

# SAGAR

SOUTH ASIA GRADUATE RESEARCH JOURNAL



INTRODUCTORY ISSUE

VOLUME 1, NO. 1

SPRING 1994

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# Sagar

*South Asia Graduate Research Journal*

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Sponsored by the  
Center for Asian Studies  
University of Texas at Austin

Introductory Issue

Volume 1, Number 1

Spring 1994

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*Sagar* is published biannually in the spring and fall. The editor is responsible for the final selection of the content of the journal and reserves the right to reject any material deemed inappropriate for publication. Articles presented in the journal do not represent the views of either the Center for Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin or the *Sagar* editors. Responsibility for the opinions expressed and the accuracy of facts published in articles and reviews rests solely with the individual authors.

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Not printed with state funds.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The *Sagar* editors would like to thank the following people for their advice and guidance: Martha Harrison, Patrick Olivelle, Karla Renaud, Gregory Schopen, and Sarah Wimer. We are especially grateful to Richard Lariviere for his vision, his support, and his inspiration.

## **Editorial Note**

This issue of *Sagar* highlights the research of students studying South Asia at the University of Texas at Austin. *Sagar* encourages submissions from all students working in this field. Methodology articles from faculty are also welcome.





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# Kipling's Burden: Representing Colonial Authority and Constructing the "Other" through Kimball O'Hara and Babu Hurree Chander in *Kim*<sup>1</sup>

Nandi Bhatia

*Rudyard Kipling's Kim can be interpreted as a novel that articulates the hegemonic relations between the colonizer and the colonized during British rule. Through contrasting images of Kim, a sahib, and Hurree babu, an educated native, Kipling constructs functional dichotomies in which the position of the Other is subordinated. In this paper, I situate the construction of Kim's and Hurree babu's identities within the context of the British Empire and examine the historical underpinnings of the process that generated hierarchical representations in Kipling.*

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To read ... major works of the imperial period retrospectively is to be obligated to read them in the light of decolonization. To do so is neither to slight their great esthetic force, nor to treat them reductively as imperialist propaganda. It is a Blurb read them stripped of their countless affiliations with those facts of power which inform and enable them, to interpret them as if the many inscriptions of race and class in the text were not there at all.<sup>2</sup>

To say that Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*<sup>3</sup> can be interpreted as a project that articulates the "hegemonic" relations between the

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<sup>1</sup>An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Annual meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association in Spring 1993. I would like to thank Barbara Harlow for her support and suggestions, Dina Sherzer for input on an earlier draft, Preet for his encouragement, and three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup>Edward Said, "Kim, The Pleasures of Imperialism," *Raritan* 7 (1987): 63.

<sup>3</sup>Kipling left India in 1889 at age 24. *Kim* appeared in 1901.

*Sagar: South Asia Graduate Research Journal* 1, No. 1 (May 1994): 1-15

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colonizer and the colonized during British imperial rule in India is to repeat what critics have said about Kipling's novel. Numerous studies, including Edward Said's analysis "*Kim*, the Pleasures of Imperialism," have shown Kipling's contribution to the "invention of traditions" and the "Orientalized India of the [imperialist] imagination" through significant moments in the novel.<sup>1</sup> Said's deconstruction of Kipling's novel explores how *Kim* embodies the absolute divisions between white and non white that existed in India and elsewhere at a time when the dominantly white Christian countries of Europe controlled approximately 85 percent of the world's surface.<sup>2</sup> These same critics have, however, overlooked some of the seemingly insignificant moments which, I believe, are rather *significant* to Kipling's larger project of representing imperial authority in India. One such aspect of the novel is manifested in Kipling's portrayal of babu Hurree Chander Mookerjee, a native employee in the British administration to whom even Said's detailed essay devotes only a paragraph, calling the babu's presence a "small practical device" used by Kipling to represent imperial authority.<sup>3</sup>

For Kipling, who believed that it was India's destiny to be ruled by England, it was necessary to stress the superiority of the white man whose mission was to rule the dark and inferior races. Kipling conveys this message about the "white man's burden" by locating the educated Hurree babu in a position that is subordinate to Kim. Kipling constructs babu Hurree Chander's subordinacy by creating what Jacques Derrida calls "binary oppositions" or well-schooled dichotomies through which a whole hierarchy of meanings may be constructed. These hierarchies are created by privileging one principle, the "self" over its opposite or its "Other."<sup>4</sup> Through a similar system of binary oppositions between the ruler and the ruled, Kipling creates unequal dichotomies in which the former becomes the privileged signifier, i.e., the "self" and the latter its "Other" in opposition to whom the self asserts its own privileged position. Kim belongs to the class of the rulers and the babu occupies the position of the "Other." Both products of a colonial upbringing, in a colonized society, Kim becomes the authoritative principle and the babu his excluded opposite. The babu, in other words, is Kim's

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<sup>1</sup>Said, "*Kim*," 37. Also see John A. McClure. *Kipling and Conrad: the Colonial Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Edmund Wilson, "The Kipling that Nobody Read," in ed. Andrew Rutherford, *Kipling's Mind and Art* (California: Stanford University Press, 1964).

<sup>2</sup>Said, "*Kim*," 30.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>4</sup>Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983), 132.



anti-self to whom Kipling assigns a negative value in relation to Kim, the sahib. Kipling frames the babu in “a relationship of power, of domination, [and] of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” with Kim, through which he constantly reiterates what Said suggests as, “European superiority over Oriental backwardness.”<sup>1</sup>

Kim, who grows up as an orphan in India and is in no way different from an Indian except for his racial heritage, eventually becomes a Sahib by virtue of what, in a Derridean deconstructive reading, we might say “ceaselessly shutting out this other or opposite, defining himself in antithesis to it ....”<sup>2</sup> The babu’s presence in the novel is, thus, more than a “small practical device.” For Kipling’s imperialist ideology, it is a narrative strategy to represent Kim’s authority over the native inhabitants of the colony. The importance of this essay lies in the way Kipling, in his novel, projects Babu Hurree Chander with powerful ramifications about the colonial power-dynamics within a particular historical milieu.

Before I explicate further, I find it necessary to discuss the baggage attached to the term “babu” during the time of British rule in India. The Hindustani term “babu” referred to an educated urban gentleman. Used with respect at first, it soon acquired a pejorative connotation for the educated Indian who desperately attempted to acquire the manners and customs of the colonial officials. In *The Making of an ‘Indian’ Art*, Tapati Guha-Thakurta reveals how often the figure of “Calcutta’s degenerate babus” appeared in Kalighat art. The most recurrent of the satirical images portrayed in this genre of Bengali art during the nineteenth century was that of “the Bengali babu as a fop, a dandy and a dissolute womanizer.... the symbol of the westernized, dissipated nouveau-riche....”<sup>3</sup> According to *Hobson-Jobson*, a dictionary of Anglo-Indian terms and phrases, a “baboo” is a term which among Anglo-Indians is

often used with a slight savour of disparagement, as characterizing a superficially cultivated, but too effeminate, Bengali.... The word has come often to signify ‘a native clerk who writes English.’<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 5, 7.

<sup>2</sup>Eagleton, 32.

<sup>3</sup>Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a ‘New Indian Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1920* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 20–21.

<sup>4</sup>William Crook, ed., *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Anglo-Indian Colloquial Words and Phrases and Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968 (1903)), 44.

Such stereotypes of the babu, as Purnima Bose argues, emerged out of colonial racial attitudes about the Bengalis, who as a highly educated community, challenged British representations of Indians. Because of their defiance of colonial rulers,

the western educated Bengalis were dismissed as comic imitations of westerners. They were virulently caricatured in the figure of the Bengali Babu: a small dark-skinned, effeminate intellectual who had an imperfect command on English.<sup>1</sup>

This image is reiterated in *Plain Tales From the Raj*, where former colonial officials recall that it “was the fashion to denigrate the *babu* type:

‘We used to make fun of them ... because they were interpreting rules which we made.’ *Babu* jokes, based on the English language either wrongly or over-effusively applied, were a constant source of amusements for all ‘Anglo-India.’ Coupled with the denigration of the *babu* was a traditional distrust of the Bengali—‘litigious, very fond of an argument’—who was frequently seen as a trouble maker: ‘He doesn’t appeal to many British people in the same way as the very much more manly, direct type from upper India.’”<sup>2</sup>

The descriptions and definitions above show the ways in which the stereotype of the Bengali babu had been created and acquired a pejorative connotation. This image permitted the

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<sup>1</sup>Purnima Bose, “Survivors of the Raj, Survivors of the Empire: Narrating the Colonial and Post-Colonial Encounters” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1993), 165.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Allen, ed., *Plain Tales from the Raj: Images of British India in the Twentieth Century* (Andre Deutsch: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1975), 198. According to Ashis Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy. Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), Kipling hated the Bengali babus in whom, having grown up in India and being bicultural, he saw an image of himself. Unable to identify with his English counterparts in England, Kipling suffered from a sense of marginality and felt distanced from English society in England. On page 67, Nandy writes: “young Rudyard ... remained in England a conspicuous bicultural sahib, the English counterpart of the type he was to later despise: the bicultural Indian babu.”

circulation of stereotypes about the educated Indian intellectuals and the term used homogeneously to apply to doctors, journalists and clerks in other works of colonial discourse. In Orwell's *Burmese Days*, English officials constantly refer to the Indian Doctor Veeraswamy as the despicable babu. A book about Indian journalism, authored by an Englishman and published in London in the late nineteenth century, carried the title *Babu English as 'Tis Writ Being Curiosities of Indian Journalism*. Such stereotypes of the babu carried on after the empire and became the subject of numerous cartoons. So strong was their impact that my highly anglicized tenth grade school teacher always corrected the students' English in class by chastising us with the phrase: "Girls, don't speak babu English."

The questions that these babu stereotypes provoke are: why did colonial officials make fun of the babu? why does Kipling perpetuate the myth of the babu further? In other words, why is the babu the target of Kipling's jokes; why not the other Indians in the novel such as the Lama or the horse trader Mahbub Ali? It is significant that Hurree babu is an intellectual. He is an anthropologist who is also well-versed in English literature, in the art of mensuration, and unlike Mahbub Ali, can read maps. He embodies all that Western liberal learning at this time stands for. He knows that there were "marks to be gained by due attention to Latin and Wordsworth's *Excursion*. French, too, was vital," and that a "man might go far ... by strict attention to plays called *Lear* and *Julius Caesar*."<sup>1</sup> Hurree babu is perfectly capable of educating his countrymen about British rule. Because of his education in the British curriculum, he is equipped with the bicultural knowledge to communicate on both sides of the divide—the British colonial officials on one side and the Indians who had no direct dealing with their colonial rulers, on the other. Kipling wrote *Kim* at a time of rising Indian nationalism, a time when the relationship between the empire and colony had started to change, when British rule was being overtly questioned. Important changes had taken place in the national and political fabric of India following the mutiny of 1857. The Congress Party was formed in 1885. A large part of nationalistic resistance arose from the educated section of the Indians, from people like Hurree Babu, who with their close encounters with British administrators were more fully aware of British ways. The educated babu Hurree Chander thus represents a threat to the colonial presence. Kipling perhaps recognized this threat. Therefore, to relegate the educated babu to a subordinate

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<sup>1</sup>Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 63.

position is for Kipling a historical necessity in order to ward off any obstacles to the empire. The Lama on the other hand, is hardly to be feared. Although he is learned man, he is sympathetic to the British mission and actually expedites Kim's transformation into a sahib by paying for Kim's education. Kim's business, he tells the boy "was to get all the wisdom of the Sahibs...."<sup>1</sup> Hence, it is not surprising that we find Kipling's imperialistic beliefs incorporated into the energy of creating babu jokes in the novel.

Kipling relegates the babu to an inferior position through various situations, encounters and descriptions. This is how Kipling introduces the Hurree Babu in the novel: "At the end of that time entered a hulking, obese Babu whose stockinged legs shook with fat, ...."<sup>2</sup> Following this description Kipling always describes the babu's appearance as shabby, his voice "oily," his mouth stuffed with *pan* and betel and his English distorted. Throughout the narrative, Kipling makes fun of Hurree Babu's "orotund verbosity," ridicules his incorrect grammar and finds his accent abominable, which he emphasizes in the exaggeratedly misspelled words that the babu uses: *Onlee* instead of "only," *allso* instead of "also," *opeenion* instead of "opinion," *quiett* instead of "quiet" and so forth.<sup>3</sup> Evidently, it is Kipling's way of maintaining the babu's subservience by painting the picture of a silly Bengali babu who apes the Englishman with his broken English. If he can't speak like the colonizers, he can never be one of them. (It is important to note here that English being the language of the colonizer became a signifier of power and authority. The language connotes authority and legitimizes ruling class power in India even today).

However, nothing brings this point home more powerfully than a comparison between Kim's and the babu's educational backgrounds. Both Kim and Hurree Chander share an interesting commonalty in their education. They are both products of the British system. While Kim receives his formal education at St. Xavier's in Lucknow, babu Hurree Chander holds a Master's degree from Calcutta University. Being a native working for the British administrator colonel Creighton requires him to be well-versed in English as well as Hindustani. Hurree's English education, thus, makes him bicultural. Since the babu's bicultural education grants him access to both cultures, Kipling carefully hybridizes Kim's education, systematically providing him with a

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<sup>1</sup>Kipling, 164.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 159.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 220, 223.



skillful knowledge of the Indian culture as well as a formal British education.

From the beginning we see Kim learning about diverse Indian ways through his friendship with Mahbub Ali for whom he “executed commissions by night on the crowded housetops,” his travels with the holy Lama, and interaction with the natives during his travels. Mahbub Ali initiates Kim into the “great game” of the secret service. The spiritual Lama provides him with a sense of maturity and shows him “other and better desires upon the road [than to be King].” Lurgan, the antique dealer of Simla, trains Kim in various memory games and prepares him for espionage work. And Kim’s own curiosity for learning, keen sense of observation and spirit of adventure instill in him, what Robert Moss calls, the qualities of “self-reliance” and “resourcefulness.”<sup>1</sup> By learning to manipulate people to his own advantage, Kim manages to earn his living and procure food for the Lama and himself. His early exposure to natives and their customs teaches him the subtleties of Indian life: he knows the “breed” of farmers of the land; he understands the distinctions of caste and realizes that the Lama is the “most holy of holy men” because he is “above all castes.” Kim learns about the “many-armed and malignant” Hindu Gods who need to be left alone; is “careful not to irritate ... [a Sikh] for his temper is short and his arm quick”; wonders “since when the hill-asses (*Paharis*) owned all Hindustan”; knows that even Rajahs of “good Rajput blood ... sell the more comely of their womenfolk for gain.”

Kim’s grasp of Indian life teaches him to process the native culture whereby he knows its strengths and weaknesses; to react with cleverness when the situation demands, appropriate the useful and dismiss the rest. For instance, Kim wears his Indian clothes to merge with the natives “when there ... [is] business or frolic afoot.”<sup>2</sup> So well-versed is he with the Indian ethos that when the need arises, he even learns to “*think*” [let alone speak] in the vernacular. Kim’s knowledge of the various Indian dialects is particularly useful. It provides him with the ability to translate and overcome the tremendous handicap that colonial rulers felt in their inability to translate for which they had to depend on the “unreliable”

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<sup>1</sup>Robert F. Moss, *Rudyard Kipling and the Fiction of Adolescence* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 83.

<sup>2</sup>Kipling, 4.

natives. In this way, Kim's ability to translate represents the colonizer's acquisition of a highly useful device for the Empire.<sup>1</sup>

To master only a knowledge of the native culture, however, is not sufficient for the sahib. Therefore, at the moment when the educated babu appears in the novel, displaying his knowledge of English and discussing the advantages of Western education, Kim is sent off to St. Xavier's in Lucknow for a formal British education. Despite the boy's disinterest in school, a strict academic curriculum—an aspect of learning that was an indispensable part of every well-bred Englishman's training and essential for governing the empire through formal rules—is imposed on Kim.

St. Xavier's, which aimed primarily at the children of the Anglo-Indian servants, becomes the perfect place for Kim. For, as Moss says, the boys at the school, besides learning mathematics and trigonometry, were

shaped by direct contact with the joys and dangers of the Indian Frontier ... [Here] the Anglo-Indians ... [learn to] carry on the heroic, day to day business of maintaining the Empire.<sup>2</sup>

In this school, where “every tale was ... mixed with quaint reflections, borrowed ... from native foster-mothers, and turns of speech that showed that they had been instantly translated from the vernacular,” Kim is trained to process the native culture. This arrangement of Kim's education is Kipling's way of providing Kim with the necessary tools for his imperial enterprise. For, a bicultural knowledge authorizes him to manipulate and control this “manifestly different [Indian] world”<sup>3</sup> which, as Colonel Creighton communicates, is important for a sahib:

thou are a Sahib and the son of a Sahib. Therefore, do not at any time be led to contemn [*sic*] the black men. I have known boys newly entered into the service of the Government who feigned not to

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<sup>1</sup>See Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation. History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). Niranjana discusses the issue of translation not just to indicate an interlingual process but to name an entire problematic that raises questions of “representation, power and historicity (1).” She argues that the ability to translate was a good strategy for the British rulers because it removed their dependence on native intermediators to translate Indian laws.

<sup>2</sup>Moss, 89, 90.

<sup>3</sup>Said, *Orientalism*, 12.

understand the talk or customs of black men. Their pay was cut for ignorance. There is no sin so great as ignorance. Remember this.”<sup>1</sup>

Although Kim’s knowledge and understanding of the native culture is Kipling’s strategy to position Kim’s superiority, he makes it seem like a “natural” acquisition for a precocious boy whose spirit for adventure motivates him in the pursuit of knowledge. Hence, Kim’s ability to understand the natives and assimilate with them endears him to one and all who call him “little friend of the world.”

By contrast, the qualified and competent bicultural babu is despised, parodied and constantly made fun of by Kipling. While Kim’s Anglo-Indian education makes him rational, clever and well-quipped to “some day ... command the natives,” the babu’s education is subjected to ridicule. Kipling portrays him as a clownish, ignorant *hakim* trying to impress the natives by giving them medicines (such as “*arplan* from China that makes a man renew his youth and astonish his household; Saffron from Kashmir, and the best Salep of Kabul”)<sup>2</sup> and even printing his papers in “*Angrezi*,<sup>3</sup> telling what things he has done for weak-backed men and slack women.”<sup>4</sup>

Kipling’s framing of Kim and the babu in such oppositional positions is crucial to the power-relations within which his narrative operates. The highly opinionated and contentious babu contrasts with the amiable and likable Kim who is well-suited to one day command natives such as the babu himself. By making the babu ridiculous despite his intelligence and qualifications, Kipling strives to show that the Oriental is inherently inferior and even his education cannot bring him at par with the colonizer. Hence, as opposed to Kim’s education that is favourable to the empire, Kipling dismisses the babu’s knowledge of anthropology, medicine, English and Western training as a “monstrous hybridism of East and West.”<sup>5</sup> His education does not make him Kim’s equal but his “Other,” reducing him to a representative of the class of the native elite who were used as “interpreters between ... [the British] and the millions whom [they] ... govern[ed].”<sup>6</sup> It does not allow him the status of a

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<sup>1</sup>Kipling, 169.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 217.

<sup>3</sup>*Angrezi* is the Hindustani term for the English language.

<sup>4</sup>Kipling, 216.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 341.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Indian Education,” in *Prose and Poetry* (Cambridge, 1952), 729.

sahib, but relegates him to the position of an ally to support the rulers in maintaining control over the masses. The babu, thus, is assigned, in Gramscian terms, within a class of educated people that the British controlled by manipulation via the assertion of “intellectual and moral leadership” instead of direct military coercion, in order to secure their consent for cultural domination.<sup>1</sup> And indeed Kipling succeeds. For, he even supplants the babu’s own consciousness with an image of himself that has been constructed by Kipling. Hurree babu describes himself to Kim in precisely the way that Kipling would want him described: “I am only Babu showing off my English to you. All we Babus talk English to show off.”<sup>2</sup> Such self-representation by Hurree babu represents a negation of the Indian intellectual, presented through a direct antithesis to the “high” standards that the colonizers’ language upholds. Cultural hegemony, as Said says, functions from “the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all non-European peoples and cultures.”<sup>3</sup> Kipling reiterates European superiority over the so-called native backwardness by manipulating the babu into believing and living his inferiority.

However, there is more at stake for Kipling to ridicule the babu. It is well to remember that the babu knows how to survey maps and locate the strategic importance of various geographical sites. At a time when Britain was competing with Russia to establish her own supremacy as a superpower, it is Hurree babu and not Kim who is able to foil the Russian intruders’ attempt to negotiate a diplomatic agreement with the Afghan kings; and again Hurree babu is the one who manages to obtain the maps from the Russian spies.<sup>4</sup> It is the babu who educates Kim on the importance of maps and “the art of science and mensuration [which was] ... more important than Wordsworth or the eminent authors Burke and Hare ....”<sup>5</sup> For this knowledge, Kipling dislikes the babu. Because it is an instance of the colonized teaching the colonizer about the

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion on “hegemony theory” see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London, 1971).

<sup>2</sup>Kipling, 83.

<sup>3</sup>Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

<sup>4</sup>In the nineteenth century, Russia was trying to establish relations with the various Afghan rulers in an attempt to challenge England’s supremacy in the region. To ward off the Russian threat, British rulers also attempted to extend their frontier into Afghanistan. According to Percival Spear the Afghan kings preferred their own independence to British or Russian rule. *The Oxford History of Modern India: 1740–1947* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965).

<sup>5</sup>Kipling, 167–68.



geographical territory that the colonizers have set out to conquer, which represents a reversal of the colonial power-dynamics.

In one sense Hurree babu fulfills here the function that underlay the colonial motive of enforcing an Anglicized education on the natives. This function, as Gauri Vishwanathan in her study on the politics of educational and cultural policy on India, points out, was to educate a segment of the traditional ruling class of Indians “to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education.”<sup>1</sup> The support would be provided by having the educated Indians interpret the native culture for the administrators in a language that belonged to the rulers. That these motives formed the basis of an Anglicized education policy for the Indian colony is evident in the infamous claim that Macaulay made in his “Minute on Indian Education:”

It is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreted between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.<sup>2</sup>

With his knowledge of anthropology, of maps, Wordsworth, Shakespeare, mensuration, etc., the babu becomes a Macaulayan interpreter for Kim in the novel.

However, because of his knowledge and educational acumen, the babu can also become a deterrent to Kipling’s imperialist ideology and a threat to the Raj. Therefore, Hurree babu becomes an instrument of fear for the rulers—knowledge of the colonizer can well become an instrument for the educated Indian to lash back at the latter. For Hurree babu is in every sense a brown sahib who, as Hurree babu himself tells Kim, is “a teacher of the alphabet.... [and has] learned all the wisdom of the Sahibs.”<sup>3</sup> And like a sahib, Hurree babu helps Kim in the “great game.” But for Kipling, such knowledge is also dangerous. Besides undermining Kim’s authority, it also threatens the colonial presence in India

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<sup>1</sup>Gauri Vishwanathan, “Currying Favor: The Politics of British Educational and Cultural Policy in India, 1813–1854,” *Social Texts* 19–20 (1988): 95.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Minute on Indian Education,” in *Selected Writings*, ed. John Clive (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 249.

<sup>3</sup>Kipling, 217.

through potential attacks on the rulers in their own language. Hurree Chander's knowledge can thus prove detrimental to the Raj. According to Ashis Nandy, Kipling recognized in utter disgust that if the colonizers could make use of the Orientals for more effective administration, then even the Indians "could use the Occident for their own purposes."<sup>1</sup> He was aware that even the "crafty babus" knew how to use the white man. The full implications of what Nandy says, are discernible, as Nandy himself realized, most vividly in the following description by Duncan M. Derrett:

It was supposed, and the author of this paper used to suppose along with his elders and betters, that Indians had learnt English ways and values as they had learnt the English language, and that, as a race of would-be-parrots they "have done remarkably well ...." One perceived with pained surprise the conflict between profession and performance. Indians trained almost exclusively in Western arts and sciences reacted as irredeemable orientals in any crisis. They enforced this feeling again and again by their lack of confidence when faced with a new problem, their pathetic desire for foreign advice (which they would shelve when they had paid for it), and their "going through the motions" like a tight-rope walker who walks his rope for the sake of walking it, or like a somnambulist, avoiding desperate accidents but unable to say why .... Very late in the day the present writer woke up to what he believes to be the fact, namely that Indian tradition has been "in charge" throughout, and that English ideas and English ways, like the English language, have been used for Indian purposes. That, in fact, it is the British who were manipulated, the British who were the silly somnambulists. My Indian brother is not a brown Englishman, he is an Indian who has learned to move around in my drawing room, and will move around in it so long as it suits him for his own purposes. And when he adopts my ideas he does so to suit himself, and retains them so far and as long as it suits him.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nandy, 77.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Nandy, 77.

Hence, Kipling makes it his mission to locate authority in Kim and assign a new subject-position to his "Other." Clearly a bright man, the babu is, therefore, portrayed, in Said's words, as

almost always funny, or gauche, or somehow caricatural not because he is incompetent or inept in his work—on the contrary he is exactly the opposite—but because he is not white ....<sup>1</sup>

These antithetical yet unequal constructions of Kim and the babu produce an uneven exchange of what Said in *Orientalism* calls the political (imperial), intellectual (through Kim's education), cultural (portrayed in Kim's superior tastes and values) and moral power (with ideas about what Kim can understand and do better than the babu). Indeed, if Kipling believed, as he argued, that East and West can never meet in India, then he makes sure that in *Kim* they don't. Despite the similarities that exist between Kim and Hurree babu, there exists a huge gulf between the two that cannot only never be bridged, but one which renders the native to a position of subordinacy.

Interestingly, however, to represent Kim's authority Kipling needs the educated babu. Only by virtue of defining himself in antithesis to this educated Other can Kipling assert Kim's authority. Hence, even as he spurns him, the babu becomes indispensable to his narrative. As an Other, he embodies the image of what Kim as an Englishman can and never will/should be. In this sense the babu becomes a reminder of what Kim is and ought to remain—a sahib who must "never forget that ... [he] is a sahib; and that some day ... [he] will command natives."

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<sup>1</sup>Said, "*Kim*," 52.

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# Gandhi: Patron Saint of the Industrialist

Leah Renold

*For over a quarter of a century Mohandas K. Gandhi maintained a close friendship with G. D. Birla., a wealthy industrialist, who was Gandhi's chief patron. This article explores their relationship which reveals some of the less well-known aspects of Gandhi. Despite popular perceptions of Gandhi, he was neither a social nor economic revolutionary.*

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During the years of the Indian independence movement, a leading Indian industrialist, G. D. Birla, was Mahatma Gandhi's most generous financial supporter. While Birla has been described as a devotee of Gandhi, the relationship between the two men was more one of collaboration than of one-sided devotion. Gandhi's campaigns were made possible by drawing from Birla's vast financial resources while Birla benefited not only from the social and religious prestige which his association with Gandhi brought him, but his economic role and position as a wealthy capitalist was strengthened and glorified. Gandhi gave his blessing to the abundant wealth of Birla with his teaching on trusteeship, a concept which asserted the right of the rich to accumulate and maintain wealth, as long as the wealth was used to benefit society. Gandhi apparently borrowed the concept of trusteeship from the writings of the American millionaire, Andrew Carnegie, who had used trusteeship to promote capitalism over socialism.

The close relationship between Gandhi and G. D. Birla did not escape scrutiny. B. R. Ambedkar, a leader of the untouchable castes, accused Gandhi of pretending to support the cause of the oppressed while actually supporting the forces of social conservatism.<sup>1</sup> Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India, questioned the Gandhi-Birla connection. Linlithgow, who had blamed Gandhi

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<sup>1</sup>For further discussion see B. R. Ambedkar, *Gandhi and Gandhism* (Jullandar: Bheem Patrika Publications, 1970).

for the sabotage and violence of the Quit India Movement of 1942, had suspicions that Birla, as representing big business, was actually the hidden hand behind the violence.<sup>1</sup> Investigations by the governments of both colonial and independent India into Birla's economic and political association with Gandhi and the Congress failed to bring criminal indictment.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the relationship between the two men had consequences for the future of India and deserves attention. Gandhi and Birla, both strong defenders of social conservatism, shared objectives that were not brought out openly. In the shadow of Gandhi's public persona and popular teachings, Gandhi and Birla were able to weave conservative policies into the social, political, and economic fabric of independent India.

Ghanshyam Das Birla (1894–1983) was from a Marwari merchant family of Pilani in Rajasthan.<sup>3</sup> His grandfather, Seth Shivanarain Birla, set out for Bombay on a camel in 1862. In Bombay, Shivanarain began trading in seeds and bullion. His only son, Baldeodas, joined him in the business at age thirteen in 1875. The Birla's trading business thrived and the family established an export-import business in Calcutta. In Bombay the family moved into trading in cotton, wheat, rape-seed and silver. G. D. began his apprenticeship in the family business at age thirteen. G. D. was sixteen when he started his own brokerage. G. D.'s business took him into contact with the British. He was offended by their racial arrogance. Birla wrote, "I was not allowed to use the lift to go up to their offices nor their benches while waiting to see them. I smarted under these insults and this created in me a political interest."<sup>4</sup>

When G. D. was in his early twenties he found himself a wealthy man. World War I had produced great profits in his trading business. He was also a wanted man. G. D., in his frustration with the British had become involved with the Bara Bazaar Youth League, a group that engaged in terrorist activities against the British. Birla denies participating in terrorism, but in 1916 he was

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<sup>1</sup>Linlithgow to all Provincial Governors, 2 November 1942, in Nicholas Mansergh, *Reassertion of Authority, Gandhi's Fast and the Succession to the Vicerealty: 21 September 1942–12 June 1943*, Vol. 3, *The Transfer of Power 1942–7* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1971) 190–91.

<sup>2</sup>Margaret Herdeck and Gita Piramal, *India's Industrialists*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D. C.: Three Continents Press, 1985), 73.

<sup>3</sup>Birla's biographer Alan Ross provides the following information on Birla's life in *The Emissary: G. D. Birla, Gandhi and Independence* (London: Collins Harvill, 1986).

<sup>4</sup>G. D. Birla, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma* (Bombay: Vakils, Feffer and Simons, 1968), xiv.

accused of stealing a shipment of armaments. He went into hiding for several months until friends could have the charges dropped against him.

Birla, restored to his business, decided to steer clear of terrorism. He would meet the British on the playing fields of business. There were British businessmen though who did not want him to play. When the Birlas attempted to open a jute factory in Calcutta, a British competitor started buying up all the land adjacent to the plot on which the Birlas were to build their factory, forcing the Birlas to move elsewhere. The Birlas were not deterred. G. D. and his brothers prospered in the jute business, as well as in their other enterprises. At the beginning of World War II, the Birlas were worth \$3.3 million. By the end of the war, they had holdings of \$20 million.<sup>1</sup> Before independence in 1947 the Birlas had 20 companies. Today they own 175 businesses and are prominent in textiles, sugar, jute, automobiles, bicycles, boilers, calcium carbides, industrial alcohol, linoleum, woolens, flax, ghee, margarine, and also starch, confectionery, banking, and insurance. The Birlas owned several newspapers including the *Hindustan Times* and a large interest in radio. In the summer of 1993, the Birla fortune was \$1.5 billion.<sup>2</sup> G. D. Birla's political activities were a factor in the success of the Birla empire.

G. D. Birla's association with Mahatma Gandhi began in 1915. Gandhi had just returned to India from South Africa as a hero for championing the rights of Indian workers. In Calcutta, where Gandhi was to make a speech, Birla arranged a grand reception for him. Birla related his first impressions of Gandhi:

At this first meeting he appeared rather queer .... I was rather puzzled about him when I first saw him, and then gradually I came to know him .... He gave us a new conception of politics. We felt him a saint as well as a politician .... That meeting was thirty-two years ago, and since then I have been associated with him and have been giving him such service as I can.<sup>3</sup>

The service that Birla provided amounted to supplying practically every financial need Gandhi brought to him. Gandhi had other

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<sup>1</sup>Herdeck and Piramal, 67.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Schuman, "The Birla Family," *Forbes* (1993): 88.

<sup>3</sup>Margaret Bourke-White, *Halfway To Freedom* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949), 64.



sources of income, including the assistance of the industrialist Jamnalal Bajaj, as well as the accumulated donations from multitudes of poor supporters, but Birla was the major financier. Birla's brothers also contributed to Gandhi, but sometimes G. D.'s gifting was seen by them as an extravagance.<sup>1</sup> Birla rarely refused any financial request on Gandhi's part and Gandhi's requests were numerous. The following request from Gandhi was not atypical:

My thirst for money is simply unquenchable. I need at least Rs. 2,00,000—for khadi, untouchability and education. The dairy work makes another Rs. 50,000. Then there is the Ashram expenditure. No work remains unfinished for want of funds, but God gives after severe trials. This also satisfies me. You can give as you like for whatever work you have faith in.<sup>2</sup>

With Birla's beneficence Gandhi was able carry on his massive political campaigns, as well as to maintain a semblance of poverty and simplicity in lifestyle, while enjoying almost limitless financial resources.

While Gandhi appeared to share the living standards of the typical Indian villager in his ashram, the annual expenditure of his ashram was 100,000 rupees,<sup>3</sup> a considerable sum in pre-Independence rupees. In a similar vein, Gandhi was known for his humility in insisting on travelling by third-class trains. To get a seat in a crowded third-class car was difficult, so when Gandhi and his entourage travelled, the entire third-class car, cars, and sometimes even the whole train was paid for to ensure Gandhi's comfort.<sup>4</sup> When Gandhi attempted to make a symbolic action by temporarily moving into an untouchable colony in Delhi, half the residents were moved out before his visit and the shacks of the residents torn down and neat little huts constructed in their place. The entrances and windows of the huts were screened with matting, and during the length of Gandhi's visit, were kept sprinkled with water to provide a cooling effect. The local temple was white-washed and new brick paths were laid. In an interview with Margaret Bourke-White, a

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<sup>1</sup>Herdeck and Pirmal, 77.

<sup>2</sup>Gandhi to G. D. Birla, 10 January 1927, G. D. Birla, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, 35.

<sup>3</sup>Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 318.

<sup>4</sup>Bourke-White, 88–89

photo-journalist for *Life* magazine, one of the men in charge of Gandhi's visit, Dinanath Tiang of the Birla Company, explained the improvements in the untouchable colony, "We have cared for Gandhiji's comfort for the last twenty years."<sup>1</sup>

Gandhi put forward the illusory image of poverty and simplicity while he was actually living very comfortably. We can only speculate whether this image-making was political posturing on Gandhi's part or whether the amenities were forced on him by the practicalities of operating a massive movement. When Gandhi was questioned by the journalist Louis Fischer about the percentage of his budget which was funded by the rich, Gandhi told him practically all of it was, adding, "In this ashram, for instance, we could live much more poorly than we do and spend less money. But we do not and the money comes from our rich friends."<sup>2</sup> Gandhi was not oblivious to the expense laid out for him.

We can also only speculate on whether certain statements Gandhi made were representative of his opinions or whether they, too, could have been political tactics. Gandhi was well known for espousing seemingly contradictory positions. As a result it is a difficult task to decide what Gandhi's true positions were. For example, Birla criticized Gandhi for his public support of the Swaraj party. Birla did not care for the party due to its violent propensities.<sup>3</sup> Gandhi responded:

I shall talk to you about the Swaraj party when we meet. I do not want you to change your view because by justifying your views I seek to justify my position as well.<sup>4</sup>

Apparently Gandhi had reasons for publicly seeming to support a party which he admitted in private he was against. Similarly, Gandhi voiced radical views against capitalism and industrialism in his public speeches and writing:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 11f.

<sup>2</sup>Gandhi to Louis Fischer, 6 June 1942, Louis Fischer, *A Week With Mr. Gandhi*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1943) cited by B. R. Ambedkar, *Gandhi and Gandhism* (Jullandar: Bheem Patrika Publications, 1970), 10.

<sup>3</sup>Birla had earlier written to Gandhi encouraging him to not worry about offending the Swaraj party. Birla writes that the Swarajists were espousing violence: "At the Sirajganj Conference the Swarajists have openly declared themselves in favour of violence and have therefore torn the mask of non-violence off their faces." Gandhi to Birla, 11 June 1924; G. D. Birla, *Bapu*, 7-8.

<sup>4</sup>Gandhi to Birla, 16 December 1925, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XXIX, 324.

Industrialism is, I am afraid, going to be a curse for mankind .... Industrialism depends entirely on your capacity to exploit.<sup>1</sup>

To change to industrialism is to court disaster ... The one great change to make is to discard foreign cloth, and reinstate the ancient cottage industry of handspinning. We must thus restore our ancient and healthgiving industry if we would resist industrialism. I do not fight shy of capitalism. I fight capitalism ... I do picture a time when the rich will spurn to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor ....<sup>2</sup>

These radical positions do not seem to correspond to other elements in Gandhi's life and thought, especially his close relationship with the industrialists. Margaret Bourke-White, having read Gandhi's seemingly revolutionary writings, was very puzzled to learn that for a quarter of a century Gandhi had spent much of his time living in G. D. Birla's palatial mansion in Delhi, where he was later assassinated.

Margaret Bourke-White's investigations into working conditions at one of Birla's mills in Delhi revealed a equally puzzling attitude on Gandhi's part to Birla's labour practices. Bourke-White was present when Gandhi was fasting in December 1947. During his fast, all the trade-unions sent delegations with peace pledges and pleas for Gandhi to end the fast. One trade-union, the largest union in India, did not send delegates. The textile workers union, whose chief employer was Birla, was noticeably absent. On December 8, shortly before Gandhi was to begin his fast, workers at Birla's textile mill in Delhi went to the manager asking for a cost of living bonus to meet rising prices. When their requests were answered with gunfire and rifle butts, the workers sent a delegation of five workers to see Gandhi at the Birla House. According to Bourke-White, Gandhi refused to see them.<sup>3</sup> On an earlier occasion, the workers at Birla's Delhi mill wrote to Gandhi directly to complain of

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<sup>1</sup>M. K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 12 November 1931.

<sup>2</sup>M. K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 7 October 1926.

<sup>3</sup>Bourke-White, 56-57.

bad working conditions.<sup>1</sup> Instead of answering the letter or questioning Birla about the matter, Gandhi forwarded the letter to Birla. Birla responded by telling Gandhi that the workers were lying.<sup>2</sup> Margaret Bourke-White visited Birla's mills and found conditions to be appalling. The squalid living quarters Birla provided for his workers were no better than those at mills belonging to owners who were not devotees to Gandhi. She wondered why Gandhi never visited the mills, as it would have been easy for him to do so.<sup>3</sup>

In none of the voluminous correspondence between Birla and Gandhi is Gandhi critical of the working conditions in Birla's mills. Birla once defensively wrote Gandhi, not in response to rebuke from Gandhi, but to reports that conditions were bad in his mills. Birla tells Gandhi that he is improving conditions in one factory and hopes to do so in others. He blames any atrocities at his mills on the mill managers, claiming he cannot control them.<sup>4</sup> While it would seem natural for the Mahatma to take an interest in Birla's workers, Gandhi refrained from criticizing or questioning Birla personally. In other cases, Gandhi did not shy away from public criticism of companions who did not abide by his views. He frequently complained about his longtime friend Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. Gandhi had called for a boycott of all British education. Malaviya, the founder of Banaras Hindu University, refused to comply. In one of many attacks against Malaviya's position, Gandhi accused him of the greatest *adharma* (unrighteousness).

I do not want to go into why this Empire is Satanic. But an Empire which has been guilty of the atrocities in the Punjab, which killed children six or seven years old ... to study in the schools of such an Empire is, to my mind, the greatest *adharma* of all. To Panditji, an elder brother to me, this seems to be *dharmā*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. C. Nanda of Textile Mazoor Sabha to Gandhi, 14 November 1944, G. D. Birla, *Bapu: A Unique Association, Vol. 4* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1977), 344–46.

<sup>2</sup>Birla to Pyarelal, 30 November 1944, *Ibid.*, 347–8.

<sup>3</sup>Margaret Bourke-White, 49–58.

<sup>4</sup>Birla to Gandhi, October 1929, *Bapu: A Unique Association*, 128–29.

<sup>5</sup>M. K. Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 28.

Though Gandhi continued to say he respected Malaviya, in reality there was a break in their friendship. In Gandhi's thirty-two year friendship with Birla, he never publicly criticized Birla's actions. Gandhi at times would make suggestions to Birla, but if Birla failed to follow them, Gandhi did not complain. Gandhi did not have the upper hand in the relationship. He considered Birla one of his mentors and would act on his advice.<sup>1</sup> In Gandhi's letters to Birla he does not lecture him, except with regard to dietary matters. Their correspondence is remarkably free from spiritual concerns, quite unlike the writing which Gandhi puts forward to the public. In Birla's collection of his correspondence with Gandhi, one letter by Gandhi stands out in addressing spiritual matters.<sup>2</sup> Birla writes that he cannot remember the context or for whom the letter was meant. Though the letters between Gandhi and Birla are very amicable, the subject matter concerns mostly mundane affairs of finances and strategy.

When Gandhi disagreed with Birla, he found a way of avoiding argument. In one instance, Gandhi publicly complained that people were buying mill-produced *khadi* under the mistaken impression that it was homespun. Birla understood this as an indirect criticism of his textile industry, which was producing milled *khadi*., and gave quick retort to Gandhi's complaint:

Do you not think that you are unnecessarily exaggerating the results of the khadi propaganda? ... You could find this out yourself if you send hawkers with mill-made as well as *shuddha* khadi who may ask some villagers to select their choice after explaining the latter properly about the quality as well as the price of the cloth, I have not the least doubt that if you made the experiment you will find that 90% of the consumers will pick up the cheaper and more lasting of the two stuffs. Mill khadi is popular because people find it cheap, durable besides it being swadeshi make.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"God has given me mentors, and I regard you as one of them." Gandhi to Birla, 20 July 1924, *Bapu*, Vol. 1, 10.

<sup>2</sup>Letter Without Date, *Bapu: A Unique Association*, Vol.1, 167.

<sup>3</sup>G. D. Birla to Gandhi, 11 April 1928, *Bapu: A Unique Association*, 92.

Gandhi answered a week later: "I got both your letters. But even today there is not time for reply."<sup>1</sup> Gandhi never allowed the *khadi* issue to become an object of contention between himself and Birla. Instead he found a place for mills in the *khadi* movement. Later Gandhi wrote to Birla:

I am convinced that the boycott will be successful only through *khadi*. This does not mean that the mills have no place in the scheme at all. The mills can have their deserved place by recognizing the worth of *khadi*. The conception of God envelopes all Gods.<sup>2</sup>

Gandhi was clearly making concessions to Birla in incorporating textile mills into his homespun *khadi* movement. Gandhi was as much interested in pleasing his patron as Birla was in pleasing his saint.

A useful model for examining the give and take of the Gandhi-Birla relationship is that of the patron and publicist as presented by the historian C. A. Bayly.<sup>3</sup> Bayly examines the relationship between wealthy patrons and leaders of reform movements such as the Hindi movement and the cow-protection movement in the late 1880s. Bayly uses for example the patronage of Madan Mohan Malaviya, a leader of the Hindu revivalist movement, the Hindu Mahasabha, by the wealthy magnate Ram Charan Das.<sup>4</sup> Bayly holds that the goal of the patron-publicist relationship was not exclusively concerned with protection of the patron's financial interests:

Two forms of relationship can be seen between patron and publicist, as also between various levels of political activity. One was the relationship between patron and publicist designed to protect material interests, or to promote them within new political arenas—the *vakil* relationship. The other concerned the protection or enhancement of particular conceptions of status conceived within the bounds of

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<sup>1</sup>Gandhi to Birla, 27 April 1928, *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>2</sup>Gandhi to Birla, 28 April 1930, *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>3</sup>C. A. Bayly, "Patrons and Politics in Northern India," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 7, Part 3, July 1973, 349–388.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 368ff.

revived Hinduism—the *dharmik* relationship. It is difficult to separate them.<sup>1</sup>

Desire for enhanced religious standing in the community, which affected all avenues of social interactions, from marriage arrangements to business deals, was an important element of the patron-publicist relationship. Religious patronage was a means to enhance social and economic status in the community. Avenues of religious patronage went beyond the traditional practices of temple construction and maintenance, feeding of *brāhmaṇas*, sponsoring of festivals, etc. With the advent of religious reform movements in the 1800's, sponsoring such causes as the Hindi movement or the cow-protection movement became a religious and status-enhancing act. Elements of some of the earlier religious reform movements, such as the use of the vernacular and revived cultural identity, as well as the political undertones and organizational capabilities of the movements, later played a role in the growth of nationalism. These causes were sponsored by the wealthy, whose economic and social standing profited therefrom.<sup>2</sup> Later, the relationships of patrons and publicists became an important element of Congress.<sup>3</sup>

Aspects of the Birla-Gandhi relationship can be described by Bayly's model. Birla's fame and social standing did not rest on his raw wealth alone. Birla did not neglect to develop his reputation for generous religious patronage. He is well known for his religious gifting, particularly in the construction of magnificent temples. Birla admitted that he did not construct the temples from personal piety, "Frankly speaking, we build temples but we don't believe in temples. We build temples to spread a kind of religious mentality."<sup>4</sup> Birla's financial support of the publicist Gandhi, as a form of religious patronage, would serve him well. The mere association with Gandhi conferred on Birla a measure of Gandhi's religious stature. It is easy to see that Birla's generous patronage of Gandhi could have been perceived as a sign of devotion and Gandhi's acceptance of that patronage as a sign of approval of Birla. Gandhi's role in the independence movement was as much religious as it was political. He was the Mahatma, the Great Soul. Gandhi captured the hearts and imaginations of his fellow Indians by drawing upon a wealth of traditional Hindu symbolism. The

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 368.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 365.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 360.

<sup>4</sup>G. D. Birla in interview with Margaret Bourke-White; Margaret Bourke-White, 63.



political entity that Gandhi called for would be a *rāmrajya*, a kingdom likened unto that of the righteous Lord Rama. The British, Gandhi often said, were the equivalent of the evil demon Ravana, who Lord Rama and his entourage defeated. Gandhi, not only discarded his Western garb and lifestyle to appear to identify with the Indian masses, but also to take upon himself the attitude of the *brahmacāri*, the holy renunciant. He renounced material possessions, sexual relations, and held to a strict vegetarian diet as part of his regime of holiness. At the same time he was the guiding inspiration to a massive political movement. According to Bayly's model, Gandhi would be the exemplar publicist.

As Birla's publicist, Gandhi was able to deftly weave Birla's interests into a seemingly spiritual context. A blatant example of this is found in Gandhi's support for Birla's position against government regulation of prices. On several occasions Gandhi brought up the need for decontrol in his sermons during his evening prayer meetings.<sup>1</sup> Gandhi also allowed the issue of decontrol to be promoted in his newspaper *Harijan*, a publication that was supposedly devoted to the needs of the oppressed. As part of the campaign for decontrol, Gandhi's son, Devadas, as managing editor of the *Hindustan Times*, Birla's chief New Delhi newspaper, also published an editorial calling for decontrols.<sup>2</sup> When Margaret Bourke-White questioned Birla about decontrols, he responded: "I never was in favor of controls. I am not built that way. The greatest virtue of capitalism is free competition."<sup>3</sup> He went on to add that since the recent decontrol of sugar prices, the price of sugar had gone down. Gandhi followed this line of argument in his prayer meetings. Bourke-White's investigation of decontrol found that it was true that the price of sugar went down for the wealthy, who could buy on the black market. As for the man on the street, the price of sugar had doubled.<sup>4</sup> Though in theory prices could go down for poor consumers with decontrol, in this case, it was the wealthy consumers and industrial producers who prospered.

Gandhi did not have anything against wealth. He was not inclined towards socialism and taught that there should be no forced redistribution of wealth in India. Gandhi called for social justice and alleviation of suffering, but believed that change brought about by

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<sup>1</sup>Gandhi, Birla House, 21 December 1947, *Harijan*, Vol. XI, 1973, 477.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*



government intervention would be ineffective. Change must first come in the individual heart. The wealthy should not be coerced into sharing their wealth; they should do it voluntarily. Gandhi taught that the wealthy should be trustees of their wealth, using only what was necessary for their own use and distributing their surplus for the benefit of society. Gandhi's idea is very much like the ideas of trusteeship that were being expounded in England and America in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Andrew Carnegie, a self-made American millionaire, had published a series of articles between 1886 and 1899 that sought to justify private wealth in the industrial society increasingly burdened with social concern and unrest.

Although some conservative Christian spokesmen had condemned corporate oppression, financial dishonesty, and growing poverty, many American and British religious leaders supporting the capitalistic economic system saw these social realities as prices that must be paid for progress. Carnegie in his essays set "in authoritative form the ideas that many Christian authors and most of the church press had been preaching for at least a generation."<sup>1</sup> In England the articles were reprinted and commented upon in the *Fortnightly Review*, *Nineteenth Century*, *Saturday Review*, and *Pall Mall Gazette*. The articles received much attention, including a review and praise by the British Prime Minister, William E. Gladstone. Carnegie believed that the articles were better-received in England, because England was "more clearly face to face with socialist questions." Carnegie's articles offered an alternative to socialism. He stressed individual effort and responsibility instead of government control. He urged the wealthy to adopt the principle of trusteeship:

This then, is held to be the duty of the man of wealth:  
To set an example of modest, unostentatious living,  
shunning display or extravagance; to provide  
moderately for the legitimate wants of those  
dependent upon him; and, after doing so, to consider  
all surplus revenues which come to him simply as  
trust funds, which he is called upon to  
administer ... the man of wealth thus becoming the  
mere trustee and agent for his poorer brethren,  
bringing to their service his superior wisdom,  
experience, and ability to administer, doing for them

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<sup>1</sup>Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), 132.

better than what they would or could do for themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Gandhi was a student in England from 1888 to 1891, at the time some of Carnegie's articles were published. As the articles were a subject of some controversy at the time they were published and afterwards, it is possible that Gandhi was exposed to these ideas that served to promote capitalism over socialism. Gandhi's teachings are remarkably similar to Carnegie's:

The rich man will be left in possession of his wealth, of which he will use what he reasonably requires for his personal needs and will act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for society.<sup>2</sup>

Carnegie made a list of worthy causes on which surplus wealth should be spent which included educational institutions, hospitals, churches, etc.<sup>3</sup> To provide for the required surplus wealth, Carnegie called for unbridled capitalism:

He who manages the ships, the mines, the factories, cannot withdraw his capital, for this is the tool with which he works wonders; nor can he restrict his operations, for the cessation of growth and improvement in any industrial undertaking marks the beginning of decay.<sup>4</sup>

Birla's lifestyle and actions could almost be used to illustrate Carnegie's ideas. Birla was known for his unostentatious living and philanthropy. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, in the foreword to G. D. Birla's book *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, puts forward Gandhi's version of trusteeship and points to G. D. Birla as being a worthy trustee. The beneficiaries of Birla's patronage curiously match Carnegie's list of the institutions deserving of surplus wealth:

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard, (1900) 1962), 25.

<sup>2</sup>Gandhi as cited in Raj Krishna's "The Nehru-Gandhi Polarity and Economic Policy" in *Gandhi and Nehru* by B. R. Nanda, P. C. Joshi, and Raj Krishna, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979), 55.

<sup>3</sup>Carnegie, 29 ff.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 72.

It has been one of Gandhiji's teachings that those who are blessed with wealth should regard themselves as Trustees and treat their wealth as trust property for the benefit of others. The large number of institutions which are to be seen in so many parts of the country in the shape of educational institutions or religious temples and Dharmshalas or Hospitals with their apex at Pilani and Delhi are testimony to the fact that Birlas have imbibed this part of Gandhiji's teachings in no small manner. They have earned abundantly and likewise spent also generously and abundantly on every good cause.<sup>1</sup>

Gandhi claimed that his idea of trusteeship was taken from the first verse of the *Īśā Upaniṣad*.<sup>2</sup>

All this, whatsoever moves on the earth, is to be hidden in the Lord (the Self). When thou hast surrendered all this, then thou mayest enjoy. Do not covet the wealth of others.

Perhaps by making such a claim Gandhi hoped to give credence to the concept of trusteeship in the eyes of the Indians. Attributing the basis of contemporary ideas or practices to ancient texts, even while the connection is spurious, is not an uncommon means of legitimization. This is not to say that it was impossible for Gandhi's idea of trusteeship to be original or inspired by Hindu tradition. The *Manu smṛti*, for instance, contains a verse in a section on the duties of castes, which encourages the *vaiśya* caste to accumulate wealth for the benefit of others:

He [a *vaiśya* ] should expend the greatest effort in justly increasing his goods, and he should also take pains to bestow at least food on all creatures.  
*Manu smṛti* IX. 333.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Rajendra Prasad in foreword of G. D. Birla's *In the Shadow of the Mahatma*, vii.

<sup>2</sup>Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, 624.

<sup>3</sup>*Ordinances of Manu*, translated by Arthur Cole Burnell (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint (1884) 1971), 303.

Theoretically, the verse could be developed into the idea of trusteeship. But Gandhi did not bring forward such an explicit text on which to claim trusteeship was founded. Judging from the popularity of Carnegie's writings and the simultaneity of Gandhi's stay in England with the publication of Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth," it is highly probable that Gandhi borrowed from Carnegie's ideas on trusteeship.

Gandhi's first application of trusteeship was with regard to Britain's trusteeship of the colonies well before Gandhi called for independence.<sup>1</sup> While Gandhi changed his mind about the ability of the British to be beneficent trustees, he did not change his mind about the trusteeship of capitalists in India.

Gandhi's support for capitalists is expressed in his writing concerning industrial workers. On one hand, Gandhi suggested in *Young India* that mill owners should provide the following improvements for their workers:

1. The hours of labour must leave the workmen some hours of leisure.
2. They must get facilities for their own education.
3. Provision should be made for an adequate supply of milk, clothing and necessary education for their children.
4. There should be sanitary dwelling for the workmen.
5. They should be in a position to save enough to sustain themselves during their old age.<sup>2</sup>

In the same article Gandhi makes a strong statement of the intellectual superiority of the capitalist over the workers:

When labour comes fully to realise its strength, I know it can become more tyrannical than capital. The millowners will have to work dictated by labour if the latter could command the intelligence of the former. It is clear, however, that labour will never attain to that intelligence. If it does, labour will cease

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<sup>1</sup>"What is the duty of a trustee, if not to make his ward fit for everything that the trustee has been doing for the ward?" *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. IX, Sept.-Nov. 1908, 475-6.*; "They [the British] will be trustees and not tyrants, and they will live in perfect peace with the whole of the inhabitants of India." 14 October 1904, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. IX, Sept.-Nov. 1908, 481.*

<sup>2</sup>Gandhi, *Young India 1919-1922, 729.*

to be labour and become itself the master. The capitalists do not fight in the strength of money alone. They do possess intelligence and tact.<sup>1</sup>

In another article Gandhi worries that increased wages and reduced work loads will be squandered by the workers:

It is now time to examine the use we should make of increasing wages and hours saved. It would be like going into the frying pan out of the fire to use the increase in wages in the grog-shop and the hours saved in gambling dens. The money received, it is clear should be devoted to education of our children, and the time saved to our education. In both these matters the mill-owners can render much assistance.<sup>2</sup>

Gandhi implies that the workers are incompetent to spend their wages properly and that the mill-owners are better able to use the increase in wages to provide milk, reading rooms and harmless amusements and games for the workers. Gandhi counsels the workers that it would be a sin to request higher wages and less hours if they were unable to control their passions. Higher wages and reduced hours, according to Gandhi, required clean minds and hearts.<sup>3</sup> Gandhi does not grace the capitalists with a lecture to the effect that increased profits require a clean heart. According to Gandhi's version of trusteeship, the capitalists had a right to their profits owing to their superior abilities. They were to make decisions that would benefit their less able workers.

Birla, while prospering from his textile mills and making use of Gandhi to promote his own industrial interests, daily wore *khadi* and occasionally worked at the spinning wheel. At Gandhi's suggestion he had been active in the Harijan upliftment movement. Though Gandhi and Birla are supposed to be strong supporters of the untouchables there is a noticeable lack of emotion or enthusiasm about the issue in their letters. The Harijans are spoken of as a cause, perhaps one that they would not want pushed too far. Gandhi did not want to abolish the caste system that had assigned the Harijans to their degraded position. B. R. Ambedkar, an untouchable leader, was strongly critical of Gandhi's motives and policies regarding untouchable castes, including the euphemistic

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<sup>1</sup>Gandhi, *Young India* 1919–1922, 729.

<sup>2</sup>Gandhi, *Young India*, 6 October 1921, 731f.

<sup>3</sup>Gandhi, *Young India*, 6 October 1921, 732–36.

designation of untouchables as Harijans.<sup>1</sup> Ambedkar was also critical of Gandhi's connection with businessmen:

If the Bania is financing the Congress it is because he realized and Mr. Gandhi has taught him—that money invested in politics gives large dividends.<sup>2</sup>

Gandhi's call for Harijan upliftment, like Gandhi's ideas on abolition of capitalism and industry would be revolutionary if put into actual practice. But Gandhi's lofty teachings were otherworldly and seemingly unattainable, perhaps purposely so. That most people would not follow them literally was understood, even by Gandhi. Birla once wrote of the exaggerated expectations Gandhi had aroused in the untouchable castes:

Especially among the educated Harijans, hopes have been encouraged which could under no circumstances be fulfilled. Many educated Harijans seem to be under the impression that the society of ours is going to create a millennium.<sup>3</sup>

Ambedkar accused Gandhi of exploiting social problems, such as the plight of the untouchables, for political gain, while actually preventing social change. Ambedkar pointed out for example that Gandhi had publicly supported a bill for temple-entry for Harijans, but when election time came, he, along with Congress withdrew support for the bill.<sup>4</sup>

Birla realized that behind all the revolutionary rhetoric, Gandhi was socially conservative. Gandhi might make public statements against industrialism, but he was no threat to Birla's industrial interests; he was a boon. Birla, as Gandhi's patron, basked in the aura of Gandhi's popularity, while Gandhi went about securing Birla's interests. Among Birla's chief concerns was Indian independence.

There had been times that Birla had profited from his relations with the British, and for some time had served as a go-between for Gandhi and British officials. But developments in

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<sup>1</sup>See B. R. Ambedkar's chapter, "Gandhi, the Doom of Untouchables" in *Gandhi and Gandhism*, 42-92.

<sup>2</sup>B. R. Ambedkar, *Gandhi and Gandhism*, 10.

<sup>3</sup>Birla to Gandhi, 10 January 1933, *Bapu: A Unique Association*, Vol. 1, 248.

<sup>4</sup>B. R. Ambedkar, 63.

British economic policies in India in 1937 had not been favorable to Birla and other industrialists:

The [British] refusal to change the rupee ratio, the willingness to sacrifice large-scale Indian interests in Burma, new encroachments of foreign capital in some profitable fields, austerity budgets and ... open hostility to India's industrialization and to planning combined to produce a marked shift in the traditionally cautious line pursued by big business towards the government.<sup>1</sup>

Resentment on the part of industry grew against the government and led to closer ties with Congress. B. R. Tomlinson, a historian, credits a group of industrialists, which included G. D. Birla, Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas, and J. R. D. Tata, with presenting in 1944 the most complete survey of India's postwar economic requirements, as well as detailed planning to achieve them. Tomlinson writes that the industrialists began to regard Congress, rather than the British, "as the body best able and most willing to secure for them a place in the domestic economy and polity they desired."<sup>2</sup> From 1944 onwards, business interests openly supported Congress. It was clear that big business, including Birla, would stand to profit by independence.

There was a major obstacle remaining in Birla's path. Jawaharlal Nehru, as president of the Congress in 1936, put forward two proposals. The first was to establish a joint anti-imperialist front. He was willing to yoke himself to any sympathetic party for this cause, including Madan Mohan Malaviya, whom Nehru had criticized for the communal politics of his Nationalist Party. Nehru's other proposal was the affiliation of trade and peasant unions to the Congress. Nehru in his presidential speech at the Lucknow Congress presented his plea for radical changes in the *status quo* of India:

I see no way of ending the poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation and the subjection of the Indian people except through socialism. That involves vast and revolutionary changes in our political and social structure, the ending of vested

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<sup>1</sup>Claude Markovits, *Indian Business and Nationalist Politics 1931–1939: The Indigenous Capitalist Class and the Rise of the Congress Party*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 183.

<sup>2</sup>B. R. Tomlinson, *The Political Economy of the Raj*, 163.



interests in land and industry, as well as the feudal and autocratic Indian States system. That means the ending of private property, except in a restricted sense, and the replacement of the present profit system by a higher ideal of cooperative service.<sup>1</sup>

The outcome of the Lucknow Congress was that Nehru's idea of yoking the Congress to the unions was gently pushed aside to a committee who was to consider the matter. Satyamurti, a Congressman from Madras, announced that it was the triumph of Gandhi over socialism.<sup>2</sup>

Birla had earlier tried to bring Nehru into his camp. When Nehru was having severe financial difficulties, Birla had offered him a handsome monthly allowance, such as the Birla family was providing Gandhi and other Congress leaders. Nehru was angry with the offer and refused it.<sup>3</sup> Now Birla expressed his pleasure with Gandhi's victory over Nehru:

Mahatmaji kept his promise and without his uttering a word, he saw that *no new commitments were made*. Jawaharlalji's speech in a way was thrown into the waste paper basket because all the resolutions that were passed were against the spirit of his speech.<sup>4</sup>

A disappointed, but undeterred Nehru went on tour to promote his proposals. In Bombay, he was met with hostility by businessmen. On 20 May 1936, *The Times of India* published a response to Nehru's speech signed by twenty-one Bombay businessmen:

We are convinced that there is a grave risk of the masses of the country being misled by such doctrines into believing that all that is required for the improvement of their well-being is a total destruction of the existing social and economic structure. The inculcation of any such ideas into the mind of

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<sup>1</sup>Jawaharlal Nehru as cited by Markovits, 206.

<sup>2</sup>*Bombay Chronicle*, 16 April 1936, as cited by Sarvepalli Gopal in *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, Vol. One 1889-1947 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 209.

<sup>3</sup>Gopal, 190.

<sup>4</sup>To Purushottamdas Thakurdas, 20 April 1936. Purushottamdas Thakurdas papers, File 177. N.M.M.L. Emphasis in original, as cited by Gopal, 209.



unthinking millions of this country would lead to a situation in which not only the institution of private property but the peaceful observance of religion, and even personal safety, are likely to be jeopardized. The business communities and the propertied classes of this country played not a small part in the furtherance of the national movement for the achievement of political freedom and have supported all practical measures for the amelioration of the lot of the toiling masses of this country ....<sup>1</sup>

Birla himself avoided a public confrontation with Nehru. In a letter to one of the signers of the Bombay businessmen's manifesto, he criticized the open display of hostility towards Nehru's policies:

You have rendered no service to your caste men. It is curious how we businessmen are so short-sighted .... It looks very crude for a man with property to say that he is opposed to expropriation in the wider interest of the country.<sup>2</sup>

Birla's preferred method was to quietly strengthen the opposition to Nehru by bolstering the non-revolutionary, right-wing elements in the anti-British camp. He left it to Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Rajagopalachari, and Gandhi to criticize Nehru for taking it on himself to try to push forward his minority viewpoint against propertied interests to the forefront of Congress policies.<sup>3</sup>

Gandhi's friendship with Birla endured until Gandhi's assassination at the Birla mansion in Delhi in January 1948. Gandhi has come to be remembered as a saint and leader of the Indian nationalist movement. He is not remembered as a supporter of capitalism and social conservatism. History's memory of Birla is somewhat fainter. After all, an industrialist is an industrialist. It is noted to his credit that he was also a devotee of Gandhi. This recollection distorts what transpired between Gandhi and Birla, as well as neglects their mutual influences. The relationship between the two men was too complex to be reduced to simple manipulation

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<sup>1</sup>As cited by Markovits, 206.

<sup>2</sup>G. D. Birla to Walchand Hirachand, 26 May 1936. Purushottamdas Thakurdas papers, file 177, as cited in Gopal, 212.

<sup>3</sup>Gopal, 212.

on the part of either. Theirs was a friendship involving an interplay of nationalism, social conservatism, the exigencies of business, politics, and patronage, as well as shared membership in mercantile castes, religion, and genuine affection.

The relationship between Gandhi and Birla reveals that Gandhi in many ways supported capitalism and policies that were favorable to the industrialists, particularly in respect to his teachings on trusteeship. It cannot be denied that Gandhi and Birla had a hand in the fact that after independence there was no social revolution and the socialist aspirations of Nehru were discouraged. When one reads a letter from Birla written as early as 1942 calling for the formation of Pakistan, and further mentioning that Gandhi told Birla at that time that he was willing to be converted to the idea, ones wonders if the full extent of Birla's influence is yet to be told.<sup>1</sup>

Birla once defended himself for not being the ideal trustee to Margaret Bourke-White. In response to her questions about the contrast between his industrial policies and Gandhi's ideal of trusteeship, Birla responded, "I am an industrialist and a mill owner. He is a saint."<sup>2</sup> Birla did not claim to be a saint and did not feel he had to live up to Gandhi's ideal of trusteeship. Gandhi as a saint had the luxury of being idealistic. He did not have to implement the ideas which won him mass appeal. Nor did he have to make sure his devotees implemented them. Gandhi's relationship to Birla reveals a less public side of the Mahatma. In G. D. Birla's words, Gandhi's letters to him were not those of "a great man or Mahatma but of a saintly man and the outpourings of a friendly soul."<sup>3</sup> Through their correspondence, we see a Gandhi who is far less the saint of history's imagination and much more a man, subject to biases and ideologies of his social milieu.

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<sup>1</sup>Birla wrote to Mahadev Desai, "Bapu says that the Congress and he are willing to be converted. I drew the attention of Nawabzaba to this and asked him to say publicly that he is prepared to meet the Congress and convert it. To this, he replied: 'Jawaharlal says he does not even want to talk of Pakistan. How could then the conversation be possible?' I think the two statements, viz., of Jawaharlal and Bapu, are contradictory to each other. If the Congress position is that it is willing to be converted, then a meeting is necessary ... You know my views about Pakistan. I am in favor of separation and I do not think it is impracticable, or against the interest of Hindus or India." Birla to Mahadev Desai, 14 June 1942, *Bapu: A Unique Association*, Vol. 4, 315-6.

<sup>2</sup>Birla to Bourke-White; Bourke-White, 69.

<sup>3</sup>Birla as cited by Alan Ross, 177.

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# The Mahar Movement's Military Component<sup>1</sup>

Richard B. White

*Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is widely recognized for his prominent role in improving the status of India's Untouchables. An important factor in his rise is his family's military background. This article explores how military service resulted in the accrual of benefits to Ambedkar's caste, the Mahars of Maharashtra, that otherwise would have been unavailable.*

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[I]n the Bombay Army, 'the Brahmin stands shoulder to shoulder in the ranks, nay sleeps in the same tent with his Parwari [Mahar] soldier, and dreams not of any objection to the arrangement.'  
—Brigadier John Jacob, *Views and Opinions*, 1858.

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, is famous for being "the most highly educated Untouchable in India." His education,<sup>2</sup> encouraged and financed largely by the Gaikwad of Baroda, led to his role as the Untouchable's chief spokesman, the founder of a political party for Untouchables, and the moving spirit behind organizations, schools, and colleges established for their uplift. One of Ambedkar's final acts was the initiation of a Buddhist conversion movement that ultimately attracted more than 3 million Untouchable adherents.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This paper does not necessarily represent the opinion of the Department of Defense or the United States Army. It is solely the view of the author.

<sup>2</sup>Ambedkar earned an M.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia University in New York City, a D.Sc. from London University, and a Passed the Bar was issued from Grey's Inn, London.

<sup>3</sup>Eleanor Zelliot, "Gandhi and Ambedkar," in *The Untouchables in Sagar: South Asia Graduate Research Journal* 1, No. 1 (May 1994): 39–59

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This part of Ambedkar's story is well-known. However, his family's military service in the British Raj is not widely acknowledged for creating an environment that laid the foundation for his later success. Eleanor Zelliott, an expert on Dr. Ambedkar and the Mahar movement, maintains, "[T]he hundred year period of Mahar recruitment into British armies may well have been the single most important factor, aside from economic reasons, in producing the Mahar movement."<sup>1</sup> This article examines the importance of military service in improving the social status of Ambedkar's caste, the Mahars of Maharashtra. The focus is on their relationship with the British.

The Mahars benefited from their participation in the British Army in a number of ways. First, military service became "a significant part of caste élan and mythology."<sup>2</sup> The first section provides the historical evidence they use to establish their credentials as a caste with martial traditions. The paper's second section details the advantages, especially education, that accrued from military service and discusses their access to the government that otherwise was unavailable to Untouchables. The final section discusses the British decision to recruit only "martial races," in which the Mahars were not included, for the British Indian Army and the Mahars' efforts to gain reinstatement in the Army. The article does not focus exclusively on Dr. Ambedkar, but uses him as a point of reference for many of the examples given.

### Early Military Participation

Eleanor Zelliott explains that the British gave Mahars the opportunity to seek different occupations from their traditional role as a village servant. She explains that before the arrival of the British,

Mahars had no special skill or craft, but performed necessary duties for the village as watchmen, wall-menders, street-sweepers, removers of cattle carcasses, caretakers of the burning ground, servants of any passing governmental official.... Mahar service was essential for the village; his status was

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*Contemporary India*, ed. J. Michael Mahar (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1972), 70. I am grateful for Professor Zelliott's assistance in providing many of the sources for this paper.

<sup>1</sup>Eleanor M. Zelliott, "Dr. Ambedkar and the Mahar Movement" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1969), 53.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 52.

low, his work menial, but his place was secure. With the coming of the British and the spread of new ways of administration and communication, the Mahar place in the village grew less important.<sup>1</sup>

Military service provided Mahars with the opportunity to move beyond their traditional social position in the village. In fact, the Mahar tradition of being in armies precedes the British Raj.

The recorded history of the Mahars' military achievements dates back to Shivaji's Army in the 1600s.<sup>2</sup> Cynthia Enloe, a noted sociologist who has written extensively on ethnic-military relationships, states, "The best of all militaries in the eyes of a state elite is one in which the most competent soldiers are also the most politically reliable, because they have the greatest stake in the continuation of the current system."<sup>3</sup> The Mahars met this condition according to descriptions of their loyalty. Colonel V. Longer, author of *Forefront Forever: The History of the Mahar Regiment*, states:

There were a number of useful functions which the Mahars performed. Their Argus eye; their daring tenacity and determination; their faithfulness, loyalty and honesty; their courage and candour, were inestimable qualities which were always held in respect and were for ever utilized to advantage by the village .... In course of time, their voice carried great weight when there were disputes over property as their evidence was considered most accurate, intimate, and trustworthy.<sup>4</sup>

This sense of loyalty and trustworthiness led Shivaji to include Mahars as a vital component of his army.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>2</sup>Shivaji (1627-1680) led Maharashtra's "fierce ... opposition to Mughal rule." He fought primarily in the Deccan, but his raids took him as far north as Surat. Stanley Wolpert writes, "Shivaji clearly used an intimate knowledge of his homeland to considerable martial advantage, and he well deserves to be called one of the founding fathers of modern guerrilla warfare." Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 162-65.

<sup>3</sup>Cynthia H. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), 23.

<sup>4</sup>V. Longer, *Forefront Forever: The History of the Mahar Regiment* (Saugor, India: The Mahar Regimental Center, 1981), 2.

Shivaji, leader of the Maratha nation, fought for a Hindu empire, but using Untouchables did not bother him. He “found the Mahars useful, for the wily Maratha chief realized that the best way of obtaining the maximum results was to mix up various castes in his garrison forces.”<sup>1</sup> He used the Mahars “to watch the jungles at the foot of the hill forts, act as scouts and [they] kept the forts supplied with wood and fodder.”<sup>2</sup> This was the first exposure of the Mahars to an organized army that provided its soldiers with steady pay and benefits. After Shivaji’s death, Mahar units continued to serve his descendants throughout the 1700s.<sup>3</sup> Their experience with Shivaji and others encouraged them to seek similar employment as sepoys of the British East India Company.

Ardythe Basham, in her detailed examination of the Mahars and the military, found the perceived early martial history to be an important part of Mahar identity. She concludes, “Whether or not these incidents are historically true, they are widely accepted by the Mahars as part of their tradition, and now form part of the official history of [today’s] Mahar Regiment.”<sup>4</sup> The Mahars have often used this martial identity, rooted in the 1600s, to legitimate their continued presence in the military.

Mahars began their service with the British in the 1750s. Stephen P. Cohen, an expert on the Indian Army, discusses the importance of Mahars in the Bombay Army in his seminal work, *The Indian Army: Contribution to the Development of a Nation*. He writes that Mahars were

a sizeable portion of the armies of the Mahratta chieftain Shivaji, served as hereditary local policeman, and were thus a “natural” martial class. Heavily recruited in the premutiny years, the Mahars constituted a fifth to a quarter of the entire Bombay Army.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>2</sup>S.P.P. Thorat, *The Regimental History of the Mahar MG Regiment* (Dehra Dun: The Army Press, 1954), 3.

<sup>3</sup>Ardythe Basham, “Army Service and Social Mobility: The Mahars of the Bombay Presidency, with Comparisons with the Bene Israel and Black Americans” (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1986), 26. This thesis, provided by Professor Zelliott, is the most detailed work on the Mahars and their unique relationship with the military and provided much of the data for this paper.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Contribution to the Development of a Nation* 2d ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 59.



In addition to the size of the Mahar contingent, they were also praised for their conduct as soldiers. The Mahars rewarded the British with the same loyalty that Shivaji had enjoyed.

The Bombay Army fought in several battles, and in most, the Mahars were recognized for their skills. Longer proclaims:

Much praise was showered on the Mahar Sepoys of the Bombay Army who endured the rigours of difficult marches when rations were low and disease was high among men and animals. Whether they were charging ahead or were besieged or taken prisoner-of-war, whether they were storming fortresses or making tactical withdrawals, they always stood steadfast by their officers and comrades, never letting down the honour of their Regiments.<sup>1</sup>

The recorded history of their exploits, especially prior to the mutiny of 1857, supports this effusive adoration. Basham located evidence of Mahar participation in the Second and "Third Anglo-Maratha War, the Second Anglo-Sikh War and the Second Afghan War."<sup>2</sup> The Mahars' exploits in these conflicts form an important part of their military lore.

The Mahar participation in the battle of Koregaon on 1 January 1818 is the most famous, and also the best documented, action involving Mahar soldiers. This battle gave the British the advantage in the Third Anglo-Maratha War. The successful defense of Koregaon by

a small force of 500 men ... under the command of Capt. F. F. Staunton [who] fought without rest or respite, food or water continuously for twelve hours against a large force of 20,000 Horse and 8,000 Infantry of [Maratha Leader] Peshwa Baji Rao II who was threatening the British garrisons at Kirkee and Pona.

Mahars dominated Staunton's unit. The Peshwa's troops inexplicably withdrew that evening, despite their overwhelming numbers, giving the British an important victory. The men of the

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<sup>1</sup>Longer, 13.

<sup>2</sup>Basham, 37.

2/1st Regiment Bombay Native Infantry, including many Mahars, who fought in this battle, were honored for their bravery. The official report to the British Resident at Poona recalls the "heroic valour and enduring fortitude" of the soldiers, the "disciplined intrepidity" and "devoted courage and admirable consistency" of their actions.<sup>1</sup> Further, the action is commemorated by a monument, with the names of twenty-two Mahars killed there, erected at the site of the battle and by a medal issued in 1851. Today, the monument still "serves as a focal point of Mahar heroism."<sup>2</sup> Similar anecdotes are recorded in the written histories of the Mahar Regiment and Bombay Army. All demonstrate that most Mahars soldiers were dedicated and courageous.

In addition to Army units on land, the Mahars formed a vital component of the Bombay Army's Marine Battalion. This unit's history is well documented and provides numerous examples of Mahar actions,<sup>3</sup> including several acts of bravery by Mahars in the battalion. In September 1810, during the Second Maratha War, several Mahars proved their loyalty when captured by the French Navy. The French tried to

induce their prisoners to enter their own service, a practice which enjoyed some success with Irish, Madrassi and Bengali troops. On this occasion, the Bombay sepoy[soldiers] were shown the captured Bengal and Madras Sepoys dressed in French uniforms and enjoying considerable privileges and luxuries, whereupon the Bombay Detachment started abusing them as being dead to all shame that they could forget the oath and desert their colours.

The upshot was that they were very roughly treated and some were severely wounded. To the seventeen survivors who reached Bombay a special medal was given and of this number twelve were Mahars.<sup>4</sup>

This is just one of many cases where Mahars distinguished themselves as a part of the Marine Battalion and is another part of the martial history that the Mahars used to legitimize their important

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<sup>1</sup>Longer, 14.

<sup>2</sup>Eleanor Zelliot, "Learning the Use of Political Means: The Mahars of Maharashtra," in *Caste in Indian Politics*, ed. Rajni Kothari (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970), 33.

<sup>3</sup>Basham devotes seven pages to narratives of the Marine Battalion.

<sup>4</sup>Thorat, 5.

role in the British Indian Army. But, in the wake of the 1857 mutiny and threats from Russia, the British reexamined their recruitment policies. The Mahars were a casualty of this new thinking.

### The Mahars Delistment

Despite the Mahars' long martial history, the British ceased recruiting them in 1893. The Bombay and the other Presidency Armies were reevaluated following the 1857 mutiny. The Peel Commission<sup>1</sup> first examined class composition of the armies in 1858. One report to the Commission "emphasized that 'we cannot practically ignore it (the caste system), so long as the natives socially maintain it.'"<sup>2</sup> This led to the discrimination against the Mahars and other low-caste groups as well as some Brahman castes which were considered unreliable.

General Lord Roberts, while not originating the concept of martial races, was instrumental in implementing a strategy of building "class regiments." Recruiting policies were rewritten, and the Bombay Army "was notified that the Mahars, together with a number of other classes of the Bombay Army, would no longer be recruited to the Army."<sup>3</sup> Lord Roberts recorded his rationale in his autobiography, *Forty-One Years in India*. He writes:

I have no doubt whatever of the fighting powers of our best Indian troops; I have a thorough belief in, and admiration for, Gurkhas, Sikhs, Dogras, Rajputs, Jats and, selected Mahomedans; I thoroughly appreciate their soldierly qualities; brigaded with British troops, I would be proud to lead them against any European enemy.<sup>4</sup>

Roberts thought that the first step to making the Indian Army was "to substitute men of the more warlike and hardy races for the Hindustani sepoy of Bengal, the Tamils and Telagus [*sic*] of

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<sup>1</sup>The Royal Commission was appointed to examine the Army following the mutiny. It was not "instructed to examine the role of caste, it soon became aware that caste and the structure of Indian society would be a central problem." Cohen, 36.

<sup>2</sup>Longer, 17.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>4</sup>Frederick S. Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India: From Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief* (New York: Longman, Green and Company, 1898), 534.

Madras, and the so-called Mahrattas [*sic*] of Bombay.” He was convinced that

In the British Army the superiority of one regiment over another is mainly a matter of training; the same courage and military instinct are inherent in English, Scotch, and Irish alike, but no comparison can be made between the martial value of a regiment recruited amongst the Gurkhas of Nepal or the warlike races of Northern India, and of one recruited from the effeminate peoples of the south.<sup>1</sup>

The Mahars believed that their martial history demonstrated their abilities as warriors, but the British had made their decision. Mahars could only enlist as bandsmen or clerks. This would not provide the same opportunities for promotion, and allow little change in their social status. As expected, the Mahars felt the British had betrayed them after over 100 years of loyal service to the British Raj.

Throughout India, there was controversy about which groups should remain in the Army. The Mahars had support from some British soldiers, including three commanders who recommended their continued service. The commander of the 2nd Grenadiers argued that

“the Parwari [Mahar] is of far better fighting material than the Deccani Mussulman,” and suggested that the Marine Battalion might be made a class regiment of Parwaries. The commanding officer of the 9th Bombay Infantry thought that a regiment of Parwaries, especially from the Deccan, would “give a very good account of itself.” The Commanding officer of the 19th Bombay Infantry stated that: “They are possessed of as much soldierly quality as many castes of whom much higher opinions are entertained.”<sup>2</sup>

However, their assistance was not enough to overcome the sentiments of Lord Roberts and other senior officers of the British Indian Army.

Longer provides an excellent commentary on the impact of the decision on the Mahars. He writes:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 532.

<sup>2</sup>Basham, 192.

The excellent system with its cosmopolitan composition, which had worked out over the years, was dismantled and destroyed. The Mahars, who had proudly carried the Colours of various Regiments of the Bombay Army, were crestfallen and heartbroken. For years they had provided abundant evidence of their courage, resolution, perseverance, constancy, and fidelity. When they bade farewell to arms there were eight Subedar-Majors, 62 Subedars, 34 Jemadars, and a host of Non-Commissioned Officers and Sepoys of the Mahar community who had served with distinction in the Bombay Army.<sup>1</sup>

The Mahars would continue to fight for the right to re-enlist in the Indian Army. They were loath to lose the benefits that the military provided. Furthermore, the education provided to the soldiers had created an educated cadre that would transfer their skills into political action. However, there were few Mahars left in the Army by the beginning of World War I.

### **Benefits Of Military Service**

Eleanor Zelliot notes that the “emergence of Mahar leaders and a new spirit of militancy in the 19th century was due in large measure to the influence of education acquired in the military.” The result was that

[d]uring the 19th and 20th centuries, a substantial number of Mahars removed themselves from their traditional village servant role. The establishment of British rule in Bombay Presidency provided Mahars with the opportunity for service in the army, employment in cotton mills, ammunition factories, railroads, dockyards, construction work, and as servants in British homes. The 1921 Census records that only 13.5 percent of the Mahar working force of nearly 300,000 were employed in their traditional

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<sup>1</sup>Longer, 18. The officer ranks were equivalent to Majors, Captains and Lieutenants of the British Army with the caveat that Indians could not command British soldiers.

occupation even though most Mahars maintained strong ties with their ancestral village.<sup>1</sup>

The Mahars' ability to work among the British exposed them to Western ways, and helped them to realize that their status as Untouchables did not keep them from working in successful and satisfying occupations. They aggressively used the advantages provided by their relationship with the British.

Military service provided important benefits to its soldiers. The benefits include "pay and pensions, access to education and/or specialized training, preferential access to employment, enhanced social status, and personal satisfaction."<sup>2</sup> For the Mahars, the access to education and increased social status was the most important benefits. The best example of their results was Dr. Ambedkar. Zelliott writes that Ambedkar's experiences were "[f]ree from the traditional village role, his early life was spent among educated ex-army men, imbued with the pride of soldiers and acquainted with a more sophisticated Hinduism than that found in the village."<sup>3</sup> In fact, Ambedkar extends much of the credit for the start of the movement to improve the Untouchables' place in society to contact with the British Army. He maintained:

Until the advent of the British, the Untouchables were content to remain Untouchables .... In the army of the East India Company there prevailed the system of compulsory education for Indian soldiers and their children, both male and female. The education received by the Untouchables in the army ... gave them a new vision and a new value. They became conscious that the low esteem in which they had been held was not an inescapable destiny but was a stigma imposed on their personality by the cunning contrivances of the priest. They felt the shame of it as they ever did before and were determined to get rid of it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Zelliott, "Gandhi and Ambedkar," 75.

<sup>2</sup>Basham, 114.

<sup>3</sup>Zelliott, "Dr. Ambedkar," 4.

<sup>4</sup>B. R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* 2d ed. (Bombay: Thacker and Co. Ltd., 1946), 189, quoted in Zelliott, "Political Means," 33-34.

It is indisputable that this access to education was helpful to Ambedkar, and therefore, to all of India's Untouchable communities.

Ambedkar's family had extensive links to the military. Additionally, his mother's "father and her six uncles were all Subedar Majors in the Army,"<sup>1</sup> the highest rank that Indians could hold. Ambedkar's father also was a Subhedar Major and

a full-fledged teacher trained at the Normal School then established by Government for turning out teachers to impart education that was then compulsory for the children as well as both male and female relations of the military servants. For fourteen years Ramji Sakpal served as Headmaster in the military school.<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly, the accomplishments of this family were exceptional. Nonetheless, the availability of education had a positive effect on all members of Mahars in the military, including women.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Basham concludes, "The loss of this education option with the loss of their right of enlistment was therefore a real blow, not merely the loss of a theoretical benefit which few actually received."<sup>4</sup> The quality of life for soldiers and their families suffered because of the loss of educational opportunities available through participation in the military.

Mahars joined the military with the intent of improving their social status. They were successful in this regard. As Basham explains:

Within the closed circle of the regiment, caste prejudice was, if not actually absent, at least officially discouraged. According to army regulations no distinction was made between soldiers on the basis of their caste or community .... Mahar

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<sup>1</sup>Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission* 2d ed. (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1964), 9.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>3</sup>Basham also writes that "The Bombay Army also made a small but important contribution to female education in the Bombay Presidency. At least three regimental girls' schools were mentioned in a report by the American Missionary Society in 1829." Basham, 150.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 153.

officers were able to command men of other castes apparently without difficulty.<sup>1</sup>

After growing up in this environment of equality it was a shock for the Untouchables to travel and live in situations away from the military cantonments.

Ambedkar's biographer, Dhananjay Keer, writes of young Ambedkar's shock the first time he travelled outside the military environment while he was in school. He and his brother were travelling to meet his father in a distant village. At the railway station, they hired a bullock cart to take them to the village, but

[h]ardly had the cart gone a few yards when the god-fearing touchable Hindu cartman, to his wrath, came to know that the well-dressed boys in his cart were the accursed Untouchables! In a fit of rage he threw them out on the road as one overturns the dust bins; for he felt they had polluted his wooden cart and destroyed the purity of his domestic animals!<sup>2</sup>

This was Ambedkar's first experience that forced him to confront his status as an Untouchable. Life in the military cantonment had sheltered him from the prejudice and discrimination for the early part of his life.

After retirement, there was a period of adjustment for Mahars who lived outside the cantonment. Basham concludes:

As nearly as can be deduced from rather limited information, it would seem that while actually in the army, or after retired or taking other employment, while in contact with British employers and officials, the Mahar soldier was not treated in any way differently from a soldier of higher caste. Once retired and living in his native village, a Mahar soldier, although he might have a relatively high status among the Mahar community and even among caste Hindus, would nevertheless once again have to accept his untouchable status.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>2</sup>Keer, 12.

<sup>3</sup>Basham, 167-68.



The important point is, even after retirement, Mahars with a military background still had access to the British government. The retired military officers were an effective lobby for Mahar rights.

Retired officers also created a group of political leaders with access to the Indian government. This was especially true near military cantonments in Poona, Satara and Ahmednagar.<sup>1</sup> Basham relates an incident where Mahar children were not being offered equal educational opportunities. Local caste Hindus and low-level British education officials refused the Mahar demands for Mahar boys to be integrated into classes with caste-Hindu boys. The dispute was resolved in favor of the Mahars. Basham argues that this demonstrates

they were seeking not just education for their sons, although this was obviously important, but also an improvement in their social status. The fact that many of these parents were retired officers, and therefore could legitimately make a claim on the attention to government officials, indicates the value of military service in this respect.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, the type of access available to the soldiers, active or retired, was unavailable to most Untouchables

All the benefits the Mahars received were the result of their ability to develop a link with the British. This helped them overcome the obstacles erected by the Hindu social system. Zelliott observes:

[I]t was their entry into the British army which proved significant for the subsequent history of the Mahar movement. It is important to gauge this significance. It consists not in any automatic elevation in the social hierarchy through military service, which indeed is ruled out in a hierarchical system governed by considerations of ascriptive status and ritual purity. It rather consists in the fact that military service at such an early date exposed them to British institutions much before the dissemination of western culture took place on a large scale.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 176.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 171.

Such an exposure socialized them sufficiently early to the new political order so that when new opportunities and alternatives became available, they were found prepared to use them more effectively than those groups which did not have this opportunity.<sup>1</sup> Following the delisting of 1893, the Mahars would need all the access and knowledge they had gained to overcome the impact of being refused service in the Army.

### The Fight For Re-enlistment

The Mahars did not give up their positions in the Army easily. The British decision of Mahar “[d]elisting in 1893 had been a severe blow to them as a community, not only threatening their economic status, but also (in their view) giving official sanction to caste Hindu discrimination against them.”<sup>2</sup> Overcoming both of these threats was the focus of two different efforts to petition the Government of India to reconsider its decision between 1894 and the start of the first World War.

The Mahars used two different strategies to influence the government; with both they tried to regain enlistment privileges in the army and an improved social status. Zelliott maintains that these efforts “illustrate the importance of army service to the Mahars. This was clearly the beginning of their efforts to induce government to intervene on their behalf, and their questioning of their traditional inferior status.”<sup>3</sup> In both instances, the movement was led by educated, former military officers.

The first organized attempt was in April 1895. Some of the details of the petition drive presented by Zelliott and Basham are speculative. Basham, who has completed the most recent study, states it was originally presented to the Viceroy, but was later returned for resubmission through the Bombay Government.<sup>4</sup> It appears that the petition was submitted by Gopal Baba Walangkar, a retired military officer, on behalf of the Anarya Doshpariharak Mandali, the non-Aryan committee for the rightings of wrongs, an Untouchable organization. Dr. Ambedkar, following the death of his father, found a copy of the petition in his papers. Ambedkar “believed that his father had obtained the assistance of Justice

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<sup>1</sup>Zelliott, "Political Means," 33.

<sup>2</sup>Basham, 179.

<sup>3</sup>Zelliott, "Political Means," 34.

<sup>4</sup>Basham, 208. Zelliott writes that "[t]he petition was never translated into English or presented to the British, but it serves as documentation for Mahar attitudes of the time. Zelliott, "Political Means," 34.

M. B. Ranade in preparing the petition.”<sup>1</sup> The petition compares Mahar actions to those of the higher castes and requests reinstatement in the military.

The petition’s pleas were simple. The Mahars believed that, in 1859, the Government had declared that the castes who fought loyally for the British were to be given due preference for military enlistment. Therefore, they demanded:

In view of that promise, Government should employ in civil, military and police department without any discrimination these faithful and honest persons. They should also be given education and proper opportunity for suitable posts in the department.<sup>2</sup>

The case they presented for reinstatement was more complicated than their demands. Much of their argument attempts to demonstrate that their identification as Untouchables was a mistake.

The 1895 petition argues that the Mahars as a group who are actually of the Kshatriya caste.<sup>3</sup> This represents the Mahars attempt to change their position in the caste structure by “Sanskritization.”<sup>4</sup> The petition states:

Our ancestors were Kshatriya. In about the year 1396 there was a great famine for about 12 years which was called Durhavedi famine. That time our ancestors survived by eating whatever they could find. Therefore, they were considered low case under the Peshwa rule.

It continues by attacking the legitimacy of the higher castes. It claims, “The so called high caste and pure people’s ancestors were as degraded as our people and were used [sic] to eat flesh of cow and beef. They wrote their own religious scriptures.” Finally, the petition provides a “creation myth” about the high castes. It maintains:

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<sup>1</sup>Basham, 208.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 321. This is a translation of the document written in Marathi. Therefore, some of the grammar is not correct.

<sup>3</sup>“Warrior” caste.

<sup>4</sup>Sanskritization denotes an attempt to demonstrate that the Untouchables situation is one of mistaken identify and that the social norms of interaction with other castes should change.

The high caste people of the South are progeny of Australian Semitic Anaryas and African Negroes whereas the high caste people from North are mixture of several castes .... Several castes of foreign origin became high caste Hindus by giving up beef-eating.

The Chitpavan Brahmins of Konkan came from the Jewish race. They fled from Africa for fear of their lives by the invaders and their ship was wrecked nearby Malabar coast. Their children and women drown and died in the sea. Those men who survived, married the native low caste women.... [W]hen they became rulers, they called themselves Brahmins.<sup>1</sup>

The document's tenor shows the importance of military service to the Mahars and the use of Sanskritization tactics to show they were at least equal to the alleged high castes.

This campaign was unsuccessful. The Mahars were unaware of the debate "over recruitment policy or the acceptance of Lord Roberts views on martial races" which was the prime component in the British decision. However, Basham shows "the government of India took the petition seriously enough to request information about the Koregaon monument from the government of Bombay (presumably to verify the petitioners' claims). Eighteen months after the initial submission of the petition, the Indian government replied that it was "unable to rescind the orders which have been issued regarding the castes to be admitted to the Bombay Army."<sup>2</sup> Shortly after the turn of the century, a second attempt was organized.

The second major petition was submitted to the government three times between 1904 and 1910. The document's "signatories included forty-two military pensioners" including Dr. Ambedkar's father. Basham's research found that "[s]everal of the signatories had also written letters to newspapers or had signed at least one other petition, suggesting a long-term commitment and a willingness to agitate for change."<sup>3</sup> This petition had a broader base of support than the one in 1895.

This campaign was more sophisticated than the first. The spokesman, Shivram Janba Kamble, spoke English (Walangkar

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<sup>1</sup>Basham, 315-18.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 210-11.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 211.

could not). More importantly, the petition's "appeal for consideration was not on the basis of the Mahars' having been demoted from Kshatriyahood, but on the grounds of former service, English justice and human worth."<sup>1</sup> This pragmatic approach attracted greater support than the earlier petition, and used arguments that were later refined by Dr. Ambedkar. In fact, Ambedkar took over leadership of the Mahars from Kamble.

The 1910 petition was more polite and less argumentative than the 1895 petition. The document states, "We do not aspire to high political privileges and positions, since we are not educationally qualified for them, but humbly seek employment in the lowest grades of the Public Service, in the ranks of Police Sepoys and of soldiers in the Indian Army." It continued:

We are making no new demands; we do not claim employment in services in which we have not been engaged before. Indeed, some few of our people do still hold positions in the Police Force, and have acquitted themselves most honourably. So also have our people been employed in the Indian Army from the very commencement of the British Raj in our country, and they have risen to the highest positions by their valour and good conduct.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the reasoned arguments, this petition demands, like the first, were denied. The manpower demands of World War I had a greater effect, and beginning in 1914 Mahars, again, were recruited into the Army and given their own Regiment, the 111 Mahars. The Regiment's three battalions "were formed the toward the end of the war, but they did not see action and their martial qualities were untested."<sup>3</sup> Shortly after the war, the Regiment was disbanded by the British "on the excuse of the economy."<sup>4</sup>

More important, however, is that the petition drives provided an organization for Dr. Ambedkar to use after the war to improve the social status of Untouchables. Basham correctly concludes:

Military service had been a significant factor for the Mahars in two respects. Education and skills

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<sup>1</sup>Zelliot, "Dr. Ambedkar," 70.

<sup>2</sup>Basham, 322.

<sup>3</sup>Byron Farwell, *Armies of the Raj: From the Mutiny to Independence, 1858-1947* (New York: Norton, 1989), 190.

<sup>4</sup>Keer, 336.

acquired through military service created a class of community leaders, and the wish to retain the social and economic benefits derived from military service was a powerful incentive to organize behind these leaders and work for a common goal. A high level of organization and political activity in the Mahar community by the 1940s was therefore at least in part a consequence of their military past.<sup>1</sup>

The long association with the military gave Mahars an issue to organize around and the movement then worked to achieve more substantial achievements than just military service.

### Conclusion

The 120 years of service in the British military gave the Mahars excellent skills. Basham concludes:

Mahar soldiers were able to establish a link with the most powerful institution in India—the British Raj—and in some instances to use that link to bypass local authorities. Military service was also a way to sever the ties of village customary law which maintained the inferior status of the Mahars. Other forms of employment could take the Mahar out of the village, but none offered long-term financial security in the form of pensions.<sup>2</sup>

This case study shows how military service has assisted the Mahars to fight the stigma of untouchability. Their positive experiences fighting with Shivaji encouraged them to seek similar opportunities from the British. It is clear, that in their service they received their most tangible benefits. Before delistment, Mahars in the Bombay Army received a steady wage, housing, and education. With this, many were able to retire with a pension, which, often, eliminated the need to return to the traditional Mahar occupations following their military service. These obvious benefits were eliminated following the 1893 decision.

However, military service still influenced Mahar life following delistment. As Basham argues:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 223–24.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 175.

If the army system of education had produced no effects for the Mahars other than to provide an appropriate environment for Ambedkar's early life (since his father took a very strong interest in encouraging his sons' education) this in itself would be a significant impact on the Mahar community.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the petition drives provided political organizations to press for overcoming the stigma of Untouchability. There were other benefits that were accrued, even if their requests for reinstatement were refused until the beginning of the war. Kamble's work in Poona that formed the base for Ambedkar's later political movements is the best example of this. Therefore, even after military service was taken away from the Mahars, the traditions and accrued benefits continued to be an advantage to this Untouchable community.

### Epilogue

A Mahar Regiment was reformed in 1945 and has existed ever since. The ceremonial Colonel of the Regiment is K. V. Krishna Rao, former Chief-of-Staff of the Indian Army and current Governor of Jammu-Kashmir. The preface of the Regimental History states:

Militarily, the Mahars faced the vicissitudes of fortune, but once the Mahar Regiment was reborn in 1945, it came into its own after India became free .... A three-battalion [one class] Regiment blossomed into a eighteen-battalion Regiment with men from all classes and communities of the country fused together to form a rich and radiant amalgam.<sup>2</sup>

The Regiment has taken part in all of India's major military operations since 1947. Just as the Mahars have survived and prospered, so has the Mahars' military legacy.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 149.

<sup>2</sup>Longer, xi.

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# Ambivalence in a STAR-ry Eyed Land: Doordarshan and the Satellite TV Challenge<sup>1</sup>

Geetika Pathania

*As the forces of liberalization sweep through the world, the opening of economies, and hence markets, provides an increasingly receptive context within which the trade of cultural products is carried out. The success of Hong-Kong-based Satellite Television Asian Region (STAR TV), which, in 1991, started direct broadcasting via satellite to Asia, has underlined the attractiveness of these Asian markets to the corporations of the media-saturated West. The mainly American programming which arrived without any prior consent of national governments has also demonstrated the ambivalence with which governments are viewing the manifestations of the foreign capital that they eagerly seek. This research paper attempts to examine how the liberalization of national economic policies favorable to foreign investment in India has softened the reception of foreign-backed media industry products, with a consequent shift in Indian cultural policy.*

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Advertising-supported STAR TV is now owned by a western media mogul Rupert Murdoch (one of the “lords of the global village”).<sup>2</sup> The regulatory response to STAR TV in India is notable since it occurs at a time when India, responding to both internal

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<sup>1</sup>This paper is dedicated to Dr. Nikhil Sinha, who asked all the right questions so long ago. Many thanks to Dr. Richard Lariviere for his support and thanks also to my dearest husband.

<sup>2</sup>B. H. Bagdikian, “The Lords of the Global Village,” *The Nation* 12 (June 1989): 805–820.

*Sagar: South Asia Graduate Research Journal* 1, No. 1 (May 1994): 60–78  
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domestic and external international pressure, has begun to re-evaluate its inward-looking economic policies and is opening up to the world. As transnational interests respond to possible access to one of the last closed market of the world, the government is finding itself at odds with the media agendas that it no longer controls.

In this paper, I will discuss the context within which Doordarshan and STAR TV operate and their strategies for greatest market share and revenue. Transnational links of the advertising industry in India will be discussed, and an analysis of the political economy of liberalization in India will be attempted. I will conclude by arguing that the timing of STAR TV's arrival in India, when the credibility of internal reforms was vital, was key to its official reception in India.

### Doordarshan

At the time of independence in 1947, the concern with developmental issues made radio, and later television a natural choice for the centralizing tendency of the state.<sup>1</sup> When television broadcasting began in 1959, it was a modest, if controversial beginning. A single studio in Delhi transmitted an hour of programming twice a week. For several years, farm programs for rural audiences, folk dances and music, and women-oriented programs were the mainstay of Doordarshan programming.<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India for fifteen years, was a strong supporter of television, and her government made significant efforts to improve television infrastructural development. The Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) in 1976 provided an impetus for the use of television for development purposes, and state-controlled Doordarshan,<sup>3</sup> (the Indian national television organization) has been under the purview of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting since 1976.

Doordarshan began a slow shift away from its original mandate of social education in 1982, the year India hosted the Asian Games, yet the rhetoric remained. Mr. Sathe, minister of information and broadcasting, introduced color television ostensibly

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<sup>1</sup>P.C. Chatterjee, *Broadcasting in India* (New Delhi: Sage, 1987), 200. Newspapers and film escaped this centralizing tendency, probably because they had already evolved into mature industries at the time of independence.

<sup>2</sup>A. Vasudeva and L. K. Malhatra, "India: T.V. at the Crossroads: Indian Television Programs Fiction," *UNESCO Carrier* (October 1992): 37.

<sup>3</sup>Literally, "distance audience."

to improve the quality of educational programs. Pendakur however, suggests that “adding prestige to the ruling party” was a more plausible rationale for this action.<sup>1</sup>

At about the same time, soap opera, *Hum Log* (“People like Us”), inspired by Mexican telenovellas, began its 159 episode marathon. The tremendous audience response generated by the serial inevitably caught the attention of advertisers. Doordarshan, realizing that allowing limited commercialization of broadcasting could painlessly provide capital needed for expansion, encouraged sponsorship of the immensely popular subsequent serials such as *Buniyaad*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

Despite these developments, however, Doordarshan has resisted all-out commercialization. Documentary serials on issues such as the environment and drugs reflect Doordarshan’s continued commitment to “public service.”<sup>2</sup> The advertising code, called the “General Rules of Conduct for Television and Radio Advertising” is strict (this is discussed later). Doordarshan’s programs on national integration, panel discussions and folk music have viewership rates of less than 2 percent compared to prime time entertainment programs which have 50 percent ratings, yet these continue to be aired.<sup>3</sup>

Yet these may come to represent little more than vestigial remains of the original public service orientation, as Doordarshan becomes especially vulnerable to the pressures of audience ratings and advertising revenues. Lacking a license fee, and with the government urging Doordarshan to “raise internal revenues to meet its Plan expenditure,”<sup>4</sup> it is increasingly embracing the market, leaving itself wide open to intensified criticism.

Pendakur argues, for instance, that Indian television policy “simultaneously serves its own propaganda needs as well as the demands of indigenous and transnational capitalists, along with the entertainment prerogatives of the middle/upper middle classes.” Pendakur’s criticism that there is “no evidence...that the state television policy is either designed for, or even accidentally related to, social improvements for the vast majority of Indian people” is especially sharp since it implicates Doordarshan as no better than an

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<sup>1</sup>M. Pendakur, “A Political Economy of Television: State, Class and Corporate Influence in India.” in *Electronic Dependency: Third World Communications and Information in an Age of Transnationalism*, ed. G. Sussman and J. Lent (Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1990), 242.

<sup>2</sup>Vasudeva and Malhatra, 37.

<sup>3</sup>C. Jayaram, *Market Reports*, National Trade Data Base, Lexis-Nexis, 17 August 1993.

<sup>4</sup>“Doordarshan: Opening Up at Last,” *India Today*. 15 April 1994, 53.

instrument of corporate and class interests<sup>1</sup>. In a similar vein, Mankekar posits that Doordarshan discourses are directed at co-opting the upwardly mobile classes, who in turn are 'captured' simultaneously as a market for consumer goods advertised by sponsors of programming and as an audience for nationalistic serials, into the project of constructing a national culture.<sup>2</sup>

In this context, it may be worth reflecting on how the critique of dominant national cultures may be destabilizing the capacity of nation-states to act in benign and positive ways in the defense of minorities against globalizing forces. As international communication scholar Sinclair points out, "cultural theorists have yet to reflect the degree to which ... postmodernism is lending theoretical legitimation to global capitalism in its drive for the deregulation and privatization of the cultural industries."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Smith has talked about "the freedom of restraints of both the marketplace and government; both lead to the distortion of information."<sup>4</sup> The role of the state as an intermediary between global media and national audiences often becomes the focus of policy interest, and if theoretical frameworks seem to de-legitimize the state, the efficacy of unregulated market forces to achieve desirable ends must be questioned.

STAR TV represents one such market force, and it is challenging Doordarshan's political as well as economic agendas. For one, it is subverting government attempts at nation-building which, according to Joshi,<sup>5</sup> is a primary objective of Indian television. Foreign (or alternative) news television helps citizens look behind Meyrowitz's "on-stage" political behavior of inaugurations and speeches to the hitherto hidden "backstage" behavior of failing policies and their frequently violent outcomes, thus weakening the government's authority. STAR TV is also siphoning off Doordarshan's advertising revenues, which were

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<sup>1</sup>M. Pendakur, 250.

<sup>2</sup>P. Mankekar, "National Texts and Gendered Lives: An Ethnography of Television Viewers in a North Indian City," *American Ethnologist* 20 (August 1993) no. 3: 543.

<sup>3</sup>J. Sinclair, *Culture and Trade: Some theoretical and Practical Considerations on "Cultural Industries,"* Lecture presented at the Media, Culture and Free Trade Conference, University of Texas, Austin, 3-5 March 1994.

<sup>4</sup>A. Smith, *The Geopolitics of Information: How Western Culture Dominates the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 15.

<sup>5</sup>P. C. Joshi, *Culture, Communication and Social Change* (New York: Vikas, 1989).

estimated at \$115 m in 1992.<sup>1</sup> Some analysts estimate that about 20 percent of mass brands and 50 percent of niche brands have moved their advertising from Doordarshan to STAR TV.<sup>2</sup> In 1993, STAR TV and Zee TV together had 20 percent of the total advertising pie of roughly \$184 m.<sup>3</sup>

The I & B ministry response to STAR TV can be roughly classified under the following areas: (i) incipient cable regulation, (ii) privatization of program content, (iii) changes in content and (iv) limiting access to uplink and foreign exchange.

(i) Incipient cable regulation. The Cable TV Networks (Regulation) Bill 1993 was introduced in Parliament, and would have required erstwhile bootleg cable operators to target the most objectionable of current STAR TV offerings, such as liquor ads, explicit MTV songs, nudity and communal programs.<sup>4</sup> The bill has been referred to a panel of experts for deliberations before being re-introduced in Parliament. The rapidly proliferating cable operators, who are typically neighborhood entrepreneurs on a shoe-string budget who wire 8–10 adjoining buildings and provide a menu of film and satellite television programs to urban dwellers, are beginning to face fierce competition in the market. The possible creation of 15–20 large-scale cable franchises with standardized quality and technical capabilities may serve to get around the enforcement nightmare that regulating the neighborhood “cablewallahs” pose.<sup>5</sup>

(ii) Privatization of program content. The bureaucrats and politicians who run Doordarshan have traditionally resisted attempts to let in independent media professionals who, borrowing strength from India’s strong film industry and tradition of journalistic excellence, could make an important contribution.<sup>6</sup> The popularity of Zee television, with its Hindi language broadcasting, and reliance

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<sup>1</sup>S. Nadkarni, “Satellite Ends Doordarshan Party,” *Asia-Pacific Broadcasting*, 30 November 1992.

<sup>2</sup>Jayaram.

<sup>3</sup>“Doordarshan,” 53.

<sup>4</sup>M. Rahman and A. Agarwal, “Cable Bill: Ominous Signals,” *India Today*, 15 September 1993, 48.

<sup>5</sup>N. Ingelbrecht, “In India, a Market Slowly Develops,” *Asia-Pacific Broadcasting*, 30 November 1992. Cited in J. Foote, *Electronic Media Change in the Least Developed Countries: the Cases of Bangladesh and Nepal*, Paper presented at Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Kansas City, 11–14 August 1993.

<sup>6</sup>Lloyd R. and S. H. Rudolph, “Dishing it Out: India’s Battle of the Airwaves,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 February 1992.

on Indian themes and characters seems to suggest the preference for domestic programming over foreign programming.

The five new satellite channels that have been set up by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry: the Entertainment Channel, the Music Channel, the Business and Current Affairs Channel, the Enrichment Channel and the Sports Channel, are on air despite rocky beginnings, and have offerings very similar to those on STAR TV. Though Doordarshan now allows private Indian companies to solicit for programming slots on a first-come-first-served basis, the I & B ministry still insists on running the channels itself. However, there is optimism that Doordarshan is "opening up at last," reflecting a far greater accessibility and willingness to be criticized in recent months.<sup>1</sup>

(iii) Changing content. Doordarshan's programming content has begun to be affected by the competition it faces. The Indian "General Rules of Conduct for Television and Radio Advertising" urge advertisers, among other proscriptions, not to "offend against morality, decency and religious susceptibilities of the people," and ban "cigarettes, alcohol, tobacco products and other intoxicants," and other items of conspicuous consumption such as "jewelry or precious stones." Doordarshan has already had to make changes in the code, to allow the exhibition of foreign models and locales, and permit foreign banks and airlines, as well as foreign firms with investments in India to advertise.<sup>2</sup> Foreign companies with no business investment in the country to advertise may soon be allowed to advertise on Doordarshan in a revision of its earlier position.<sup>3</sup> Doordarshan has also started broadcasting programs that will help regain lost viewership: imported serials like "Dallas" and "Dynasty", and even the risqué comedy series "Carry on Behind."<sup>4</sup>

What are the implications of these changes? If Doordarshan has been cross-subsidizing nationalistic programs with advertising revenue derived from entertainment, then, the loss of this advertising revenue to STAR TV will allow fewer such programs to survive. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), another bastion of public service broadcasting, found that the wave of deregulation in Britain, caused the public broadcasting system to suffer "severe competitive disadvantages compared with its private

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<sup>1</sup>"Doordarshan," 53.

<sup>2</sup>"Upendra for Limited Media Autonomy," *Hindustan Times*, 22 February 1994.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>"Satellite TV Shows Asia a World Beyond Reach of State Censors," *The Washington Post*, 10 April 1993, A12.



sector rivals." BBC had less money to spend on its programs, paid its skilled technical staff less well, had lost light entertainment stars to Independent Television (ITV), and was under strong pressure to shift towards cheaper forms of light entertainment programs and to undertake major series only in collaboration with outside partners.<sup>1</sup> STAR TV has not been constrained by the advertising code that Doordarshan adheres to, and accepts liquor and cigarette advertising

(iv) Limiting access to uplink and foreign exchange. That Doordarshan is not relinquishing its erstwhile monopoly happily is obvious in its recent show of force, when it denied satellite uplink facilities for the transmission of the immensely popular Hero cup cricket matches.<sup>2</sup> Doordarshan has lately adopted a strategy of aggressively procuring the exclusive rights for international programs such as Wimbledon to maximize its advertising revenue. The muscle-flexing was brought on by Doordarshan's irritation at being outbid by STAR TV for domestic telecast rights.<sup>3</sup> This incident shows that the loss of advertising revenues is beginning to pinch. In fact, to arrest the fall in earnings from advertisers who left Doordarshan for STAR TV, the government clamped restrictions, in 1993 on the release of foreign exchange to Indian companies to pay for spots on STAR,<sup>4</sup> but lifted this ban subsequently.

So why has the I & B ministry not banned STAR TV outright? Even if it could overcome the enforcement difficulties brought on by technological advancements of small satellite size, and not alienate the middle class urbanites who are watching STAR TV, this mild reaction is surprising. Doordarshan enjoys immense staying power, and its unique position of being a competitor as well as a regulator make it a formidable rival. It certainly appears that the commitment to liberalization is one of the important reasons that the government is tolerating the presence of what must surely be an irritant.

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<sup>1</sup>J. Curran, "The Impact of Advertising on the British Mass Media," in *Media, Culture and Society: A Critical Reader*, ed. R. Collins, J. Curran, N. Garnham, P. Scannell, P. Schlisinger and C. Sparks (London: Sage, 1986).

<sup>2</sup>"Talking Sport: Pulling the plug may short-circuit India's World Cup plans," *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 November 1993, 35.

<sup>3</sup>Trans-World International, who won international telecast rights from the Cricket Association of Bengal, chose to give domestic telecast rights in India to STAR TV. The Supreme Court, citing a 1885 Telegraph Act, upheld Doordarshan's sole domestic rights. Doordarshan thus retains sole uplink rights in India.

<sup>4</sup>"India-Economy: State T.V. Opens to Foreign Advertisers," *Inter Press Service*, 22 February 1994.



## STAR TV

Television's main impulse, according to Smythe,<sup>1</sup> is not to deliver messages to the audience, but to effectively deliver the audience to the advertiser. STAR TV, which, in its promotional brochures, stresses its ability to reach out to narrowly defined demographic segments of affluent urban consumers, has managed to wrest away significant amounts of advertising revenue from Doordarshan. This is despite Doordarshan's access to 100 million adult viewers as opposed to STAR TV's 10 million in 1993.<sup>2</sup>

Yet far more important sources of competitive advantage emerge from STAR TV's business savvy, under first Li Ka-shing of Hutchison Whampoa and now "the most complete media mogul,"<sup>3</sup> Rupert Murdoch. STAR TV is more in touch with the needs of transnational businesses, and advertisers are king. Its service-oriented approach and willingness to discuss rate packages is in stark contrast to Doordarshan, which has become accustomed to setting the terms.<sup>4</sup> Advertising on STAR TV is almost five times cheaper than Doordarshan and the delivery of audiences to advertisers is further facilitated by advertisements every 10–15 minutes to reduce clutter.<sup>5</sup>

In buying 64 percent share of STAR TV in August 1993, Murdoch has teamed up with Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-shing, who owns the other 36 percent, and will provide him exclusive access to Asia-sat1, the satellite that STAR TV broadcasts on. Rupert Murdoch's European experience in satellite systems will no doubt provide a source of competitive advantage. This move may be seen as a hardware-software merger, with Li Ka-shing providing the satellite broadcasting hardware, and Murdoch bringing to the table the extensive software, or programming that he has access to, due to his ownership of Fox Broadcasting Company and BSKyB.

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<sup>1</sup>D. W. Smythe, *Dependency Road: Communication, Capitalism, Consciousness and Canada* (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corp., 1981).

<sup>2</sup>Jayaram.

<sup>3</sup>J. Tunstall and M. Palmer, *Media Moguls* (London: Routledge, 1991), 124.

<sup>4</sup>Doordarshan, as a monopoly television service, has been in a position to treat advertisers as it pleases. The I & B minister was quoted as saying in *India Today*, that he was like a shop-keeper, and advertisers would have to negotiate on his terms. In a larger sense, this statement reflects the how monopoly suppliers in India often leave consumers with little choice. "Interview with I & B Minister," *India Today*, 31 July 1993, 64.

<sup>5</sup>Jayaram.

Other synergies that Murdoch can profitably exploit from his European experiences, include (i) the know-how to set up subscription based services, as well as (ii) the pitfalls of a pan-continental television system.

(i) Subscription services were necessary because even though its reliance on advertising has served STAR TV well so far (the number of advertisers went up from 60 to 300 in a year),<sup>1</sup> there is an ultimate limitation on such a financing scheme. Subscriptions let STAR TV out of the double-bind of assuaging advertiser disbelief about the audience figures, and at the same time quelling programmer anxiety in the face of possible pirating, especially in an environment where intellectual property rights are not strictly enforced.

(ii) Early 1989 saw the cessation of Sky's transcontinental ambitions, and Rupert Murdoch announced shortly after acquiring STAR TV that it was going to be divided into STAR India, STAR China and possibly another division for the Indonesia region. This action seems to indicate that Murdoch is applying the lessons he learnt on European skies to Asian ones. Tunstall and Palmer, discussing Murdoch's European experience envision "the likely evolution of satellite television as a mainly national service aimed at a single language market." Satellite channels aimed at cable systems across western Europe, such as BSkyB and Super-channel, according to them, were money-losing ventures since they "attracted very modest audience shares and little advertising" due to the widely scattered audience. At the end of the 1980's there was a trend towards own-language satellite offerings—notably German-language channels aimed at German-speaking cable subscribers.<sup>2</sup>

Murdoch's acquisition of 49.9 percent share of the Hindi channel Zee television, in an attempt to get involved with local language programming, seems to reflect this earlier experience. In February 1994, Murdoch announced that he is going to set up a communications company in India, independent of STAR TV. In addition to producing Hindi programming,<sup>3</sup> Murdoch will also supplement his Hindi language library with Indian films, of which he already owns 2,000.<sup>4</sup> In Europe, Murdoch's satellite channels

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<sup>1</sup>S. T. Davies, "\$50 m deal biggest yet for TV movies," *South China Morning Post*, 4 April 1992, 2.

<sup>2</sup>J. Tunstall and M. Palmer, 124.

<sup>3</sup>"Murdoch Hopes to Expand into India via TV Production," *AFX News*, 15 February 1994.

<sup>4</sup>"There are more Patels Out There than Smiths," *Forbes*, 14 March 1994.

met with political resistance to the overwhelmingly American and British content, and producing Hindi programming may be a politically savvy way for Murdoch to allay fears of Western images inundating Indian skies. What remains unclear is whether, and to what extent this Hindi programming will be a reproduction of Hollywood formats with an Indian twist.

More broadly, STAR TV, first under Li Ka-Shing of Hutchison Whampoa, and now under Rupert Murdoch of News Corporation, has made a concerted efforts to be culturally inoffensive to the host countries in its foot-print. Murdoch's announcement that the new revamped STAR TV will have an open-university channel and an arts channel is surely aimed at gaining more acceptance, as a purveyor of 'high' Western art rather than kitsch. Gus Fischer of News Corporation stated that STAR TV is "acutely aware of the political sensitivities" across its vast 36 country footprint, and would be working closely with local governments to avoid problems.<sup>1</sup> Consistent with its self-imposed personality of cultural sensitivity, STAR TV routinely edits out unsuitable material, as in the case where profanity and even Australian vernacular was edited out from the Australian miniseries "Phoenix" before being rebroadcast in Asia.<sup>2</sup> Still, cultural inoffensiveness is a relative term, and in some eyes, STAR TV can not try hard enough—its very presence in Asian air-waves is an irritant. China, Singapore, Bangladesh and Malaysia have virtually cracked down on STAR TV, forbidding its own citizens from owning ground receiving equipment.<sup>3</sup> Indian I & B Minister Singh Deo, in 1993, denounced the "cultural invasion by foreign tv networks" and even blamed foreign saboteurs for the rocky start of the five Doordarshan satellites. Yet despite this earlier indictment, Murdoch was *persona grata* on his visit to India in February 1994, and got an audience with the Prime Minister, the I & B minister, as well as the Commerce minister. In what appears to be an attempt at fostering smoother relations, STAR TV telecast India's republic day parade on 26 January 1994, paying \$15,000 for the broadcast to Doordarshan, which retains sole uplink rights for India.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. Dawtrey, "Euro-high Rollers set to Join Murdoch's new Global Effort," *Daily Variety*, 7 September 1993, 1.

<sup>2</sup>K. Murphy, "Asians Resist a Western Media Invasion: As Murdoch Moves In, Concern Over Values and Revenues," *International Herald Tribune*, 12 August 1993.

<sup>3</sup>"Chinese Law on Satellite Dishes Blocks Access to Foreign Stations," *The Guardian*, 9 October 1993, 14.

<sup>4</sup>"Murdoch in New Delhi to woo TV Viewers," *Inter Press Service*, 10 February 1994.

It is evident that Murdoch is far ahead in the learning curve, and is using this experience to consolidate his position. Murdoch has been talking of standardizing common digital satellite systems for Europe, Asia and Americas,<sup>1</sup> which might well become the technical standards, and serve as an entry barrier for later competitors. A huge capital investment, as well as complicated and labor-intensive support operations, is a prerequisite for selling decoders to unscramble signals, as STAR TV proposes to do. Smaller firms may not be able to bear this cost. Besides the advantages of size, STAR TV will no doubt gain a competitive edge due to the advanced technology it commands, including encryption technology<sup>2</sup> and the latest digital compression technology<sup>3</sup> which will allow more than one channel per transponder. Though Indian satellite INSAT 2B, does have digital compression technology, the signal is not strong enough to be redistributed on an 8-foot dish.<sup>4</sup> STAR TV currently has plans for a cheaper analog pay channel in India as a reflection of what the market will bear, but if there is consolidation of the cable industry in the future, digitized technology will surely be an important competitive factor.

### Transnational Advertising

In the Indian context, however, by far the greatest advantage to STAR TV is the patronage of transnational firms that have similar marketing strategies in more than one country. Firms such as Hindustan Lever, Nestle (Food Specialties Limited), Procter and Gamble, Colgate Palmolive, Pepsi, Sanyo, Reckitt & Coleman account for 35 percent of television revenues.<sup>5</sup> The on-air advertisers list for STAR TV on July, 1992 included transnational corporations like Castrol, Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, Jaguar, Kodak, Levi-Strauss, Lexus, Mobil, Motorola, Nike, Reebok, Sony and

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<sup>1</sup>Dawtre, 1.

<sup>2</sup>Also known as "scrambling." S. Davies, "Guarded Welcome for New HK Television Plan" *Financial Times*, 3 July 1992, 26.

<sup>3</sup>"Digitization is essentially a software-based process using micro-electronic techniques to sample a given analog (wave) signal and convert it into binary bits for transmission. This process reduces the amount of bandwidth needed to transmit the signal ... instead of having to lease the entire transponder, thanks to digital compression, a user can rent a segment of transponder space" M. Albrecht, in *Communication Technology Update: 1993-1994*, edited by A. Grant and K. Wilkinson. Austin, TX: Technology Futures, Inc.

<sup>4</sup>"Upgrade or Perish," *India Today*, 30 November 1993, 74.

<sup>5</sup>Jayaram.

Unisys. Not all of these products are currently available in India, but the advertisements serve to create a pent-up demand and ensure instantaneous brand recognition nevertheless.

Almost all of these transnational corporations entrust their accounts to Indian advertising companies which have either joint-ventures or affiliations with other transnational advertising firms. The following table makes this clear:

Foreign (Home) Agency	Indian (Domestic) Agency
J. Walter Thompson	Hindustan Thompson Assoc. Ltd.
Lintas Worldwide	Lintas India Ltd.
DDB Needham	Mudra Communications
Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide	Ogilvy & Mather Limited
Euro RSCG	Ulka Advertising Private Ltd.
D'Arcy Macius Benton & Bowles	Clarion Advertising
BBDO Worldwide Inc.	R.K. Swamy/BBDO Advtg. Pvt. Ltd.
Dentsu	Rediffusion Advtg. Pvt. Ltd.
Young & Rubicom	Affiliation
Grey Advertising	Trikaya Grey Advertising
Saatchi & Saatchi	Everest Advtg. Pvt. Ltd.
Leo Burnett	Chaitra Leo Burnett Pvt. Ltd.
McCann Erickson	Tara Sinha McCann Erickson
Bozell, Inc.	Arms Bozell

Source: Market Reports, NTDB, 17 August 1993

Not to be left out of the transnational party, almost all programmers are subsidiaries of Western transnational parent companies: Star Plus Entertainment, Prime Sports, BBC World Service Television and MTV Asia.

Janus argues forcefully that transnational corporations rely heavily on transnational advertising firstly, to “overcome customer resistance to the transnational’s products” and secondly to “legitimize the presence of transnational corporations—to justify their existence.”<sup>1</sup> In this context, Schiller notes that, “the role of the global arena of cultural domination has not diminished in the 1990s. Reinforced by new delivery systems—communication satellites and cable networks—the image flow is heavier than ever.”<sup>2</sup> He claims that “the media, public relations, advertising, polling, cultural sponsorship, and consultants these industrial giants use and support hardly are distinguishable from the same services at the disposal of

<sup>1</sup>N. Janus, “Transnational Advertising: the Latin American Case,” in *World Communications: A Handbook*, ed. G. Gerbner and M. Siefert (New York: Longman, 1984), 137–143.

<sup>2</sup>H. I. Schiller, “Not Yet the Post-Imperialistic Era”, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8 (1991): 13–28.

American-owned corporations.” Economic liberalization in India, then, makes it an especially attractive market for the newly arrived transnational clients such as Pepsi and Coca Cola, who rely on STAR TV to serve their need for support services such as television advertising to target the upwardly mobile English-speaking population of multi-lingual, multi-ethnic India, and who are most likely to benefit from the economic liberalization in India.

### Economic Liberalization

India’s development strategy, when it became independent from British colonial rule in 1947, was based on the Nehru/Mahalanobis strategy, and favored import substitution, a large public sector that took on heavy industrialization as well as other “commanding heights” of the economy, and a highly regulated private sector. The sheer unwieldiness of India the nation, with its ethnic and linguistic complexity, contributed to a centralizing force in the first constitution. On the international front, in a world increasingly riven with cold war tensions, India decided on a policy of non-alignment.

Almost five decades later, according to Kohli,<sup>1</sup> there is a sense of “failure of socialism” and with the erstwhile Soviet Union<sup>2</sup> and China embracing the market, there seem to be few exemplary examples left in the world that could help sustain anti-market arguments. Competing explanations for industrial stagnation in India center around three alternative hypotheses: the inefficiencies of the state as a productive enterprise; low aggregate demand; and “bottlenecks” in infrastructure caused by declining public investment.<sup>3</sup> The models of state-induced, market-like competitiveness that spur economic growth, as seen in the East Asian NIC’s and also in Latin America, appears to appeal to government advisors.<sup>4</sup> Since stripping away public functions does not necessarily lead to a more efficient and productive private sector,

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<sup>1</sup>A. Kohli, “Politics of Economic Liberalization in India,” *World Development* 17, no. 3, (1989): 305–328.

<sup>2</sup>In fact, the dismantling of the ruble/rupee trade arrangement as the erstwhile Soviet Union itself scrambles for Western assistance puts greater pressure on India to build up its foreign reserves and increase its competitiveness so as to re-enter the global market.

<sup>3</sup>I. J. Ahluwalia, *Industrial Growth in India: Stagnation Since the Sixties*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>4</sup>Kohli, 305–328.



several scholars are more concerned about the quality of intervention rather than its elimination.

Under pressure from both an adverse balance of payment situation and institutional foreign lenders, India intensified the process of liberalization in almost all sectors of the economy in July 1991. The reforms undertaken under finance minister Manmohan Singh, were primarily aimed at reducing fiscal as well as external deficits and comprised expenditure cuts, devaluation, and measures to encourage foreign capital inflows. India's "cooperation" on this front was rewarded by a \$2.2 billion standby IMF loan to India to replenish its foreign exchange reserves which had dwindled to dangerously low levels. Some important highlights of the reforms are (i) devaluation of the rupee, (ii) abolition of import licensing, (iii) full convertibility of the rupee on the trade account, (iv) reduction in tariff and excise duty, (v) abolition of industrial licensing except for investment in 18 industries, (vi) granting majority ownership to foreign investors, (up to 100 percent equity) and (vii) commitments to downsize the public sector by selling off assets and developing an "exit policy" for loss-leading industries. On the fiscal front, the deficit was reduced to 6.5 percent of GDP, but the inflation rate in 1993 hovered around 12.5 percent while the Indian economy grew by about 2.5 percent in 1992.<sup>1</sup>

One of the main concerns is that of credibility of genuine commitment to the reforms.<sup>2</sup> Up until 1993, India had not attracted as much investment as had been hoped subsequent to the opening of the economy (of the projects worth \$3 billion cleared by the Foreign Investment Promotion Board in the last two years, which include companies such as Kellogg's, GM, IBM, Coca-Cola and Dupont-Nylon 6, only about \$500 billion had been invested),<sup>3</sup> and the government was probably loath to send out signals that were indicative of less than full commitment to reduced role of the state. Further, attempts to encourage domestic manufacturing to make the satellite and cable industry in India competitive, as a three-day satellite fair at the Pragati Maidan<sup>4</sup> by the Trade Fair Authority of India, a department of the Ministry of Commerce, seems to suggest, lends credence to this hypothesis.

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<sup>1</sup>Market Reports: *India-Country Marketing Plan 1993*, National Trade Data Base, Lexis-Nexis, 17 August 1993.

<sup>2</sup>I. Kohli, *Symposium Rapportage: Economic Liberalization in South Asia. April 16-18, 1993* (Center for South Asia Studies: University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 6.

<sup>3</sup>S. Jain and H. Sanotra, "Economic Reforms: Questioning the Pace," *India Today*, 15 November 1993.

<sup>4</sup>"Cable Industry: Upgrade or Perish," *India Today*, 30 November 1993.

## Political Factors

Early attempts to liberalize the domestic economy, according to Kohli,<sup>1</sup> had already begun by Mrs. Gandhi. Electoral expediency led Mrs. Gandhi, who had earlier taken visibly socialist actions such as the nationalization of banks, to adopt a more pro-business stance. Yet it was her son Rajiv Gandhi who is most closely associated with India's first attempts to liberalize. The reforms he announced in the 1985 budget, included tax concessions to business, import liberalization in priority sectors, and the relaxation of licensing regulations. These reforms provided a boost for consumer electronics. Production of television receivers registered an impressive 44 percent compound annual growth during the period between 1980 and 1988, mainly due to the boom in kit assembly brought on by the introduction of color television.<sup>2</sup>

Not surprisingly, business groups and the middle class favored the reforms. Yet the opposition to the reforms by rural groups, the moderate left as well as the rank and file of the Congress<sup>3</sup> ultimately slowed down the reforms. Rajiv acquired that most damaging of labels for a leader in a poor country: "pro-rich," and the pace of the reforms decelerated. The current reforms, which were precipitated by a foreign exchange crisis, suffer a somewhat skeptical reception as a result of this earlier back-tracking, and there is some concern that once crisis mode is over, what has been a preponderantly nationalistic policy climate will take over again.

## Conclusion

Contradictions abound in STAR TV's Indian reception. The Information and Broadcasting ministry unleashes rhetoric decrying foreign cultural imperialism, yet does not attempt to regulate its competition out of existence. Is it because technological advance in the form of diminishing satellite dish size make attempts at

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<sup>1</sup>Kohli, 305-328.

<sup>2</sup>S. Guhathakurta, *Electronic Policy and the Television Manufacturing Industry: Lessons from India's Liberalization Efforts*. Institute of Urban and Regional Development, University of California at Berkeley. April 1992.

<sup>3</sup>Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and now, Narasimha Rao belong to this political party which has been in power for most of the five decades that independent India has existed.



regulation hopelessly unenforceable? Or is it because the business groups and the middle class, the same segment of population that favors economic liberalization, are watching STAR TV and liking it?

In this context, Mattelart<sup>1</sup> discusses society as the “site of confrontation and negotiation between social groups” that serve to mediate national communications policies. The “organic alliances between national and transnational capital on the basis of common interests” that he points to helps explain the existence of unlikely alliances among competitors. In India, for instance, while national and transnational capital both compete for the domestic market, fewer government restrictions would help both.

To add yet another twist, the IMF-World Bank structural adjustment programs for debtor countries have been criticized for serving the interests of transnational corporations that have followed close behind, and the movement for economic liberalization in India has certainly felt that pressure from the lending institutions. The middle class, whose savings have begun to finance domestic capital through the stock market in India, then, constitute the last link of this alignment which contains in it varying levels and degrees of competitive and cooperative strains. It is only through an understanding of the larger context of these many players, the World Bank, transnational corporations, domestic business groups, the state, the middle class, all influencing and being influenced by each other that STAR TV’s continued and unhindered presence in India can be understood.

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<sup>1</sup>A. Mattelart, M. Mattelart, and X. Delcourt, *International Image Markets: In Search of an Alternative Perspective* (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1984).

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## Book Review

*Fault Lines: A Memoir.* By MEENA ALEXANDER. New York: The Feminist Press, 1993. Pp. xii, 226. \$12.95 pb.

Poets are blessed, or cursed, with a heightened sensibility, an ability to express the emotions hidden under outward appearances. Meena Alexander is a poet, and her sensibility is expressed here in a luminous prose that makes *Fault Lines* an uncommon autobiography.

The facts of her life are fascinating enough. Meena Alexander was born in India; her family is Christian from Kerala, the state on the southwestern coast that has been a pepper emporium and a crossroads of trade since long before Vasco da Gama reached its shores at the end of the fifteenth century. Rooted in that tropical soil, her immediate family was uprooted by the peripatetic life of civil service. The eldest of three sisters, Meena was born in Allahabad, a sacred city at the conjunction of the Ganges and Jumna rivers, in the heart of India's northern plain. Summers were spent at the ancestral home among the coconut palms in Kerala. When she was five, her father took a job in the newly-independent Sudan, sent by the Indian government as part of a technical mission. There, in Khartoum, she attended school.

North India, South India, North Africa—these migrations superimposed cultures and environments like geological strata on her consciousness. But her nomadic life did not stop there. She went to England for higher education and later returned to India to teach in Delhi, then in Hyderabad. There she met and married, after a whirlwind courtship, an American, and flew off to live, teach, and give birth to children in New York. Alexander's life can be summarized, prosaically, in terms similar to that of other post-colonial migrants: born on one continent, educated on another, living on a third, at home in all—or in none.

Such a life also involved speaking in many tongues: her native Malayalam, the educational medium of English, the Arabic of Khartoum, Hindi, French. Amidst so many sounds, poetry emerged as a solace:

That's all I am, a woman cracked by multiple migrations. Uprooted so many times she can connect nothing with nothing. Her words are all askew... What I have forgotten is what I have

written: a rag of words wrapped around a shard of recollection. A book with the torn ends visible. Writing in search of a homeland (pp. 3–4).

*Fault Lines* is a work that relates the seismic discontinuities of Alexander's existence, linking them through the operation of her poetic gift. Her compressed language conveys emotions, sights, sounds, the feel of surfaces. Her description of giving birth captures that visceral moment more vividly than anything else I have ever read on the subject: the bloodiness, the elation, the exhaustion.

To summarize Alexander's memoir, as her life, cannot do it justice, but quotation can only render fragments. Given the theme of her memoir, however, that is somehow appropriate:

Sometimes I am torn apart by two sorts of memories, two opposing ways of being towards the past. The first makes whorls of skin and flesh, coruscating shells, glittering in moonlight. A life embedded in a life ... Rooms within rooms, each filled with its own scent: rosehips, neem leaves, dried hibiscus leaves that hold a cure, cow dung, human excrement, dried gobs of blood ... Another memory invades me: flat, filled with the burning present, cut by existential choices. Composed of bits and pieces of the present, it renders the past suspect, cowardly, baseless. Place names litter it ... Sometimes I think I could lift these scraps of space and much as an indigent dressmaker, cut them into shape. Stitch my days into a patchwork garment fit to wear (pp. 29–30).

Geologic faults and patchwork quilts, the earthquakes of discontinuity and the thread of memory—Meena Alexander's memoir tells a very contemporary tale and yet it glows with the fire and permanence of another composite medium: the golden-hued mosaics of Byzantium. When viewed too close, a mosaic is simply jewel-like fragments, but when viewed as a whole, it is startling in its passion and timelessness. Meena Alexander's story is such a work.

Gail Minault  
*University of Texas at Austin*

## Graduate Student Profiles

Each issue, we will spotlight several graduate students in this section. The purpose is to advertise student research and fields of study and to allow others doing similar work the opportunity to contact these students. We feature students from the University of Texas, Austin this particular issue but would like to emphasize that this section is open to all interested parties. If you would like your profile to appear in our next publication, please complete the attached form (or a photocopy) and mail to:

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