals but also with a defined progressive politics steeped in the tradition of analytical, rational and responsible reporting.[3] This press signifies a readership that might not wield the power it used to posses, yet still demarcates the context of high culture. The critiques offered of conservative ideals by English periodicals imagine the female consumers of Urdu digests as more traditional and as passive recip ients of these

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[2]. Specially see chapters 1 and 4.

[3] Shemeem Abbas (1993) for a discussion on the continuing emphasis on English education in Pakistan and its links to global flows of capital.

narratives. These lower middle class women are thought to be trapped in a social milieu where change is stifled by an authoritarian domestic realm. In contrast, implicitly, the English speaking audience is constructed as graduating from Enid Blyton, Mills and Boons, and other romance stories to more serious and enlightened European literature. There is an underlying argument about the English language that makes such readers more critical and analytical; open to self-reflection and to change.

Urdu digests' readership hence is constructed as victimized women who are crushed under the weight of patriarchy and need to be jolted out of their misery by consciousness raising. The politics of understanding the Freudian question, what do women want, now rephrased into, why are women reading this pulp, is linked to a politics of conversion; a conversion into modern notions of self-consciousness, of individual identity, and of agency. Talal Asad (1996:263-72) argues that conversion by itself is considered irrational by moderns, yet invoking the idea of agency renders it "rational and freely chosen" as everyone has agency and is responsible for the life they lead. The lives of these women are only seen as an accident of "natural inequality" that equal opportunity, or pedagogy could perhaps resolve (Chatterjee 1993:232).

Pakistani "Pulp"

I do not have a definite answer to the Freudian query, what do women want. But that remains at least partly an empirical question. Here I wish to engage in reading a story that reflects what women may be reading. I chose the following story, as it is a distinct departure from earlier depictions of women's lives within the genre of popular women's fiction. This particular narrative was published in the journal Pakeeza, which like others of its kind, caters to a range of readership. Digests like Pakeeza consist of various sections; interviews with celebrities, cooking

tips, Q and A columns and several pages of fashion spreads. One of the most popular sections is the one called "three women three stories." The editors introduce these stories as true depictions of women's lives. They then edit the narratives to give it some publishable form. Women are encouraged, to send their stories, according to the editors, as they reflect social moral dilemmas that need to be shared with the larger reading audience. The story discussed below was published in this section.

The story, titled "Chains" (Zanjeer), starts with the protagonist, a woman, lamenting that everyone is looking at her with suspicion. She relates, "after Naseer's death I do not care, I myself want to die, Naseer my love, my life, my husband, we were married for thirty years. This is long time to be married. It is definitely enough time for people to become one and the same; you become essential for each other's existence. His death has broken me into pieces, but then why are people looking at me like this as if they want to ask me something but then look at my saddened face and hesitate."

She then narrates us the rest of her story in a long flashback sequence. She tells us that her name is Selma and she lived with her family in a small town in former East Pakistan. There, her family was close to two Urdu speaking families, one of Rahman's and one of Naseer's, who lived nearby. She liked both of them but had particular feelings for Rahman. She thought that if permitted to choose her life's partner she would choose Rahman, as he wanted to succeed in life through hard work and education. In contrast, Naseer, although a friend, was basically interested in making money. Time passed and the families moved to West Pakistan much before Bangladesh's independence. The families remained friends and prospered. Her parents received marriage proposals for her from both the families. Given a choice, she decided in favor of Rahman whom she had always liked and admired and who now had a respectable job.

Naseer did not accept this decision and threatened her by

saying that she will eventually have to marry him. This threat really disturbed her. However, she was now engaged to Rahman and nothing else mattered. The preparations for her wedding were underway when the news arrived that Naseer has had an accident in which he lost a leg. This came as a shock to the whole family and the wedding was postponed. The protagonist went to see him at the hospital where she found him extremely depressed, but happy to see her.

A few weeks later Rahman informed Selma that she had to give up the idea of marrying him and instead marry Naseer. He said that not marrying her was a huge sacrifice for him, but Naseer had begged him to consider it. Naseer had told him that as he was now handicapped no woman would ever look at him again and he would, therefore, become a social outcast. Rahman implored Selma to marry Naseer, initially she resisted the idea, but then she agreed.

The wedding was arranged and it was a big occasion as befitting the wealth of Naseer's family. On the wedding night Naseer came into the room. After giving her an expensive present and talking to her, he went and lay on the sofa without touching her, while she remained waiting from him on the bed until dawn. The same thing was repeated every night. Naseer would come into the room but not near her.

Selma describes her feelings by saying "Why was he treating me like this. I keep on burning. After all I am a woman. I cannot say much, but I was worried. I felt unwanted. Marriage also means something else, was he taking revenge. But after our wedding I have never even thought of Rahman. I am an Eastern girl. Our upbringing compels us to only live for our husbands. My respect and love is only for Naseer now, can he not see that?"

Few months passed by and then one day Naseer came and sat next to Selma and said, "I am sure you are surprised at the kind of man I am who does not take care of your feelings and emotions." Then he told her how he had succeeded in his

determination to marry her. Further, he said that in the accident he had not only lost his leg but also his masculinity, he was impotent. This was a crushing blow to Selma. He gave her permission to divorce him, as he was ashamed of what he had done. Selma was furious and said that she would never divorce him because that would set him free. She was his wife and she would remain so, but she would never forgive him and see to it that he received adequate punishment for his deeds.

In the following days Salma demeanor toward Naseer changed and she became even more caring and loving toward him. After a few years she persuaded him to move to Islamabad from Karachi. They bought a house outside the city in a fairly deserted new neighborhood. Within a few years of living there most of their relatives passed away.

Normally, Naseer slept without his artificial leg. One day, while Naseer was sleeping, Selma removed his leg and locked the door from the outside. When Naseer woke up he started screaming but Selma did not respond, knowing full well that he could not move without his artificial limb. After a while she entered the room and told him that she had thrown his leg away. He was her prisoner and needed to realize the meaning of freedom.

Beneath the bedroom window there was a hole through which Selma provided Naseer food for a few days. He initially refused to eat. One day he, however, did eat the meal. The next day she mixed some tranquilizers in the food and when she was sure that he was asleep she went in and tied him in chains. These were then pushed through the hole in the wall and secured to a heavy iron bar in the garden outside. The chains only allowed Naseer to move around in the room and go to the bathroom. Now Naseer was totally in her control. After a few days of shouting and screaming he became docile and passive.

Selma, during this period, became depressed herself. She started taking care of Naseer; changing his clothes, combing his hair, cleaning him. Eventually as days passed she felt herself

falling in love with him. She would take care of all his needs, read him the newspaper and make the foods he liked. She realized that he was not the only prisoner; she herself had become his captive. If he was confined to the room she was also trapped in the house.

Thirty years after their marriage and years after she had chained him, one morning when she called him for breakfast, he did not respond. He had passed away, finally escaped from his imprisonment. She called the neighbors to help her with the funeral. That is when people were looking at her with suspicion because there were chain marks on Naseer's body.

This particular story lends itself to a range of readings. The affirmation of the Eastern girl as being faithful to her husband, her sacrifice and her self doubts all lead to re-establish stereotypes. Her violence may be read as a classic trope of the revengeful woman too. Even though she identifies with her captive and falls in love with him, she proclaims, "I was not ready to free him I had to take revenge." Her rekindled love for Naseer, however, may also allow us to indulge in a modernist reading by describing this act as seeking pleasure through sado-masochism (although Naseer's consent may be an issue in the liberal formulation of this practice). I would, however, argue for some caution here, as it is difficult to fix the precise sociological meaning of how Selma receives pleasure in her acts. To inscribe a practice from another cultural space onto Selma's actions, may be an act of excessive translation. We need to be aware that, drawing on Walter Benjamin (1968), brot and pain although may refer to the same object (bread) are, however, culturally specific and historically unique. Yet, Selma does give and receive sexual pleasure and in doing so, does transgress boundaries of what may be considered "proper" behavior within polite Pakistani society.

Selma's predicament is multi layered. Choice of partners, adjustment to married life, betrayal, her right of conjugal pleasure, and her revenge are some of the more obvious themes. Her narrative may resonate with women who feel trapped in non-

sexual or bitter marriages. It is a fantasy that may have broad appeal not only in Pakistan but also in many cultures. Irrespective of the moral language and the invocation of self-doubt, Selma's actions can be read in an extremely sympathetic mode. Further, although there is explicit condemnation of her own actions by Selma, specifically through her voicing of self doubt, her sexual practices are presented as one of the many forms that people give and receive pleasure. Denunciation and disapproval of assertive or "deviant" sexual practices, in a Foucauldian sense, coexist with the proliferation of a discourse about them.

Such "fictions" might be an intrinsic part of, as Arjun Appadurai (1996:58) puts it, the conceptual repertoire of contemporary society. They help us think about how people fantasize, and imagine possibilities in shifting and ever changing social situations. Their moral tone notwithstanding, these stories provide spaces where there is an exchange and negotiation of desires and of imagined lives. Interestingly, such writings also escape the kinds of moral tropes that they are structured into as they transgress the very boundaries that they inhabit.

I would further argue that the themes discussed in contemporary stories such as "Chains" do not merely shock or moralize but rather reassert a socio-cultural milieu in which most women readers find themselves. Women may come to these stories conscious of them as part fantasy and part reality based on their own social experience and surroundings. Fantasies, as Fredric Jameson (1983) writes, deflect our deepest desires and most fundamental hopes, but for them to be meaningful they also need to have a connection to our lived experience.

My claims are small, popular narratives may offer a glimpse into some of the ways in which literate Pakistani households think about themselves. Reading these texts provides us not only a sense of change and shifts in people's lives but also a representation of their own views on the body, self and community. For us to appreciate the diversity contained within

these stories, we need to allow ourselves to investigate the teleological grid of modernist readings that are imposed onto these popular romances. This knowledge may also help us critically interrogate the liberal politics of emancipation and individual rights. Such narratives make us aware of how in post-colonial spaces, such as contemporary Pakistan, the construction of bourgeois individualism may be tempered by other visions of the self that coexists with it. Women's assertion of their conjugal rights situated within the construction of individualized agency may co-habit with their desire to be modest, self-sacrificial, subservient and humble. Through Selma's own contradictory inclinations of revenge and of spousal service, we see a coming together of different worlds and impulses in the construction of her own self.[4] A self, that may accept, contradict and even transgress the imposed construction of the mythical, yet desired "emancipated" autonomous individual.[5]

Moreover, different notions of self and community can be sites of contestation to the universalized international standards of emancipation that constitute the agenda of modernization with its related emphasis on the liberal laws and the free market. It can constitute a narrative of people's lives, as Partha Chatterjeee (1993) so eloquently puts it that is unyielding through its alternate constructions of the individual and the social to the disciplinary and hegemonizing pressures of modern norms. Such a reading does not mean a rejection of modernity or an attempt to resurrect some residual past, the idea is to situate other narratives of being and existence that are as much a part of modernity as are the globalized history of progress and emancipation (Dareshwar 1995). It may also mean a tentative exploration of a future politics taking into account ideas and lived experiences of

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[4] I am indebted to Dipesh Chakrabarty (1994) for this line of argument.

[5] We need to also pay attention to Carol Pateman's (1988) reminder that the conception of modern individual belongs to patriarchal categories of thought.

people themselves, who may embody different notions of self, time and space, social and sexual relations.

Conclusion

Where early twentieth century reformist literature had its overt pedagogical task, the digests are a more fluid and complex genre. I do not wish to argue that to have a sexual awareness of the kind depicted in the story places women readers in a progressive moment in society's history. Such an attempt would merely help me re-insert Pakistani consumers of these stories into an historical trajectory that produces the humanistic (read Western) subject. I want to also avoid labeling readers as falsely conscious or condemn their reading habits as vicarious pleasure that does not lead to "correct politics." Further, I do not want to assume that readers are ignorant of the effects of these stories. Rather, I seek to understand how these texts may resonate in the larger community and how desires and fantasies are created in specific cultures and histories. These fantasies are embedded in social practices in an historical moment of proliferation of urban life style, global media, new art forms, cinema, and international migration. Therefore, popular narratives, the kind that I have discussed in this paper, remain local; yet borrow from a variety of influences. They represent local histories in a global moment; as cosmopolitan scripts that influence domestic life along with other social processes in Pakistan afflicts these localized stories.

Romance novels, Cora Caplan (1984) argues in her reading of the 1970s novel Thorn Birds, have helped women to become progressively reflective about sexuality but unreflective and uninterested in thinking about politics. Fantasizing, she claims is a constitutive part of being human yet she argues we should also pay attention to the progressive or reactionary politics that these fantasies are bound up in. I would add caution to this argument, however, by suggesting that prior to categorizing these fantasies into a rigid grid of progressive or retrogressive politics it may

serve some purpose to understand how women themselves receive these texts. Janice Radaway (1984) is correct in pointing out that with all its drawbacks the popularity of these texts opens up an argument to analyze the utopian needs and desires that these stories seek to address and fulfill among its readers. How women respond is crucial for Radaway to move toward an arena where these utopian longings can be incorporated into a future feminist politics.

Walter Benjamin (1968) argues that the task of the translator is not to turn Hindi, Greek, or English into German; rather it is to allow the power of the foreign language to penetrate the translation. I read this as a call for a culturally situated and historically grounded rendering of people's lives, before imposing on them changes that have run their course in other cultural landscapes. To be precise, this demands a situated understanding of these texts within the extremely volatile social and economic times that people in rural and urban in Pakistan cope with; a task that is still before me.

BOOK REVIEWS

Narrative Strategies: Essays on South Asian Literature and Film, Vasudha Dalmia and Theo Damsteegt, Eds. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999. 263 Pp.

Composed of critiques of late 19th and 20th century narratives, this collection coalesced out of papers and discussions drawn from two conferences--a workshop at Leiden University in 1995 and a literature panel at the 14th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies in Copenhagen in 1996. In spite of the promise implicit in the collection's title that film narrative will be considered in balance with print narrative, literature (specifically, modern Hindi literature) commands the bulk of this volume. Only three of the collection's fifteen essays are on film compared to eleven relating to literature. While the embedding of a few film papers in a collection of mostly Hindi literary essays might suggest otherwise, disparate papers were decidedly *not* shoehorned into a casual or contrived framework. The editors tell in the introduction that the second round of papers and debates at Copenhagen grew out of "intense discussions" generated in the initial workshop. Thus the reader's initial expectation is that the volume is the outcome of intense curiosity regarding the mechanics and meaning of narrative in South Asian genres; and, although some few of the papers are less successful than the majority in integrating their textual analyses into larger social, psychological or historical contexts, the overall high quality of analysis stands as further assurance of the contributors' commitment and achievement in illuminating the issue of narrative strategies.

Even beyond narrative as an independent topic, in a kind of structural double entendre the volume successfully applies the theme of narrative analysis as a strategy in its own right to illuminate three critically significant areas: tradition, gender and genre. These areas form the book's major divisions: "Tradition

Reinterpreted;" "Negotiating Gender;" and "Genre and Literary Categories." Each section contains five essays so is equally weighted. The editors' in their introduction state, "The focus of the papers is quite explicitly on applied analysis rather than discussions of literary theory, though an effort has been made to explain the basic tenets of the methods used."[1] There is more than a nod, however, to theory in the collection. Many of the fifteen essays are constructed on the frame of a literary or film critical theory. The apparent desideratum that each contributor analyze the text in reference to a theoretical paradigm and the evenly weighted number of essays in each section suggest the conscientious shaping of the volume by a strong editorial presence--a predictable factor considering the authoritative success of Vasudha Dalmia's previous work, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhartendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras*. Each of the volume's three sections succeeds to the extent that its essays work together to confirm the influence of narrative strategies on the respective foci of tradition, gender or genre. Further, each section succeeds to the extent that its individual essays deliver cohesive analyses of the narratives; appropriate and insightful positioning of the texts within theoretical frameworks; and, finally, an integration of the narratives' authorial and social particulars into wider cultural, historical or psychological perspectives.

The first section, "Tradition Reinterpreted," concerns rewritings of older narrative "classics" and the issue of tradition in general. Where all the essays in this section yield interesting analyses, not all manage to situate fully those analyses in meaningful contexts. In the first essay, "Rewriting Valmiki: Krittibasa Ramayana as a hypertext," Philippe Benoit discusses a 15th century Bengali reworking of Valmiki's Sanskrit classic using Gerard Genette's theory of transtextual relations. Benoit shows with considerable adroitness that by means of

[1] Dalmia and Damsteegt, 1999, p. viii.

hypertextual operations Krittibasa transforms Valmiki's *Ramayana* into, among other qualifications, a more "bouncing and alert" narrative.[2] The strength of this fine essay lies in Benoit's careful and convincing textual analysis that works to explicate conceptual transformations. I am left curious about the Bengali social matrix behind the work. In the second paper Denis Matringe interprets Jasvant Singh Kamval's Punjabi Marxist story, " . . . *te Prem maria gia*" (" . . . and Prem was killed") primarily in the frame of Susan Rubin Suleiman's genre analysis. The story orbits around the narration of a Punjabi love legend, *Hir Varis Shah* and Matringe successfully shows how the legend is co-opted as a revolutionary symbol of the period by Kamval's narrative tactics. The first section also contains two of the collection's three essays on film topics: Brigitte Schulze's "The First Cinematic Pauranik Kathanak" and Alain Desoulieres' "The Three Lives of Umrao Jan Ada." Schulze's paper challenges the critically generated codification of Dhundiraj Govind Phalke's seminal film *Raja Harischandra* (1912) as a mythological type with nationalist intentions. Relying in part on Diana Crane's sociology of culture theory that emphasizes cultural "incoherencies," Schulze reconstructs the film's "fuzzy" cinematic space to show that the film is not merely a nationalist mythology and a continuation of Indian narrative traditions.[3]

The second section "Negotiating Gender," centers on attitudes of ambivalence towards women and the conflict between "emancipatory attitudes" and the traditional.[4] The essays in this section cohere primarily in their aim to show how narrative tension defines and reflects the larger issue of gender. Martin Christof-Fuchsle's contribution on Krishna Sobti's, *Mitro Marjani* (a Hindi novel about a married woman's struggle with

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[2]Philippe Benoit, "Rewriting Valmiki: Krittibasa Ramayana as a hypertext," in Dalmia and Damsteegt, 1999, p. 8.

[3]Brigitte Schulze, "The First Cinematic Pauranik Kathanak," in Dalmia and Damsteegt, 1999, pp. 55-56, 52.

[4] Dalmia and Damsteegt, 1999, pp. ix-x.

tradition on account of her sexual needs) segues readily into Srilata Raman's paper on the well-known Tamil writer, Ambai. Raman offers an alternate view of Ambai's critique of tradition in women's lives. Cecilia Cossio's essay on Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti,* which deals with the plight of a married woman, is the third and final work in the volume that explores film narrative. Comparing the original story with the blunt and controversial narrative process of the film, Cossio's critique shows how Kaul uses the camera's eye to create a neutral space that is shocking in its unmediated reflexivity. Other essays in the section, Annie Montaut's, which blends structural semiotics with Freudian analysis, and Theo Damsteegt's, which uncovers the use of the absurd in a Hindi story, continue the theme of narrative tension as a way of illuminating gender issues.

The final section of the collection explores genre and the literary categories of irony, romanticism and progressivism in modern "Indian" literature. With one exception, however, the papers do not treat "Indian" but specifically Hindi texts. The exception is "*Ek Kahani, Ganga jamni*: satirizing secularity" by Christina Oesterheld who discusses the social and political implications of irony in an Urdu story. The remaining essays on Hindi narrative are outstanding contributions that cleave together creating a formidable statement against period and genre rigidity and towards fluidity of narrative structure within and among texts. Building on Todorov's definition of genres as mutually related forms expressed in a particular period, Dalmia uses the first Hindi novel of significance, *Pariksha Guru* ("The tutelage of trial") to challenge the notion of fixed genres in Hindi literature. In an engrossing critique of the Hindi social romance genre of the 1920s, Francesca Orsini continues the discussion of hybrid form, showing how confessional narratives negotiated a space where women (and men as well) could safely reflect on volatile issues such as individual transgression of the traditional social order. Barbara Lotz's "Romantic Allegory and Progressive Criticism" focuses on a developing topic in Hindi

literary critical studies: the history of Hindi criticism by Indian critics. She analyzes the reception of Prasad's modern epic, *Kamayani,* by the Progressive Marxist writer, Muktibodh. Her demonstration that Muktibodh's work itself shares traits with *Kamayani* shakes up notions of the fixity of Hindi literary periods.

When such engaging descriptions regarding the wider implications of narrative strategies are frequent in this collection, I am compelled to admit that my opening "complaint" regarding the uneven balance between essays on film and those on literature is rather disingenuous. The point of *Narrative Strategies* is exactly what the primary title indicates. "The thread which strings the essays together is the interest in narrative strategies . . ." say the editors. Who, then, but the reader seeking a focused critique of South Asian film narrative should care how many film-related essays are included in comparison to essays on literature? The excellence of the collection is balanced instead on the volume's success in showing how narrative strategies generated or transformed the arenas of tradition, gender, and genre. Thus, even though *Narrative Strategies* is of particular interest to scholars of modern Hindi literature, both film scholars and South Asianists in general will appreciate discovering new research on the ways that narrative strategies drove or were involved in processes of cultural transformation.

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Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World. Edward W. Said. Pantheon Press, 1981. 164 Pp.

This is the third and final book in a thematic series of publications by Edward W. Said, which began with *Orientalism* and includes *The Question of Palestine.* The latter, particularly,

treats on the relation of knowledge to power. *Covering Islam* was published at a particular moment when "Islam" was newly prominent on the world stage, and especially in the Western media. The Iranian Revolution was a *fait accompli*, the first Gulf War was underway, and the former Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan. Said describes an environment, particularly in the United States, where the media had "portrayed it, characterized it, given instant courses on it, and consequently they have made it known" (the *it* being Islam).

As the current crises unfold in Central Asia, and everyone from *CNN* to *The Daily Texan* feels obliged (and qualified) to inform the public about everything from Islam to military strategy, it is quite appropriate to re-visit Said's text during its sadly ironic twentieth anniversary. Said's purpose is not, to use his pun, to uncover Islam. Said aims to bring to light the gap between the professed objectivity of both the press and the academy, and the actuality that historically there have been distinct linkages between the subjugation of the colonial/ third/ developing world, and these same experts. While *Covering Islam* is concerned with the same theoretical issues as *Orientalism,* and makes no claims to new theoretical insights, it asks important questions, and does so in a framework of media analysis of current events. By locating the discourse over the phenomenon of Orientalism in current events and critiquing the mass media, rather than European romantic texts and comparative literary studies, Said simultaneously revitalizes the basic ideas presented in *Orientalism,* and makes his critique accessible to a much wider audience. Given this move towards a broader audience, it is curious that Said devotes the final segment of *Covering Islam* (titled Knowledge and Power) to a pointed criticism of certain scholars of the Middle East and their understanding of their own academic projects. This is not to say that Said's criticisms in this segment are inconsistent with his overall theme, but rather that they have a particularly limited audience compared with the rest of the text. That being said, the section *Knowledge and Power*

presents the most interesting and vital questions for students and scholars alike. It is quite clear that Said questions the possibility of a pure and objective intellectual curiosity, particularly regarding other cultures. He is insistent that observers from the media and the academy acknowledge their political and commercial linkages and motivations when studying Islam and/or the Middle East. More precisely, Said puts forth the argument that amongst many Middle East scholars there is a pretension to objective neutrality that simultaneously denies their governmental and commercial linkages. Said is equally insistent that the field of Middle Eastern studies [to that point] had generally ignored and been impervious to most of the major interpretive developments made by social and humanist scholars. This rather remarkable occurrence is neatly attributed to the corporate, governmental, academic linkages mentioned above. Simply, for Said, there is a self-contained pseudo academic market in the field of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies which reproduces itself decade after decade through an "old-boy network" which controls funding and publication.

What then is to be done? Any member of a Western academic institution is automatically implicated in the larger power dynamics of the contemporary post-colonial world. Said clearly states, and rightfully, that it is unacceptable and damaging to pretend to objectivity that most scholars don't believe is possible. Said derides the social scientific leanings of current American scholars of the Middle East precisely because these scholars take support from private foundations and government to pursue policy related work while still claiming objective neutrality.

Said's answer in *Covering Islam*, is a statement of post-modern and post-colonial thought: what is lacking in the media, government/corporate and academic marketplace of Middle East experts is interpretation. Most importantly, the tendency of scholars engaged in interpretive projects to question the moments and processes of interpretation themselves is often missing from

Middle East scholar's work. Said literally lists scholars and activists from both within and outside the academy whom he feels have tried and/or succeeded to stay relatively independent of the above mentioned entrenched troika of interests (government, media, commerce) and the attached body of received wisdom.

For Said, there is no "Islam" per se, but rather "Islams." And any understanding originating in a Western environment must take the moment and place of contact between the observer and her subject into account, including the observer's goals and intellectual attributes and capabilities. As Said writes in *Covering Islam*'s final paragraph "Underlying every interpretation of other cultures…is the choice facing the individual scholar or intellectual: "whether to put intellect at the service of power or at the service of criticism, community, and moral sense."

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Propaganda and Information in Eastern India, 1939-45: A Necessary Weapon of War. Sanjoy Bhattacharya. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001. 242 Pp.

In his monograph, *Propaganda and Information in Eastern India, 1939-45: A Necessary Weapon of War*, Sanjoy Bhattacharya challenges existing scholarly discourse on British India by placing new emphasis on the Second World War. Through this study of the changing wartime propaganda policy of the colonial state and the problems of implementation in Eastern India, Bhattacharya convincingly demonstrates the non-monolithic nature of British rule in India. He furthermore posits that these very problems of implementation denoted the growing inability of the British to rely on the Indian bureaucracy and army, both having been subject to the policy of Indianization and

as such, having become increasingly open to nationalist influences by 1939. Lacking both a dependable armed force and an unquestionably loyal bureaucracy, the British recognized the inherent instability of the Indian colonial state. While generally ignored in modern scholarship, this recognition, in addition to other factors, precipitated the British decision in 1947 to quit India. Bhattacharya has made use of a wide range of archival sources located in England as well as in India in researching this monograph, which is an extension of his doctoral dissertation.

Bhattacharya's interpretation of the colonial state during the period of the Second World War is in opposition to that of Douglas Haynes, whose scholarship "seems to be denying Indian officials a formal role within the state structure and administration of policy" (p. 8). Additionally, Bhattacharya criticizes Partho Chatterjee, who "seems to downplay the fact that the colonial authorities…did indeed seek to strengthen their administrative capabilities by deploying increasing numbers of Indians in the formal structures of the state." Bhattacharya's book argues that the approaches taken by these two scholars are faulty in that they assume a state of hegemony, under which governmental orders were unquestionably implemented and accepted by subordinate officials, including Indians. Bhattacharya seeks to demonstrate that no such hegemony existed and in his introduction, he clearly delineates his reservations towards representations of the colonial state as monolithic. Local officials, according to Bhattacharya, exercised a great deal of influence over the implementation and interpretation of orders issued by the government. Pointing out the strong presence of Indians in central as well as local government, he questions the prevailing distinction between 'Indian' local self-government and 'British' central and provincial government.

The introduction additionally glosses current understandings of propaganda, heavily informed by European studies, which understand the term almost exclusively as the

deliberate distribution of misinformation. Following the lead of Gyanendra Pandey, Bhattacharya proposes a modified conception of the term for the wartime Indian context. Official propaganda in India contained factual information, not merely false reports, and its tone did not necessarily always flatter the government (p. 5). Furthermore, Bhattacharya defines propaganda as including not only the dissemination of information in the media, but also the provisioning of target populations with food, medicine and other supplies. While it may seem that Bhattacharya potentially has expanded the concept of propaganda to include any and all actions taken by the government in Eastern India during the war, he, however, has limited himself to those activities, which the government officials themselves regularly referred to as propaganda.

Bhattacharya presents his evidence in five chapters. He has included a useful list of abbreviations found in his text, as well as a glossary. These features make the monograph accessible to those unacquainted with wartime India or the Indian nationalist movement. Several tables augment the text and provide additional information.

Chapter One, "The Second World War, Indian Nationalism and the Challenges of State Mobilisation in Eastern India: A Survey," opens with a description of the difficulties experienced by the colonial state in mobilizing for war in Eastern India. Infrastructure build-up disrupted local economies and societies, while the influx of the military into the region displaced villages, which, in addition to the alleged misconduct of allied troops, fostered deep resentments. Various activist groups and political parties agitated against the government by rallying the people around local concerns. Bhattacharya notes that some audiences were targeted for propaganda more than others were, notably war production workers, urbanites and residents of strategic locales. Throughout, he stresses the modifications made by local officials to Government propaganda

to suit their personal politics and to better conform to their perception of local conditions.

"State Propaganda and Civilian Audiences in Eastern India 1939-45: Forms, Applications and Scope" is Bhattacharya's second chapter. Here, he discusses the media used to disseminate propaganda, including wireless radio, film, printed materials and oral publicity, in addition to detailing the use of food and medical aid as propaganda. The problems encountered in the use of these different media, as well as the discretion of local officials to chose the media as well as influence the content of propaganda, provides for an interesting discussion. For instance, local officials in Eastern India were loath to screen many propaganda films that originally had been produced for the British audience and then dubbed into Indian languages. In light of the wartime famine situation, they felt it unwise to show these films with their images of bumper crops and well-fed troops, despite government orders to do so.

Bhattacharya notes that propaganda directed towards civilians, especially in the form of food and medical aid, often came into conflict with propaganda directed towards the armed forces. Government policy however, prioritized military propaganda in the form of provisions over the same for most civilian audiences. This inevitably impeded British efforts to deal with problems like the Bengal Famine, which in turn undermined British control over the civilian population in the region and created a new public relations crisis for the British Indian government. Indeed, even supposedly loyalist publications like the Communist Party of India's weekly newspaper, People's War, continually criticized the government for it's handling of the food situation, representing the British as both callous and ineffective.

In Chapter Three, "An Ancillary to Propaganda: State Censorship and the Civilian Population in Eastern India 1939-45," Bhattacharya examines the role of censorship in determining propaganda content. Censorship involved not only

the banning of certain newspapers or the regulation of the content of publications, but also the careful monitoring of those publications for information about public opinion. Government was keenly interested in how Indians represented the British, and they sought to tailor their propaganda campaign to the perceived needs and interests of the Indian public, as gleaned through their close supervision of the Indian press and of personal correspondence in the region. Bhattacharya has divided this chapter topically into the workings of censorship at the Government of India, the Provincial Capital, District and Sub-Divisional Capital levels. This allows for a clear discussion of the difference between the propaganda policy of Government and the realities of implementation by local officials.

Bhattacharya's fourth chapter, "The Colonial State, 'Neutrals' and the Propaganda Campaign against the Indian National Congress 1939-45," illustrates the changes in the government's propaganda policy towards the Congress Party during the war. The propaganda campaign was divided into negative propaganda, generally characterized by attacks on the Congress policy, and positive propaganda, meant to instill a sense of sympathetic wartime patriotism in the public. The issue of how to represent the Congress in propaganda media was complex, for while the British hoped to discredit the organization by casting them as Japanese sympathizers, at the same time, they realized that the potential existed that their media campaign against the Congress would instead undermine their own position. In order to maintain what was left of its legitimacy in the eyes of the Indian nation, the government had to show itself as ultimately sympathetic to the Congress and its nationalist aspirations. In the end, however, as Bhattacharya reports, the government's attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the Congress were unsuccessful.

Chapter Five, "Propaganda, Censorship and the British Indian Army: Eastern India 1942-45," describes the propaganda measures used among the armed forces. Food supplies and

medicine constituted an important part of this propaganda. As among the civilian population, censorship and the careful monitoring of morale remained central. The influx of new recruits not from the so-called 'martial' classes affected the nature of propaganda. New emphasis was laid on reassuring these soldiers of the safety and comfort of their families at home, and efforts were made to instill a "sense of purpose" in them by casting the war as a means of protecting the family from the Japanese, rather than by stressing "the old loyalty" (p. 184). The main themes covered by propaganda, such as alleged Japanese disrespect for Indian religions, are also detailed in this chapter.

Bhattacharya concludes his monograph by asserting "the 'successes' and 'failures' of the official wartime propaganda and information policies combined to weaken the colonial administrative edifice in Eastern India" (p. 202). While this is a compelling conclusion, Bhattacharya needs to address the point more explicitly in his main text. Aside from this one reservation, Bhattacharya's conclusions are persuasive, and his monograph represents an important addition to the study of India during the Second World War and provides for a more nuanced understanding of the Indian struggle for independence.

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South Asia Research Journal (Sagar)
Call for Papers, Spring 2002 (V.8)
(Deadline is April 1)

The *Sagar* editorial collective invites contributions for its next issue on the practice and politics of translation. In the context of literature, translation has consistently posed critical challenges to the processes of writing and representation. It has also far exceeded its literary dimensions and increasingly stands as a metaphor for a range of disciplinary practices. With this in mind, we solicit translations, research papers, critical commentaries, and book reviews that address, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- When and how do acts of translation also become acts of politics?
- How can underrepresented regional literature add new dimensions to existing subaltern politics and perspectives?
- How do disciplines, such as history, anthropology, and cultural studies among others, confront the problem of interpretation as an act of translation?

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