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Editorial

Studying the Humanities and Social Sciences in a Culture of Natural Science

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As part of both the first generation of Indian Americans and the next generation of scholars, I would like to examine two issues that I believe to be of considerable relevance to both groups. First, why are the humanities and social sciences neglected by the elder generation of Indians, and, second, is this neglect in fact detrimental to the success of the next generation of Indians?

Following independence, India attempted to assess its educational situation and chart a course of development that would ultimately lead to the betterment of all its citizens. In so doing, the Government came to the conclusion that all subjects relating to the field of Science and Technology constituted the most glaring omission to the then current curriculum. It was decided that the promotion of these subjects was essential to building a future, prosperous India.

Shortly thereafter, the United States relaxed its immigration laws. The events of the Cold War had led to the creation of a strategy to import the "best and brightest" talent from around the world. These ready-made professionals, it was hoped, would add to the pool of brain power that could be tapped to combat the "evils" of the Soviet Union. The United States' new policy led to a vast wave of emigration from India, as the new generation of *deshis* attempted to ensure a better life for themselves and their family by coming to the fabled Land of Opportunity.

The combination of the two policies meant that most of the new Indian immigrants were involved in the medical or engineering professions; a smaller percentage had interests in business. Many of the women who came over were skilled in the humanities and/or social sciences, but various obstacles arose that prevented most of them from taking advantage of their talent. Concurrent to these events, the perception that advancements in science and technology were the most effective and efficient means of accelerating the evolution of developing nations, such as

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India, was gaining popularity among the recent immigrants. Consequently, the image of the Indian doctor, engineer, or local businessman became established in the minds of the South Asian American community—so much so that they became the utopian professional goals that the older generation set for their children.

It is clear and somewhat understandable, then, why Indian Americans have chosen to so sideline the humanities and social sciences in the ways that they have. However, I think it is now time to realize the true import that these non-natural science subjects play in our lives. History, for example, determines how we view the world. It is essential, then, that we actively promulgate our own views of our past so as to prevent a skewed Euro/Americentric view of so-called Third World history from dominating our thoughts and perceptions. Area studies, anthropology, and sociology all help to expand horizons and broaden cultural understandings. Political science helps us to grasp the governmental structure in which we live and serves as an excellent foundation for a career in politics.

In short, the humanities and social sciences help to ensure the transmission of 'culture' from one generation to the next. Without the proper study of these courses, then, I fear not only for the future of scholarship, but for the very identities of future generations of both Indians and Indian Americans. It is, therefore, critical for Indians to reevaluate their hierarchy of academic importance and see to it that history, political science, education, and area studies are all deemed to be as relevant to our lives as biology, chemistry, and mathematics.

Moving Frontiers: Changing Colonial Notions of the Indian Frontiers[1]

Ian J. Barrow

This paper investigates the ways in which cartography, the scientific representation of land, served a colonial endeavour for understanding India. It examines, through a survey of colonial cartographic practices and beliefs in India, from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, how changing notions of the frontiers helped constitute, in the minds of the British, place and people.

I

This paper is an inquiry into a prominent, yet understudied, epistemological strategy for understanding India. Cartography, the scientific representation of land, was, and certainly still is, an indispensable tool in the acquisition of knowledge about India: Population densities, railway systems, rainfall patterns, etc., may be furnished by a map. Yet however innocuous the map may seem, the history of cartography in India reveals two general points: Firstly, that map-making was imbricated with other colonial modes of knowing and methods of control, or, in other words, that it was complicit in the practices of subjugating space by its transformation into place. And secondly, that shifts in cartographic methods and ontology, or notions concerning the reality of 'India', as expressed *via* the map reflected, perhaps even directed, similar movements in the ways

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[1]I would like to thank Professors Bernard Cohn and Ronald Inden for their suggestions and comments on this paper.

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colonial authors thought of India as an abstract entity. The widespread belief, for example, that India was, to borrow a phrase from Metternich, a 'geographical expression' with 'natural' boundaries can only be understood with reference to colonial cartographic practices and attitudes towards India. This essay, then, will investigate the ways in which cartography served a colonial endeavor for understanding India, but, more presciently, it will seek to demonstrate that, from the late 18th century to the early 20th century, changing notions of what the Frontier meant to the surveyors had ramifications in how, during that period, India was conceived of by both cartographers and their audience.

This essay's argument will focus on three phases of Indian cartography: The late 18th century, when frontiers were porous and largely undelimited, when the route survey served as a penetrative tool and as a facilitator to expansion beyond a frontier; the first half of the 19th century, when trigonometric practices served both to extend the base line through a frontier and scientifically consolidate information on interior locations; and thirdly, the latter half of the 19th century and the first two decades of this century, when the cartographers' bureaucracy, the Survey of India, was established and notions of protective and natural boundaries surrounding India were taken as axiomatic. The paradigmatic shift posited is that while early surveyors conceived of the 'line' as *connecting* two points (the line being the route survey or the extension of the trigonometric base line), later cartographers increasingly considered the 'line' as *dividing* two areas. This transition, however, did not necessitate a complete elision of the earlier conception of a connecting line.

Ainslee Embree has echoed early 20th century authors who saw, in the scientific demarcation of the North-West Frontier boundary, for example, a sharp disjunction between earlier amorphous frontiers and the modern boundaries which predicate nation states.[1] Beginning with the supposition that India, as a

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[1]Ainslie T. Embree, "Frontiers into Boundaries: From the Traditional to the Modern State," in *Realm and Region in Traditional India*, ed. Richard G. Fox. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 1977), pp. 255-280. Chandra Mukerji has argued that developments in cartographic practices and surveying techniques "were also expressions of a politico-economic order that made the state seem the natural unit of geographical analysis. A new image of the European continent based on the current political economy replaced the older classical and religious imagery." Chandra Mukerji, *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 128.

nation state, has 'natural' boundaries, Embree argues that the East India Company acquisition of territory, or "movement," as he calls it, "up the Gangetic plains to Punjab, and then to the mountain ranges beyond the Indus, and, in the northeast, towards Tibet and Burma, can be seen as a search for a permanent and viable frontier."[1] Matthew Edney, in a recent dissertation, presents the same rationale for conquest: that expansion was necessary in order to establish secure boundaries, or, to put it otherwise, that the Flag followed cartographic Truths. "Whatever the opinion of the Directors and politicians in London," he writes,

> the Company expanded in India almost by necessity; territorial growth was the imperial equivalent of commercial expansion dictated by the political economies of the day. Few, if any administrators, argued that a state was an organism that must grow to survive, but all understood the logic, if not the need, to subdue peripheral areas so that the core domains might be made more secure. [2]

Such arguments not only naturalize the Company's conquests and make it appear that expansion was teleologically legitimate, but they suggest that India only became a modern nation when its natural boundaries were secured, implying that modern cartography, with one stroke of the pen, dispelled medieval notions of a fractured, incomplete India.

An alternate reading of the Survey's literature suggests that while late 19th century surveyors were proud of accurately fixing boundaries, earlier methods of surveying, and, significantly, 'outmoded' conceptions of the land and people were, with modifications, still current. The Map was not a static, completely synchronic entity — it was a palimpsest of sorts: Etched in its conception, creation and presentation were previous journeys and their maps. Even at the turn of the last century, when the Survey of India was tanning itself in the sun of public approbation for scientifically demarcating, and therefore creating, Afghanistan,[3]

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[1]Ibid. p. 269.

[2]Matthew Edney, "Mapping and Empire: British Trigonometrical Surveys in India and the European Concept of Systematic Survey, 1799-1843," (Ph.D.. Dissertation: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1990), p.394.

[3]For example, T.H. Holdich, a surveyor wrote that "we have contrived much to give a national identity to that nebulous community

the 'romance' in the Survey was derived from the use of 'native explorers' in Tibet. Employing methods outdated eighty years previously, and with missions to resolve eighteenth century geographical conundrums, the 'Pundits' publicly enacted in a 'closed' and 'lost' world a bizarre combination of Victorian fantasies for 'native' loyalty, amateurish exploration and scientific enlightenment. The point is that while the period covered witnessed epistemological and ontological shifts, they, like the palimpsest, are built upon and incorporate previous workings and conceptions of India and of frontiers. Erasures, like additions, are neither arbitrary nor complete, and so this paper will also seek to clarify the policies of transition and the contradictions within the Indian survey departments.

The literature on the Survey of India is effusive in its praise for the pioneering surveyors of India. The 1760's, which saw the first systematic route surveys in India and, later, the publication of Rennell's map of India which incorporated his own surveys, seemed to usher in a new era. The new maps were authoritative not simply because they contained greater information, but also because they incorporated the principles of scientific cartography with personal experience. Maps which relied solely on travelers' descriptions, or which contained information which was uncorroborated, were *passé*. However, it would be imprudent to posit a radical disjunction between Enlightenment (and even, or perhaps especially, medieval) cartographers and India's first colonial surveyors. While the parameters of this paper do not permit me to focus in detail on Western or Mughal cartographic practices and ontologies prior to the 1760's, a brief discussion is nevertheless germane. A comparison and selected analysis of three pre-colonial European and Mediterranean texts will reveal a medieval pre-supposition that difference could be viewed on a linear spectrum.

II

The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, *Mandeville's Travels*, and Jordanus' *Journals*, are each probing for ways to articulate

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which we call Afghanistan (but which Afghans never call by that name) by drawing boundary all around it and elevating it to the position of a buffer state between ourselves and Russia . . . " *The Indian Borderland, 1880-1900*, (London: Methuen and Co., 1909, first pub. 1901), p. 366.

either the unimagined or the undiscovered: all are searching for a vocabulary and methodology with which to reveal what lies hidden. This paper will argue that one of the techniques used for making the revelation plausible was to describe a world of polarities, a world in which the further the traveler went from known lands (the Mediterranean basin) the more bizarre and antipodean the inhabitants became. This journey away from the familiar is especially apparent in the *Periplus*, a systematic description of the countries surrounding the Erythraean Sea, or Indian Ocean. The narrative begins at the Egyptian port of Mussel Harbor, and proceeds to describe, in geographical order, the meteorological conditions and trade possibilities of various localities and their entrepots. As the author moves away from Egypt, and as the quantity of commercial information diminishes, the physiognomy and practices of the inhabitants are accentuated. While, for example, the market-town of Muza, or Mocha, is described as "crowded with Arab ship owners and seafaring men, and is busy with the affairs of commerce,"[1] the lands just before the Ganges River are inhabited by "many barbarous tribes, among them the Cirrhadae, a race of wild men with flattened noses, very savage; another tribe, the Bargysi; and the Horse-faces and the Long-faces, who are said to be cannibals."[2] Jordanus also reserved his most colorful writing for lands he had not seen, asserting that there were islands "in which are men having the head of dogs, but their women are said to be beautiful."[3] A taxonomy is constructed in these descriptions, whereby the inhabitants of areas that remain unknown (in the sense that knowledge of them remains speculative rather than empirical) are classified as antipodean.

Although the three travelers do not survey the land scientifically — theirs are more works of the imagination than factual descriptions — they nevertheless serve as precursors to the early colonial surveyors. Apart from a desire to relate what hitherto lies concealed by employing rhetorically generated classificatory schemes, the medieval writers locate types of people relationally. Thus, not only do the most hideously deformed live in areas that have remained unvisited, they live farthest away, as do those with virtually unspeakable practices. Jordanus, for example, wrote that in Greater and Lesser India[4] "men who dwell a long way

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[1]*Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, (Haklyut Society)p. 30.

[2]Ibid. p. 47.

[3]Friar Jordanus, *The Wonders of the East*, trans. Henry Yule, (New York: Burt Franklin, 1863, written circa 1330), p. 44.

[4]According to the translator, Lesser India might be Sind, Makran,

from the sea, under ground and in woody tracts, seem altogether infernal, neither eating, drinking, nor clothing themselves like others who dwell by the sea."[1] It will be argued that it is precisely this linearity of perspective that informs not only the work of 18th century surveyors, but that of contemporary writers on India as well.

Medieval travelers were influential to early survey techniques and attitudes in several ways. First, as Greenblatt had noticed, early colonialists had to overcome a problem of representation: how to credibly recount their journeys to an audience that had been told about the Orient by authors who had never even visited many of the peoples or places described (in fact, Mandeville, himself, was a fiction, and it is debatable how far the author of the *Periplus* traveled, since the Ptolemaic conception of India is left unchallenged). Greenblatt suggests that early colonialists retained the medieval tropes of Oriental marvels in an effort to add credibility to their narratives: "To affirm the 'marvelous' nature of the discoveries is . . . to make good on a claim to have reached the fabled realms of gold and spice."[2] Thomas Pennant published his *View of Hindostan* in 1798, yet never visited India — in fact, many of his sources (Thomas Maurice or Arrian, for example) never saw India themselves, or if they had, as in the case of Ralph Fitch, it was over two hundred years previously. The ahistorical conception of India and the repetition of previous writings added legitimacy to his presentation.[3] Therefore, in order to convey an impression of

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and the coast of India down to Malabar, and Greater India the Malabar Coast. *Jordanus*, Yule, p. 11 ft. Thomas Maurice, Writing in 1812, notes that Ptolomy and Strabo, "and other respectable geographers of antiquity," believed that the river Ganges divided India into two parts, *India intra Gangem* and *India extra Gangem*, "a mode of division that still very generally prevails," *Indian Antiquities, or Dissertations of Hindostan*, Vol. 1. (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1984, first pub. 1812), p. 140. For a discussion of Western medieval geographical divisions of India, see Susan Gole, *India Within the Ganges* , (New Delhi: Jayaprints, 1983), and *Indian Maps and Plans: From earliest times to the advent of European surveys*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989).

[1]*Jordanus*, p. 35.

[2]Ibid. p. 74.

[3]He remarks that 'the ancients' are too often mocked for their credulity when describing the marvels of the East, "but let me remark that incredulity is more frequent the offspring of ignorance than the former." Thomas Pennant, *Outlines of the Globe: The View of Hindoostan*, 2 vols.,

India which would evoke an appropriate response, he merely needed to reproduce familiar conceptions of the Orient. Thus, he notes that the inhabitants living in the forests of central Sri Lanka are "as savage as the domesticated animals are in the state of nature." Living in caves or under trees, and eating only raw flesh or roots, they have no law, no religion, even no language. "The wilder sort never shew themselves; the tamer will enter some kind of commerce," but if they are not given the iron arrows they need, even the tamer savage will shoot the trader in the night.[1] This world of impenetrable darkness, rudimentary exchange rites, and irrationality, situated as far as possible from coastal civilization, is not a novel vision of the landscape and habits of an unseen land and its people, but a portrait of recognized and easily identifiable figures of speech. It would seem that William Baffin's inscription under the heading of a 1619 map is ironically apt: "*Vera quae visa; quae non, veriora*," — The things that we have seen are true; those we have not seen are truer still.[2]

Second, one of the rhetorical devices used to sustain interest in the Orient was to postulate the existence of an Eastern Paradise or Prester John, a Christian King variously located in Ethiopia, India and Central Asia. Pennant, for example, affirms that it is entirely appropriate that Kashmir, "this enchanting jewel . . . this Paradise, THE REGION OF ETERNAL SPRING, should be peopled with females angelic: they are uncommonly beautiful."[3] The Kingdom of 'Prestre Johan' was, for Jordanus, to be seen in *India Tertia*, "the terrestrial paradise," where there are rivers to be found of gold and gems, and "true unicorns . . . having only one horn in the forehead, very thick and sharp, but short and quite solid, marrow and all."[4] While late 18th century surveyors were not so credulous as to believe that they would discover lost Christian kings and paradises, nevertheless, medieval metaphors and representations of the unrepresented retained their saliency, albeit in modified forms. What is interesting is that early colonial surveyors and writers continued to conceive of space linearly, that further inland one went the darker and more impenetrable the landscape and the more uncivilized the inhabitants became. It was common for surveyors to speak of traveling through interior

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(London: Henry Hughes, 1798), p. 21.

[1]Ibid. pp. 192-3.

[2]Quoted in R.H. Phillimore, *Historical Records of the Survey of India*, 4 Vols., (Dehra Dun: Survey of India, 1945), Vol. 1. p. 209.

[3]Pennant, op. cit., Vol. 1. pp. 45 and 48.

[4]Jordanus, op. cit., pp. 42 and 43.

country which was, for example, "alive with Bhils."[1] Captain R.B. Pemberton, special emissary to Bhutan and surveyor, noted that much of the country he journeyed through was "little removed from a state of absolute barbarism," especially those areas beyond Company control.[2]

However, although such metaphors and conceptions of reality were credible for readers, they remained incomplete: there was neither a rationale for discovery, since the existence of uncivilized peoples was anticipated, nor for exploration, except, perhaps, to 'civilize', which for 18th century surveyors was not of primary importance. Even though military and revenue authorities had a need for accurate maps,[3] one of the ways in which surveyors justified their activities was to suggest that in addition to a pragmatic need for maps, there was also a journey to survey, culminating in the discovery of something truly marvelous — the true source of the Ganges or the putative 150 feet falls on the Brahmaputra.[4]

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[1]Phillimore, op. cit., Vol. 1. p. 126. Bhils are tribal peoples living in Central India, who were often regarded as uncivilized.

[2]He writes further that on crossing the river dividing Bhutan from Bengal, "a very marked change became apparent: extensive cultivated fields were no longer perceptible, and nearly the whole plain over which we traveled . . . was covered with dense reed and grass jungle." R. Boileau Pemberton, *Report on Bootan*, (Calcutta: G.H. Huttman, 1839), pp. 45 and 86.

[3]In 1778 Robert Kelly, a Company officer in the Carnatic, wrote that in the course of ten years' service, "I could not help observing a variety of Distresses and Difficulties which Armies and Detachments have been led into, wither by the Ignorance or Villainy of Harcarras, and the Vast Opportunities which were lost by want of knowledge of the face of the Country even two Miles of our Camp or of the Field of Battle." He therefore began systematic route surveys as he campaigned. Phillimore, op. cit., Vol. 1. p. 89.

[4]Colonel R.H. Colebrooke, Surveyor-General of Bengal from 1803 until 1810, was particularly interested in the location of the source of the Ganges. The most 'reliable' information was obtained from Jesuit missionaries and derived from early 18th century Chinese surveys. Captain Webb and Lieutenants Raper and Hearsey were, therefore, ordered to survey the Ganges from Hardwar to its source at Gangotri. Clements R. Markham, *A Memoir on the Indian Surveys*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1871), p. 63. and F.V. Raper, "Narrative of a Survey for the purpose of discovering the sources of the Ganges," in *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. 11 (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1979, first. pub. 1818), pp. 446-563.

The first colonial cartographers of India were thus still surveying under the influence of medieval conceptions of the uncharted and its rhetorical practices of revelation. However, the maps drawn by James Rennell and his companion surveyors did introduce new attitudes towards the representation of land and frontiers, attitudes which, in the words of R.H. Phillimore, the Survey's historian, rescued the map "from the vagaries of fancy."[1] David Harvey has remarked that the reintroduction of the Ptolemaic grid, with location determined by means of latitude and longitude, stripped maps of all their medieval "elements of fantasy and religious belief, as well as of any signs of the experiences involved in their production." Maps, now imbued with the principles of Enlightenment rationality, had become, according to Harvey, "abstract and strictly functional systems for the factual ordering of phenomena in space."[2] While this essay will suggest that medieval spatial notions and cartographic practices together with contingency and contestation fashioned early colonial maps which were neither purely abstract nor functional,[3] Harvey is correct to posit that maps displayed a greater 'objectivity'. Maps, as he says, lost much of their medieval sensuous, tactile character, and instead emphasized spatial organization and rationality.[4] Nevertheless, how could maps rationally represent, in a coherent and systematic manner, anomalous revenue arrangements whereby, for example, the Company was permitted to demand revenue from certain tracts of land close to Bhutan from July to

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[1]Phillimore, op. cit., Vol. 1 p. 210.

[2]David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) p. 247.

[3]Even establishing the basic cartographic grid — longitude (meridians) and latitude (parallels) — was problematic. In fact, some of Rennell's maps omitted longitudes. Latitude could easily be determined by measuring the altitude of the Pole Star above the horizon, but without an expensive and delicate chronometer it was difficult to fix longitude. To do so, surveyors were forced to resort to timing the eclipse of one of Jupiter's moons, and then compare that time with the time the eclipse was observed at Greenwich, the difference providing the longitude. Edney, op. cit., p. 52.

[4]Harvey, op. cit., p. 243. Nevertheless, Charles Reynolds spent years drawing a scaled map of India fourteen feet long and ten feet broad. Delighted observers had to crawl over the map wearing silk stockings on their hands and feet! Unfortunately, the map was never published and has since been lost. Phillimore, op. cit., p. 219.

November only, at which time Bhutan once more claimed jurisdiction.[1]

One of the interesting features of the early colonial maps is that, in theory, land is seen in terms of area. Mughal maps and many pre-colonial European maps of India had depicted land in various ways: In terms of, for example, the significant buildings or towns a traveler would encounter following the map,[2] or in terms of the land's productivity (two areas with the same acreage would not be drawn to identical proportions if one area's produce was more valuable or greater than the other's).[3] Land area was thus either a space within which to travel or a location from which to extract revenue, but not a terrain which held intrinsic value from its being regarded and compared simply as an area. The 'objectification' of land by surveyors (and I use the term advisedly, since, as we shall see, there came to be several ways to objectify land) was largely a result of their ability to accurately verify a position's longitude and latitude, and then to plot the information

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[1]Pemberton, op. cit., p. 51. Early colonial maps served various purposes: primarily they facilitated maritime and river trade, and military reconnaissance. (see, for example, James Rennell, *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan.* (Calcutta: Editions Indian, 1976, from third ed. 1793.) p. 383.) They also reflected political and revenue divisions. However, it is important to note that it was Robert Orme, the first Colonial historian of India , who first requested, in a letter to Robert Clive, dated 21 November 1764, that a map of India be drawn by a Company servant. Rennell provided Orme with regional maps, but later, when he was constructing his general map of India, felt exasperated when Orme refused to return the materials. "It is a provoking circumstance," he wrote, "that the Historian O-e keeps all the Geographical materials in order to extract such particulars only as serve the purpose of illustrating his History: and probably I may either lose my eyesight, or drop into the grave before he has done with them." Phillimore, op. cit., pp. 22 and 212. History was not possible without location, and what the map provided was a perspective on a bounded space which married well with History's need for 'abstracted particulars' — where the fact, or the location on the map, could be taken as a representation of itself, as capable of comparison, and as information which itself encapsulated a story.

[2]For a fascinating discussion of Mughal and early colonial cartographic practices, see Sudipta Sen, "The Colonial Mapping of India: a Study in the History of Cartography," unpub. essay, University of Chicago.

[3]See Embree, op. cit., p. 266.

on a map governed by certain principles of uniformity and mathematical precision.

If land came to be thought of primarily as area, capable of being mathematically compared, boundaries may then be considered 'natural', since an area must logically have its parameters if it is to constitute a place. Furthermore, the map itself no longer told a story of a journey or a visual record of productive capacity, but became, in Harvey's words, "a homogenization and reification of the rich diversity of spatial itineraries and spatial stories."[1] The map no longer presented a personal interpretation of landscape, people, length or difficulty or beauty of a journey, but became impersonal and verifiable presentations of fact. Although the surveyors aspired to present spatial facts about India in a manner that permitted the viewer the luxury of objective factual comparison with other areas or countries, what transpired belied the ideal. Individual idiosyncrasies, contestation by 'recusant' zamindars, physical and material limitations, and exigencies demanded by military and commercial route surveys, all tended to make map making as tentative and *ad hoc* as it was scientific. For example, James Rennell virtually had his shoulder severed in an encounter with an armed band of Sanyasis, and later, while surveying, he was challenged by a local zamindar, who

> appear'd on Horseback, and with him a very great Rabble, some of them armed with Matchlocks, and the rest with Pykes and Swords, etc. Without sending me any message, he came within Call and told me that he was come to fight me. I aimed a single shot at the Mogul which, however, missed him, but killed a man close by him. This had the desired effect of making them retire to a greater Distance; but they kept us in continual alarm by sending parties into the Jungles on every side of us: During this time the Mogul remained in Sight, and sent me several insolent Messages — one of them so full of Abuse and Menaces that I thought myself fully authorised to chastise the Messenger, which I did. The rest contained hints of his independence . . . To one of these I replied by showing the Messenger the Sepoys, Arms, Camp Equipment, by which he might be assured that we belonged to the Company, for the Mogul affected to believe that we were Robbers. After a while (he) began to apologise for his

[1]Harvey, op. cit., p. 251.

> Behaviour which he imputed to his ignorance of my station and employment . . . As he acknowledged his Conviction, I desired his personal Attendance, which he declined.[1]

Such encounters — and Rennell writes of several similar incidents — must have affected the quality of the observations, but they must also have suggested that the survey was a journey through a frontier, or, to put it differently, that the frontier was in many ways the survey. The threat of dispossession which the survey augured and the hostile response are constant themes in survey literature; yet it is only during this early phase that there is no distinction made between safe areas and dangerous frontier zones. Moreover, residual medieval conceptions and strategies for persuading a viewer that the map was a true representation and not a simulation, contributed to a process whereby the result was, in some senses as interpretative and imprecise as earlier maps: George Everest wrote acidly that surveyors "less burdened with that weighty thing called conscience seemed to think it much more simple to draw a map and a field-book, as an indispensable prelude to drawing the salary, and leaving to after investigators the knotty difficulty of discovering the amount of agreement between these two bantlings of their imagination."[2]

While it is true that surveyors were able, for example, to locate towns with more precision and that the coastline of India assumed a vastly more recognizable shape, nevertheless, the process of creating a map involved erasures, elisions and

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[1]James Rennell, *The Journals of Major James Rennell, first Surveyor-General of India, written for the information of the Governor of Bengal during his surveys of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers, 1764-1767*, ed. T.H.D. LaTouche, (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1910), pp. 137-138.

[2]George Everest, *A series of Letters addressed to His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex, As president of the Royal Society, Remonstrating against the conduct of that learned body*, (London: William Pickering, 1839), p. 79. Nearly half a century later *A manual of Surveying for India* contains an astonishing admission: "All beginners should take encouragement from the fact of hundreds of men having commenced their career in perfect ignorance of the various duties they may have been called on to perform . . ." H.L. Thuillier and R. Smyth, *A Manual of Surveying for India, detailing the mode of operations on the Trigonometrical, Topographical and Revenue Surveys of India*, (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co.), p. 194.

incorporations of certain kinds of information that would be of practical use for specific purposes. It is the targeted nature of the information that allowed cartographers to claim their work was scientific, but it also resulted in the rejection of information not considered of value.

The point is this: 18th century surveyors were primarily engineers conducting route surveys of roads and rivers to facilitate troop movement, commercial communication and revenue extraction. The surveyors' perception was myopic: Their view was not panoramic, all-encompassing, but selected and limited to a road. And it was this reliance on the *road* for both information and a rationale for surveying which characterizes the villages, or hills, or jungles along the way as markers, as signs directing the surveyor, traveler, viewer on to the revelation at the end of the journey. Acting almost in opposition to the Ptolemaic grid into which they are placed, 'facts' are not seen as discrete objects, but, in the words of Paul Carter, "as horizons increasingly inscribed with spatial meanings, defined not in terms of objective qualities, but as directional pointers articulating and punctuating the explorer's journey."[1] The logic of the 'facts' here, therefore, is not to stand in isolation, capable of objective analysis and comparison, but to guide the traveler onwards, and it is this sense of journey beyond the observed towards the unrevealed wonder that characterizes the first colonial surveys in India. Moreover, this manner of approach towards the map and the information revealed implies that the frontier was not a boundary *per se* prohibiting travel, but a zone of passage: Indeed it began when the survey began and ended with its completion. The frontier, then, was the survey.

Some late 18th century maps depict the company's lands *vis-a-vis* its neighbors, which from a more modern perspective would seem to imply that the concept of a frontier involved an area of separation. Although this was, certainly, one definition of the frontier, the more common approach was to think of the frontier as those lands which lay unsurveyed, possessing routes of interest to the Company and traveler. Uncertainty as to what lands exactly were the Company's, constant danger from zamindar armies or Sanyasi Fakirs, and several attempts to locate the source of the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers, all in addition to the belief that the surveyors' mission was not to delimit the land but to

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[1]Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 16.

survey it, indicates that the Company's frontiers were hardly just borders.

III

William Lambton's Great Trigonometric Survey, begun in 1802 at St. Thomas' Mount in Madras[1] and, after his death in 1823, continued by George Everest, succeeded in measuring the length of a meridional arc, from Southern India to Dehra Dun in the North.[2] The Trigonometric Survey provided mathematically determined positions (accurate to within seconds of a degree) which served as bases and check-points for both the topographical and revenue surveys, usually operating in Native States and Company territory respectively.[3] Moreover, the Trigonometric Survey contributed to the "statistical knowledge" of India, a goal established in 1802 by Lord Wellesley when he argued that a surveyor "should not be confined to mere military or geographic

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[1]William Lambton, "An Account of the Measurement of an Arc on the Meridian on the Coast of Coromandel, and the length of a Degree deduced therefrom in the latitude 12° 32'," in *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. 8, (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1979, first pub. 1809), p. 138. Lambton proposed to "connect" the coasts of India (notice the power of the map to arrogate to itself ontological powers) by "an uninterrupted series of triangles, and of continuing that series to an almost unlimited extent in every direction." In "An Account of a Method for extending a Geographical Survey across the Peninsula of India," *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. 7, (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1979, first pub. 1808), p. 312

[2]Although he was granted permission to begin trigonometrical calculations in late 1799, it took a while to obtain the requisite materials from England, such as the measuring chain. The chain consisted of forty links, each two and a half feet long, and was to be carried by twenty coolies. Lambton, *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. 7., op. cit., p. 322.

[3]It is important to note that until 1815 there were two Surveyor Generals, one for both the Madras and Bengal Presidencies, and even when Mackenzie became Surveyor General of India, Lambton was not under his jurisdiction. Everest became Surveyor General of India when he succeeded Lambton at the Great Trigonometrical Survey in 1823. It was only in the 1870's that all three departments — Trigonometrical, Topographical, and Revenue — were combined under the Survey of India. However, when I write of the pre-1870 Survey, I have in mind the Trigonometrical Survey.

information, but that his enquiries should be extended to a statistical account of the whole country."[1]

Second, surveying, and especially the scientifically precise trigonometric surveys, became increasingly associated with the colonial mission to improve India educationally, morally and agriculturally. Although surveys were not tools for direct improvement, since for many years Indian surveyors were restricted to the Revenue Department, the notion that the trigonometric survey extended a base line through a frontier suggested that the survey acted as a pioneer, enabling progress to occur. Thus in 1847, after revisiting a tract of country first surveyed twenty-three years previously, Everest wrote that "in all portions of the tract passed over by the Great Arc Series . . . the contrast exhibited by the present over the former amount of prosperity is most striking where the British power has been paramount, and is more and more marked in proportion to the influence which that power exerts."[2] However, Everest retained medieval conceptions that difference, often irreconcilable, manifested itself in oppositional terms: "The English and Hindus are the very antipodes of each other in their national characteristics: of all races on earth they present the fewest points of similarity."[3] The Trigonometric Survey, therefore, was seen as charting an entry into India's interior for the entrance of Western improvement and rationality, but due to the Department's own highly scientific nature it distanced itself from India and cultivated an objective perspective.

Despite the fact that the surveyors and the Company saw the Survey as preparing the way for India's moral and material improvement, Indian responses to the Survey's activities were unequivocally hostile. Regional kings were not unaware that surveyors' primary purpose had been, and to a large extent still was, to conduct traverses for the military. Everest concluded that nothing excited the "jealousy" of Native States "as the slightest disposition to survey and spy into the nakedness of the land, which they universally believe . . . is but a preliminary step to

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[1]Quoted in Edney, op. cit., p. 135.

[2]George Everest, *An Account of the Measurement of two sections of the Meridional Arc of India*, (London: J. and H. Cox, 1847), p. XXXVii.

[3] "A Hindu," he continues, "is taught to deem it the greatest crime on earth to kill a cow. An Englishman likes no better fun than to kill a cow and eat it afterwards, especially if it is fat and plump, and in good stall-fed condition." Everest, *A series of Letters . . .* , (1839), op. cit., p. 92.

assuming possession."[1] There were many reports by surveyors that the arrival of a survey party always caused consternation. W.H. Sleeman noted that in Central India Everest's practice of surveying by night, when the atmosphere was clear, encouraged "the peasantry to believe that men who required to do their work by the aid of fires lighted in the dead of night upon *high places*, and work which none but themselves could comprehend, must hold communion with supernatural beings . . . "[2] Everest himself was often thought of as an astrologer with necromantic powers, "a notion which," he admits," it would not have been politic to discourage."[3] It is ironic, therefore, that the Survey, which was seen to presage the introduction of improving science and morality, should view its own technical nature as a marker which not only distinguished it from Indian society, but validated behavior intended to keep Indians ignorant of its intentions, practices and results.

The Trigonometric Survey was also important to Indian cartography because both Lambton and Everest considered their work to be of global importance — the measurement of the arc would contribute to British, French and Swedish attempts to mathematically compute the exact shape of the earth.[4] For the first time, therefore, surveying India had a utility that was unrelated to Company or traveler's concerns.

Lastly, the procedure of triangulation which supplanted, much to Rennell's chagrin,[5] the less efficacious and unreliable

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[1]Ibid. p. 78.

[2]W.H. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1973, first pub. 1844), p. 201. I am indebted to Sudipta Sen for this point and reference.

[3]George Everest, *An Account of the Measurement of an Arc of the Meridian between the Parallels of 18° 3' and 24° 7', being a continuation of the Grand Meridional Arc of India as detailed by the late Lieut.-Col. Lambton, in the volumes of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta*, (London: Parbury, Allen, and Co., 1830), p. 40.

[4]For Lambton's desire to contribute to international geodetic efforts see, for example, William Lambton, "An Account of the Measurement of an Arc on the Meridian comprehended between the latitudes 8° 9' 38" .39 and 10° 59' 48" .93 North, being a Continuation of the grand meridional Arc, commenced in 1804, and extending to 14° 6' 19" North," in *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. 12., (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1979, first pub. 1818), pp. 1-101.

[5]In 1823, at the age of eighty, Rennell informed the Directors that all idea "of mensuration, or of a series of triangles over the country, is out

route surveys and perambulators introduced a new objectivity into the map.[1] Surveyors meticulously chain-measured a base line of several miles (it took Everest months to measure one in Dehra Dun) and used the results to trigonometrically calculate the location and relative distances of prominent features scattered over hundreds of miles. The results were a series of triangles which ran the length of India, spawning a series of minor trigonometric surveys spreading out towards the sea. India could now be conceived of as a completely abstracted entity. From the Cape to Dehra Dun, 'India' was a composite of triangles.

The implications of such a perspective are enormous. Paul Carter draws a distinction between exploration and discovery: Whereas explorers interpret physical objects as route markers, guiding the traveler forwards, discoverers search for a body of facts which only have value within a classificatory scheme. Carter then posits an analogy between discovery and the Linnaean botanical system. Victorian botanists were attracted by the simplicity of the Linnaean system — no examination of plant morphology was necessary, only a comparison of appearances. "The pleasure of the plant collector," he notes, "was a pleasure in naming uniquely and systematically. It was the pleasure of arrangement within a universal taxonomy, a taxonomy characterized by tree-like ramifications . . . Equipped with the artificial system of Linnaeus, novelty ceased to present a problem. Utterly strange forms became type specimens. Less curious plants might be assigned to existing genera."[2] The Trigonometric Survey, with its imposition onto India of an artificial network, permitted both the surveyor and map viewer to consider India in taxonomic terms — once a discovery was made, either of a tribe,

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of the question, and according to my opinion, the only mode in which the work can be accomplished . . . " is to conduct a route survey. Phillimore, op. cit. Vol. 1. p. 376.

[1]Before distances were trigonometrically calculated, perambulators were the instrument of choice. A perambulator was a wheel with a cyclometer geared to it which was graduated in miles. Some wheels had a diameter as wide as seven feet, but the most ingenious contraption was made in 1775 and described by Phillimore as "a wheel trailing along the ground beneath the palanquin, connected by a rod and endless screw to a cyclometer which could be read by the surveyor whilst seated comfortably inside." Phillimore, op. cit., Vol. 1. pp. 195 and 185. Despite the pretense of scientific accuracy ushered in by the Trigonometrical Survey, perambulators were used until at least the mid-19th century.

[2]Carter, op. cit., p. 20.

or of a mountain range, the inclusion of that fact into the map's classificatory grid imposed a certain rigidity and permanence: The tribe, for example, is named, located and forever known according to its abstracted, comparable characteristics.

Lambton and Everest's surveying practices also modified the meanings of the frontier. For the first time the frontier was seen as the limit of the frontier rather than as the survey itself. In the course of extending their base lines northwards, both men speak of destinations which constitute the point of the survey. In a paper announcing that he had completed a survey from latitude 15° 6' 2" to latitude 18° 3' 45", Lambton, for example, wrote that his "excursion into the *Nizam's* country was for the sole purpose of getting three degrees more to the arc, and it was with some hesitation that I entered it at all, from being apprehensive of interruption occasioned by the jealousy of the inhabitants."[1] And so rather than seeing the survey as a journey of exploration the survey is now deemed successful once a destination has been reached, and the line extended. The Frontier became a metaphor for knowledge, an area to be reached and eventually traversed, but a zone, nevertheless, demarcating what was and was not known. Towards that end, the people, buildings, land even, served a single purpose: as means of mapping. Whole villages were moved by both Lambton and Everest, long swaths of forest were cut down, and temple roofs were used as permanent survey posts.[2] Across large portions of flat country Everest constructed stone observation towers fifty feet high, with walls five feet thick.[3] While the frontier retained its porous aspect — the base line had still to be extended beyond the frontier — the Trigonometric Survey, especially after Everest introduced his grid-iron survey system, endeavored to treat geographical or social formations as ahistorical, but rooted and natural, facts to be included in a larger classificatory matrix.

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[1]William Lambton, "Account of the Measurement of an Arc on the Meridian, extending from Latitude 15° 6' 2" to Latitude 18° 3' 45", being a further continuation of the former Arc, commencing in Latitude 8° 9' 38"," in *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. 13. (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1979, first pub. 1820), p.7.

[2]For example, Lambton located a survey station (usually a platform of brick, upon which a flag or the theodolite was placed) "on top of the pagoda" at Gopalswamy. Lambton, *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. 12, op. cit., p. 38. At Tanjore Lambton's theodolite crashed to the earth as it was being hoisted to the top of the great temple causing him enormous anguish.

[3]Everest, 1847, op. cit., p. XXiii.

I V

By the end of the 19th century most of the lands under British control had been surveyed trigonometrically, and the notion of the frontier once again underwent a transformation. The frontier itself was abstracted, and thought of as a permanent, natural fixture of the landscape, becoming synonymous in common parlance with the boundary line. Surveyors and a few commentators tried to retain a distinction — the boundary being a physical line, with the frontier as a zone of demarcation — but even they conceived of the frontier as delimiting two areas. Even a 1942 college dictionary (Funk and Wagnalls) designates a 'frontier' as "that portion of a country between a civilized and unsettled region." Furthermore, the frontier was a natural buffer zone, protecting by means of a boundary what lay within from either uncivilized or threatening forces from without. And so "boundaries must be barriers," wrote T.H. Holdich, a retired Surveyor, "and if not geographical and natural, then they must be artificial, and strong as military device can make them."[1]

It became a common trope of colonial literature to view space around a sacred object, such as a woman, or the club, or the Imperial center, in terms of concentric circles. Whereas previously a linear spectrum was posited, whereby the most uncivilized or antipodean peoples jostled for position with a Paradise or other wonder at the farthest distance imaginable, often inland or out at sea (Ceylon or Andaman Islands), now the protective frontier either incorporated a series of barriers, or was itself a barrier protecting the center from a threatening periphery. A wonderful example is provided by Surveyor Lieut.-Col. Woodthorpe, mapping in the North-East Frontier district of South Sylhet towards the end of the 19th century. The long passage will be given in full as it is a lucid, if somewhat elegaic, example of late 19th century surveyors' notions of boundaries, 'point of view' and spatial vision. "At four o'clock in the afternoon," he writes,

> I am standing on a cleared hill just above a large tea garden. The air is beautifully soft and balmy, and looking to the east I see below me the gentle undulations and flat

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[1]T.H. Holdich, *Political Frontiers and Boundary Making*, (London: MacMillan and Co., 1916), p. 46.

ground under tea cultivation, the rich dark green bushes standing out in bold contrast on the red-brown soil. Among the bushes the busy coolies are at work, the women adding brightness to the scene with their brilliantly coloured robes. In the midst of cultivation on the banks of a clear stream, in a small, well-kept enclosure with a pretty tank, stands the manager's bungalow, a large commodious house, with white-washed walls and lofty thatched roof, slightly hidden by tall plantain trees. Rose bushes and other shrubs flourish in the garden, in which from my elevated standpoint I can see that the useful is not overlooked in the culture of the beautiful, as testified by a corner where many tempting-looking vegetables are growing. With the orange glow of the afternoon sun upon it, the bungalow, with its garden, looks, as indeed I find it, very haven of rest, comfort, and hospitality. I hear voices behind the bungalow near some large, neat tea-houses, and, looking, I see an excellent tennis court, where an exciting contest is being carried on between young planters of this and a neighbouring garden. Beyond, the view due south is closed by the virgin dark forest of trees and feathery bamboos, the greater portion of which will soon, by the enterprise of the planters and the extension of the tea gardens, disappear. To the South-West and West the eye wanders over the plains of South Sylhet, bounded on the south by the jungle-clad hills of Tipperah, purple now and indistinct. The flat green fields, above which, as the sun sinks, soft mist wreaths float, are broken up by the frequent glimpses of reddish roofs and the light blue smoke curling upwards denote the presence of villages . . . Far away to the north beyond the plain, the trees, the villages, and the station of Sylhet itself, rises the long, level outline of the Khasia hills, faintly glowing in the sunset. A hum of voices ascends from the villages below, cows wend their way homewards through the deepening gloom, and as the sun sinks in the brown obscurity of the distant horizon, I shut up my theodolite, and running down the hillside, soon find myself at the bungalow, where a hearty welcome and an excellent dinner await me.[1]

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[1]Black, op. cit., p. 77. Despite this vivid, almost pastoral description of the land, which certainly alludes to Grey's Elergy, Holdich writes that "Woodthorpe's art proclivities tended towards the sketching of humanity rather than of landscape." T.H. Holdich, *The Indian Borderland,*

From his position on the hill he divides the land into zones demarcated by certain barriers: thus the bungalow, the center of the picture and area of greatest domesticity, safety and practical and aesthetic cultivation, is protected by an enclosure. The relaxed and playful atmosphere of the bungalow is contrasted with the work of the coolies across the stream which separates the house from the villagers. The blocked view to the south will soon give way to a panorama of cultivated fields, while the plains of Sylhet are "bounded" by the dark and indistinct "jungle-clad hills of Tipperah." As Woodthorpe looks away from the bungalow in all directions, he paints an unproductively fecund, wild, and uninviting landscape. The whole area is itself bounded by the Khasia hills, which, although he does not mention it, were the homes to what were considered some of the most uncivilized tribes in India. The space is no longer conceived of as simply linear, but a series of nearly concentric zones of distinct cultural practice and physical appearance, all bounded by physical objects and presented as natural boundaries.

Acting as a paradigm for this new conception were the frontiers on the North-East and North-West of India. It is important to point out that these frontiers were neither single boundary lines, nor zones demarcating one area from another. They were what might be called 'complex frontiers'. That is, while an official boundary line separated Afghanistan from India (the Durand Line of 1893), or China from India, (the McMahon Line of 1914) for example, there existed an 'Administrative' or 'Inner' line behind the boundary line, but beyond which the British refused to govern.[1] Moreover, the North-West Frontier incorporated two 'Defensive' lines, one inside Afghanistan, the other the river Indus. Unfortunately, this paper does not have the scope to investigate the intricate and fascinating histories of the creation of the boundaries and administrative areas along the North-West and North-East Frontiers. However, these frontiers were complex because, in part, they were designed both to assure India the greatest possible strategic protection, and either include (as in the North-East) or exclude (in the North-West) the trans-frontier tribes. Along both frontiers the tribes proved themselves

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1880-1900, (London: Methuen and Co., 1909, first pub. 1901), p. 45.

[1]For a surveyor's perspective on the history of India's frontiers, and especially the North-West Frontier see Thomas H. Holdich, *The Gates of India: being an historical narrative*, (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1910).

to be major irritants to the Government, and murders of officials or non-payment of rents were the pretexts for many Government 'punitive expeditions', otherwise known in the North-East as perambulations, and in the North-West as 'butcher and bolt' runs.[1] In the North-East, for example, the argument articulated in 1914 by the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills was that if the Government would subsume uncivilized tribes within India, the problem of raids would disappear:

> . . . we cannot hope to civilize our own half-savage peoples so long as they see raiding and head-hunting practiced by their brothers and cousins just across the border. In order to complete our mission of civilization within our own borders we must gradually extend the area which we control . . . as we extend our control the risk that punitive expeditions will be necessary steadily diminishes, in as much as complications on the frontier occur not in controlled, but in uncontrolled areas.[2]

The administrative difficulties occasioned by either the inclusion or exclusion of the tribes, and the subsequent appeals to adjust the boundary, did not, however, obviate the widespread notion that India's frontiers-cum-boundaries (remember both were usually conflated) were regarded as being completely

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[1]C. Colin Davies, *The Problem of the North-West Frontier, 1890-1908: A survey of policy since 1849*, London: Curzon Press, 1974, first pub. 1932), p. 26.

[2]Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam from 1883-1941*, (Shillong: Assam Government Press, 1942), p. 155. For a contrasting view of the need to modify the boundary line see, for example, C.M. Enriquez, *The Pathan Borderland: A consecutive account of the country and people on or beyond the Indian frontier from Chitral to Dera Ismail Khan*, (Calcutta and Simla: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1910). The reason for the need to distance the Government from the tribesmen is that the tribes are incorrigibly belligerent. "The character of the unfortunate Pathan has been torn to bits by the writers of half a century, who have applied to him the adjectives 'treacherous', bloodthirsty' and 'cruel,' until it has become fashionable to regard the Pathan as the worst kind of savage. I once knew a military officer who declined on principle to write the words 'trustworthy' on any Afridi sepoy's discharge certificate, no matter how loyal and meritorious his service had been. . . . It seems quite unfair to judge the Pathan according to twentieth century standards. For him it is still the tenth century." pp. 85 and 86.

natural: "The natural boundary of India," Lord Lytton wrote in 1879, "is formed by the convergence of the great mountain ranges of the Himalayas and of the Hindu Kush . . . (If we) consolidate our influence over this country, and if we resolve that no foreign interference can be permitted on this side of the mountains . . . we shall have laid down a natural line of frontier which is distinct, intelligible, and likely to be respected."[1] The importance of maintaining the sanctity of the frontier, especially along the Hindu Kush ('Kush' is from the Persian *Kushidan*, 'to kill'), is revealed in the telling maxim, popular in the early 20th century, that the way to hold India was "to keep the Hindu Khush" ('happy' in Persian).[2] However, the need to convert the frontier into a defensive barrier had less to do with internal considerations than with the need to protect India from both Russia and 'troublesome' frontier tribes.

Maps are made intelligible by their frontiers. This essay has charted the development from an 18th century conception of frontiers as being the map of India, to the turn of the 20th century when, despite the fact that frontiers were complex entities, they permitted the reification of the area they bounded. Perhaps the most absurd example of how India was regarded as a complete abstraction, where location needed only to be computed, is the Survey's 1928 publication *The 'Where Is It? Reference Index*, which did not even contain a map, but was merely a listing of place names, railway stations *and* tribes, and their location given in degrees of longitude and latitude.[3]

Timothy Mitchell has argued that 19th century exhibitions of the Orient had powerful notional effects. The exhibition provided an arena for viewing the Orient, and as a representation it suggested that a real Orient existed which corresponded to the exhibition. But when a traveler visited the Orient his referent was the exhibition, and thus his trip was marked by an attempt to refer the original back to the representation, as if that were the original.

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[1]Quoted in Dorothy Woodman, *Himalayan Frontiers: A Political Review of British, Chinese, Indian and Russian Rivalries*, (London: Barrie and Rockliff, The Cresset Press, 1969), p. 85.

[2]George MacMunn, *The Romance of the Frontiers*, (Quetta: Nisa Traders, 1978, first pub. 1920's), p. 44.

[3]For example, the Waziris of the North-West Frontier, were listed as : Waziri T (for Tribe) 32.7 (latitude) 69.8 (longitude). *The 'Where Is It?' Reference Index showing geographical positions of all important localities in India and adjacent countries*, pub. by order of E.A. Tandy, (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1928).

The map, usually a first representation of India which the traveler met with, did suggest a further reality, yet due to the fact that reality could not be conceived of in terms other than those presented in the map (i.e. as an abstract, boundary-protected entity), the map itself became a surrogate reality, even more real than the 'real'. When alluding to the 'map' his book *India: A Bird's-Eye View*, the Earl of Ronaldshay writes that "man, in short, with his varied outlook upon the universe demands a picture of more than the mere outward appearance of things. The bird's-eye view which he requires is a mosaic of diverse pieces — a composition of historical, pictorial, statistical, and ethnographic vignettes."[1] Often, however, 'reality' did not correspond to the reality represented in the map, and so, as the Earl informs, his respect for cartographers decreased as his disappointment grew. "The lakes painted in blue," he says, "create expectations of something very different from the 'gloomy swamps of reality,' and a laborious journey of 500 miles across the crude expanse of desiccated hill and scorched plain which lies between Quetta and the Persian frontier taught me to regard with grave suspicion the 'refreshing oases of green and the named localities innumerable' which appear in the map. . ."[2]

The experience of the exhibition became a template, as it were, of viewing: An observer should be detached and have a 'point of view', or 'a bird's-eye view'. The map was itself the ultimate detached point of view, permitting observation without being disturbed or noticed. "The problem," writes Mitchell, "for the photographer or writer visiting the Middle East . . . was not just to make an accurate picture of the East but to set it up as a picture. One can copy or represent only what appears already to exist representationally — as a picture."[3] What is more, "the only way to grasp it representationally . . . was to grasp it as the recurrence of a picture one had seem before, or according to the lines of a map one already carried in one's head, or as the reiteration of an earlier description."[4] And it was the notion of a frontier-boundary, impregnable, permanent and protective, that permitted the map to become a stable, abstracted unity, metonymic of the real.

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[1]The Earl of Ronaldshay, *India: A Bird's-Eye View*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), p. Vi.

[2]Ibid. p. 41.

[3]Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991) p. 305.

[4]Ibid. op. cit., p. 312.

V

This essay has attempted to survey Colonial cartographic practices and beliefs in India from the 1760's to the beginning of the 20th century. The argument has focused on surveyors' notions of the frontier, and how those conceptions helped constitute land and people in the minds of the British. In rearticulating the history of colonial cartography, an effort has been made to demonstrate that contemporary and late colonial axioms regarding naturalized frontiers and protective boundaries have been historically fashioned, often for political purpose.

Early Company efforts to survey Bengal and the areas around Madras and Bombay resulted in a notion of the frontier which married scientifically generated conceptions of the frontier to previous medieval beliefs. Thus, while the frontier was to be physically located on a map, it was also a zone of travel, persuading the surveyor that the journey had a wonder to be revealed. This idea that the survey was itself the frontier, while not completely erased, was nevertheless modified when trigonometric surveys were introduced to India at the very beginning of the 19th century. William Lambton and George Everest posited a need to extend the trigonometric base line through a frontier, so that two points would be connected, yet they also envisioned a point of completion and an area which could be covered by a web of triangles. Emphasis shifted from a tactile, sensuous knowledge of the land towards a more mathematically determined and abstracted conception of India. Gradually, surveyors regarded the frontier as less a zone of passage and increasingly as a barrier, simply requiring official demarcation to transform the bounded area into a natural entity or modern nation state. Boundaries and the country they protected became 'natural' geographical products. "Geography reigns supreme in India," wrote Patricia Kendall, "It dictates political boundaries, determines social movements and limits ethnical expansion."[1]

Although early 20th century surveyors fetishized the 'map' in a manner which permitted the viewer to consider a completely abstracted India as natural, even as the hyper-real, they

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[1]Patricia Kendall, *Come with me to India! A quest for truth among peoples and problems*, (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p.18.

nevertheless reformulated anachronistic notions of the frontier. They employed Indians as quasi-legitimate surveyors, instructing them to map in rudimentary fashion the unknown lands beyond the northern boundary. The frontier reverted to being a zone of passage, but the journey was now vicariously experienced by surveyors and their viewers from behind safe boundaries.

Even medieval myths were once more utilized in an effort to infuse romance into the Survey's activities and, ironically, to help soften the Survey's scientific reputation. T.H. Holdich proposed that there were half truths to medieval myths, supposedly long thought of as incredible. "Without ascribing much value to the Mediaeval traditions which invested Prester John with a halo of religious romance . . . there can be no doubt that as late as the middle of the tenth century Nestorian Christianity prevailed in Central Asia to an extent which is hardly realised in the twentieth."[1] This essay has attempted to provide an alternative reading of the history of India's frontiers, and has suggested that questions of 'accuracy' and quality of information had as much to do with the 'painted' reproduction of established tropes as it had to do with new scientific precision.

[1]Holdich, *Tibet*, op. cit., p. 127.

The Untouchable Counter-Elite of West Bengal: Religious Protest And Indianist Integrationism

Dennis Walker

The new untouchable bourgeoisie in Bengal, as it decisevely enters India's socio-political mainstream in the late twentieth century, is reinventing an old protest religion—the Matau—into an instrument aimed at dulling the hostilities of upper caste Hindus.. This paper argues that rather than exhibiting a quiescent acceptance of externally imposed status, the Untouchables have been active participants in their attempts to integrate with upper caste Hindus—India's national elite—through the popularization of the Matau religion, innovated in the nineteenth century to advance the interests of the socially outcaste Untouchables, via the Calcutta Bengali journal Harisevak.

Caste Structure of Indian Society

As the twentieth century closes, the Brahmans, barely six per cent of the Hindu population, still stand at the apex of Indian society. Traditionally priests, Brahmans have undergone a skilled self-modernization which has enabled them to retain a disproportionate share of jobs in government, business and the private professions. At the bottom of the pyramid, Untouchables, who in the last decade have termed themselves Dalits ("the

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Downtrodden"), make up 18% per cent of the Hindu population. Excluded from society, they traditionally do the jobs considered most degrading — human-waste disposal, burning the dead and working leather hides. A contrite Gandhi had renamed the Untouchables Harijans or "Children of God" during the Indian Independence movement lest they entered joint actions with Pakistanist Muslim secessionists. On paper, the government has outlawed discrimination and segregation against Dalits and reserved 15% of government jobs for them as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), but they remain the target of violence in villages as they attempt to enroll their children in schools and to acquire property. 10 million out of the 80 million Untouchables are now literate and 75% of their children are now getting some schooling: the next generation, at last, may have the strength to compel society to receive them.

At present, urban elite Untouchables in West Bengal who make it through inferior secondary schools still face pervasive hostility and insults from UC (Upper Caste) colleagues as they break into white collar jobs. A District Administrative Officer in Calcutta abused an SC recruit as he signed the attendance register saying that he was "unfit for office work" and that he "should be punished" and ordered a peon to drive the SC subordinate out: the editor of the hyper-militant *Dalit Voice* informed this SC of a section of the Indian Penal Code that he could cite if he took the life of his boss — "only tame animals are slaughtered in yagnas and yagas."[1] Following the breakdown of segregation, caste-Hindu practice of untouchability has thus assumed new forms within the modern structures that are explosive. The new shaky Bengali Untouchable bourgeoisie in the late twentieth century is reinventing an old Untouchable protest religion into an instrument to dull this residual hostility as they decisively enter India's mainstream.

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[1]Letter from Rebati Ranjan Roy, All-India SC/ST Railway Employees Association, Seldah Unit, Calcutta, and response, *Dalit Voice* 1-15 December 1992 p. 13. For another case of mental torture in the work-place, article in *Ananda Bazar Patrika* 11 (September 1992) cited by Nani Gopal Das from Calcutta in *Dalit Voice* (Bangalore) (16-31 October 1992).

Origins and Development of Matua Protest

RELIGION

Our concern is the images of Matua religion popularized by its neo-bourgeois writers since World War II, and their functions for today, more than the early Matua religion of history.

The Matua religion was innovated by Harichand Thakur of Orakandi, in the Gopalganj district of present-day Bangladesh. Born in 1812, he became active at a time when the Untouchables of Bengal were converting to Islam and Christianity due to ill-treatment by upper caste (UC) Hindus. Harichand saved the Untouchables from conversion by innovating the Matua religion that maintained vocabulary and motifs of the Hinduism his adherents knew (caste-blind Vaishnavism), but wrenched, bent and deconstructed it to honor the ex-outcastes and advance their interests. His son Guruchand Thakur preached this religion among these Dalits ("downtrodden ones"), and promoted their upward mobility by launching his famous education movement in 1881, ten years before the birth of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar — the outstanding political leader of all of India's Untouchables — in far-away Maharashtra. Due to Guruchand Thakur's education movement, the Dalits of East Bengal became literate and politically conscious and therefore elected Dr. Ambedkar from a Bengal constituency in the Constituent Assembly election in 1946, at a time when Congress UC political foes had marginalized him in Maharashtra and the Hindi belt. Considered another avatar ("Shivavatar") in his own right, Guruchand Thakur integrated Bengal's great Namusudra community into one unit from its eight divisions and skillfully organised their ongoing mass conversion to Matuaism in protest against "Brahmanism." He held aloof from the non-cooperation movement organized by the Congress Party.[1]

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[1]Popular among recent poetical recreations of the establishment of the Matua sect by Harichand and Guruchand has been Debendralal Biswas Thakur, *Porom Purush Harichand Thakur* (Calcutta: By the Author, 1985) and *Guruchand Harigita* 2 vols (Calcutta: By the Author, 1990). The sect's pre-independence history and political vacillation between the British, the Muslims and the caste-Hindu Congress nationalists is discussed by Sekhar Bandhyopadhyay, "Social Protest or Politics of Backwardness? The Namasudra Movement in Bengal 1872-1911" in Basudev Chattopadhyay (ed) *Dissent and Consensus: Protest in Pre-Industrial Societies* (India, Burma and Russia) (Calcutta:Bagchi, 1989) pp. 170-232 and in his "A Peasant Caste in

A Matua religious literature in Bengali has been growing since towards the end of the 19th century. The first, scriptural, works of Matua literature are the Mahasankirtan, a book of Matua songs, and *Sri Sri Harililamrita*, a multi-volumed poetical epic-style life-history of Lord Harichand Thakur: these two books were penned by Tarak Chandra Sarkar, a famous folk-poet and Untouchable saint. In India and Bangladesh, innumerable Bengali professional folk-versifiers (lok kobi) direct their songs to Harichand, Guruchand and the Matua religion. The protest sect, though, has through the decades sustained continuous periodicals, starting with the monthly Namasudra Suhrid published from 1912 to 1918 at Orakandi Village in Bangladesh under the management of Guruchand Thakur himself. Current leaders claim 6,500,000 adherents in Bangladesh and 15,000,000 in West Bengal: no Indian government, though, has recognized the sect, as distinct from the Namasudra Bengali-speaking Untouchables from which it recruited, as a category for statistical purposes.[1]

This paper assesses the more radical — yet still in some ways conservative — Matua intellectualism that has developed around the Calcutta Bengali journal *Harisevak*, edited from 1977 by Debendralal Biswas Thakur, also General Secretary of the Harichand Mission 4. We evaluate this faction's further differentiation of the sect from Hinduism and caste-Hindus, but in relation to the group's quest for points of entry into a wider Indian secularoid-nationalist mainstream centred beyond Bengal. Most recent Matua writers now contribute to the ultra-politicized Untouchable "Dalit" enclavist-"nationalism" evolving in India's South and the Hindi belt since the 1970s. Yet Debendralal Biswas and his colleagues modernize the Matua discursive tradition, and institutionalize the sect, mainly to achieve integration into India's national mainstream.

Protest: The Namasudras of Eastern Bengal, 1872-1945", in Bandyopadhyay and Suranjan Das (ed), *Caste and Communal Politics in India* (Calcutta: Bagchi, 1993) pp. 190.

[1]Letter from Debendralal Biswas Thakur, Founder-Acharya of the Harichand Mission and Matua Literature Council 2 July 1994. West Bengal's Matua are concentrated in Nadia, 24 Parganas, Dinajpur, Maldah, Hoogly and Burdwan districts. Many Matua refugees from East Pakistan were resettled in the Hindi belt.

MATUA COSMOLOGY

Matua religion in its bourgeois stage still sees the world and humans as the creation of the Supreme God Hari (the post-Vedic Vishnu), repeating some motifs of high Sanskrit Hinduism and diverging from others. The sect's persistent creation-belief was set out in a lucid poem by Dr. Surendra Chandra Biswas, a brother of Debendralal Biswas Thakur who however chose to remain in Dhaka. Once the Mahavishnu Hari created the universe by thinking of it within himself: he created this world for the living beings and to add to its beauty he then (sic) fashioned the sun, the moon and the planets. After creating the living beings and plants, he sent men onto the earth. The Mahavishnu has charged the planets to decide the result of the works of men: at the time of union of semen of parents, the horoscope of an individual is written by Brahma (Mahavishnu's three parts are Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva). The sages come to know the laws of astrology by meditating on the Mahavishnu.

The Matua religion may be less deterministic than some schools and sects of Sanskritic Brahmanical Orthodoxy but it still often seeks more leeway or opportunity for low-born individuals by adjusting, rather than denying, tenets that caste Hindus also have. Some suffer all their life, some are kings, some are subjects who have to beg, some are ascetics wandering from country to country. Some are cripples and born blind, others abused and oppressed. "It is not right to find fault with the planets for the afflictions of human beings: it is the parents who are responsible for these, since children suffer for their whole life due to the fault of parents who copulate without ascertaining the rules set out in the Books on copulations" .[1]

Although the most substantial protest movement to come from the poorest of the non-Muslim poor in Bengal's history, the Matua sect at its formative emergence heard the discourses of Sanskritic caste-Hindu culture elites there: it sharply rejects much of their tenets and style but other Hindu thought-patterns indelibly intersperse its communications. Although so alert to human suffering, it can resist it with resignation, humor and endurance as often as rebellion. The religion has significant conservative and cautious features, and links of style it admittedly

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[1]Poem by Surendra Chandra Biswas, "Kormophol" (The Fruits of Actions), *Harisevak* (September 1977): 52.

atomizes or restructures, that can connect adherents to the caste-Hindu mainstream that it condemns.

SOCIETY AND THE RECTIFICATION OF RELIGION

Through the protest sect's permutations, all Matua writings have critiqued orthodox caste-Hindu religious discourse as a weapon by which caste-Hindus numb the Untouchables and justify their systematic exploitation. Throughout India's history, a minute number of privileged intellectual Brahmans have divided the huge majority into myriad castes and groups. Their machiavellian control-techniques make the victim castes forget the immortal universe from which they come, and pursue various transgressions and adulterations to their own harm or destruction. It is in just this confused era, where he alone could indicate the ideal, true path to men, that Sri Harichand appears with a religion for householders.[1]

This is a protest religion that while reversing — or turning inside out — many tenets and motifs of Hinduism redirects others for its own class and theological purposes. The Matuas gave their own twist to the Vedic theme of the four cyclic *yugas* or ages (already popularized in Bengal by Chaitanya's Vaishnavas): the Satya *yuga* of wisdom and religion, the *Treta* and *Dwapar yugas* of gradual decline of religion, and our present *Kali yuga* of strife, ignorance, irreligion and vice. Matuas currently believe that at the close of the fourth (*Kali*) era, Harichand Thakur plays his pastimes with his followers/devotees (bhokto) of these four ages. He shows mankind a Path that can transform them into one single big caste or nation. Drawing upon — but in part also reversing — Vyasadev, the Matua writers and orators argue that the *Kali yuga*, as the youngest, is the greatest of these four ages. Standing the Brahmans' sanctified hierarchy on its head, they contend that the Shudra caste is the greatest among the four castes. (Sometimes they identify "the female caste" as that greatest [Shrimommot Ronjin Mondol 1988]: the marginal Matuas' deconstruction of the UC high-texts' hierarchical opposition of the sexes may yet make women central in Bengal). "Lord" Harichand Thakur "appears" in this Shudra "lowest" caste: from it he distributes the holy

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[1]Shrimommot Ronjon Mondol, "Harichand Mishoner 10m Borsho Purti Utshob 1987" (1987 Function in Celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the Harichand Mission), *Harisevak* (March-December 1988): 13-14.

name/mantra of Hari, calling all to him. "The name of Hari is the chief seed-mantra of all the scriptures of religion": but to take or receive this spell-mantra, one has to be a follower of the Matua religion innovated by Harichand Thakur — simultaneous rejection of the Hindu sects and acceptance of their Sanskrit books as having recorded some truths. [1]

The *Sri Sri Harililamrita* scripture even stated that there are only two real castes — males and females: no other caste exists, and everyone must eat rice out of one pot together.[2] The sect's founders thus erased at a stroke the religion-prescribed compartmentalization of society that had awarded supremacy to Hindu upper-caste males and subordinated the Untouchables. The denial that sexual abstinence and withdrawal offered any increase in holiness, which could be better pursued by the married, delegitimized the celibacy with which the Brahmanical clergy validated its hegemony over society. It is to be noted, though, that there seem no passages in early Matua writings that would propel the converts to try to dislodge the top castes with the violence or struggle pursued by Arab-influenced Muslim sects among the Bengali peasantry. The abolition of segregated dining expressed the universalistic thrust of Matuaism, articulated as an open invitation to anyone who wants to join: Brahmans could become Matuas like anybody else, in its totalistic reversal of their ideology. In practice, the sect has remained overwhelmingly Dalit in its membership and thus ethnically particularist.

The sect's division of time into four great periods was taken from the key *Bhagavadgita* scripture accepted by both advaita and personalist Hindus. Stressed by the populist Vaishnavism that was a stimulus to the birth of the Matua among Bengal's least lettered, the *Bhagavadgita* has continued to intermittently interest the Matua SCs.

THE REMEMBERED PRE-MODERNIZING DEVELOPMENT OF THE MATUAS

The quality of the sect's early leaders assured that it would spread widely in Bengal, and last. By 1867 Tarak Chandra Sarkar

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[1]Ibid., p. 14. For the four *yugas* in Gaudiya Vaishnav thought, see discussion of *Bhagavadgita* Ch. 8:17 by Prabhupad, Bhaktivedanta Archives Folio Corporation Infobase (1991).

[2]Mondol, "Harichand Mishoner..." p. 14.

was winning fame in *kobigan*, a kind of popular song in the form of question and answer between two professional folk-versifiers which he made a vehicle to praise Harichand. At that time most people of some areas he evangelized had been initiated into the Vaishnava religion of Gauda, an area of then Bengal. The new Untouchables-led sect was building upon, and fulfilling, past activity of Vaishnavism, which already had denounced the Orthodox Brahmanical clergy for their Islam-like impersonalist-unitarian view of God and had had impulses to convert Untouchables and Muslims as well as caste-Hindus to a restructured Hinduism. Tarak "made them understand by discussion of scriptures" (sic) that Rama and Krishna are identical and that Krishna himself had re-incarnated as Gauranga Chaitanya to rescue the sinners by bestowing the name of Hari among all, even the Untouchables — and that "this Gauranga himself [then] reincarnated as Harichand Thakur at Orakandi with the full power." Although Saint Tarak Sarkar addressed the masses of East Bengal, he (following the also anti-caste Vaishnavas who slimmed down and personalized Hindu worship) was scanning support from the Vedic scriptures and Puranas containing the ancient mythologies of the UC Hindus. Tarak meant to blend the folk-protest of the sect with the high learning of the Brahmanic enemy. [1]

In competing to win over a wider range of rural groups, the early Matua hit back from the ancient Sanskrit scriptures against caste-Hindus ready to deride them as illiterate. In doing that, though, the sect was internalizing more materials from the *Vedas*, *Vedanta*, *Puranas*, *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Its post-World War II neo-bourgeois publicists currently justify from this pioneer history their own accelerating acculturation to the Bengali ruling castes whose supremacism they resist.

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[1]Debendralal Biswas Thakur, "Mohakobi Shadhok Tarak Sarkar", *Harisevak* p. 29. For "the learned Brahmans'" respect for Tarak's knowledge of the ancient Sanskrit scriptures, see Nani Gopal Das, *Kobi Roshoraj Tarak Gonshai* (Calcutta: Sri Biddut Kumar Dash, 1982) pp. 43, 162. The personalist-bhakti movement launched in Bengal by Chaitanya called for members of all four Hindu castes to convert: indeed, it offered to accept Chandal Untouchables and Muslims if they only vibrated the purifying Hare Krishna mantra —- infuriating his anti-personalist *advaita* UC enemies. See *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, Madhya Lila Ch. 15:108 and Adi Lila Ch. 17:211-212, including Prabhupad's discussion (Bhaktivedanta Infobase, 1991). See fn 36.

Saint Tarak Chandra's followers came to accept that, as the representative of the power of Lord Harichand Thakur, he could, for instance, miraculously check the fury of the elements. Today's neo-bourgeoisie has its own special desperations that need such texts. Once Tarak had a contract to sing *kobigan* during *Durgapuja* at the house of a landlord in Bahar in present-day Bangladesh. While crossing the infamous Padma River, a furious tempest caught him and his repeater-singers in midstream. Tarak Chandra continued to implore Harichand, the Father and Savior of the world, to save them from drowning by sitting outside the roof of the boat. One repeater, *Kali*charan, when the boat berthed safely, justified that he had not felt fear or prayed like the others because Harichand had bound himself to answer Tarak's prayers (c. 1867). [1]

This unlimited trust in such pioneer leaders and poets of the sect as Tarak, not just in the incarnate Harichand and his family, is still held up as prescriptive in the late twentieth century. The urbanized neo-bourgeois Matua today have the odds against them like their rural forbears and crave authoritative religio-political leaders as Bengal's society rots and breaks.

The Matuas could never quite shake off the contamination from their Untouchable background, but Tarak's concert in a landowner's house instanced better acceptance that some upwardly mobile Matuas were to win across a range of castes and classes. During the *kobigan* in the landlord's courtyard, rival versifiers used enchantment to distort the voice of Tarak and his repeaters. Tarak prayed to Harichand to come to his aid again, as on the river: if he performed the *kobigan* poorly next day "then I will never be called back again for *kobigan* here." On the 9th lunar day, the last of the *kobigan*, Tarak Sarkar's exquisite performance brought the intent audience to tears. The landlord, enjoying the song from his second-storey balcony, suddenly saw behind Tarak on the stage a small luminous boy — it was a guise taken by Harichand who gave word to Tarak that He would always remain with him. The "pious" landlord at once guessed why the singing of Tarak had not been good for the last two days, and summoned the rival versifier for reproof. [2]

Earlier rustic Matuaism did offer talented Bengali Untouchables such as Tarak Chandra Sarkar, self-confidence and did lead some rich caste-Hindus in a way to accept them as better than pre-conversion Untouchables. The opportunities this opened

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[1]Biswas, pp. 29-30.

[2]Ibid., pp. 30-31.

up for the first generation were limited if not precarious. Tarak Chandra must often have been strapped for cash: he sometimes had to appear with rivals in a single concert and his fear of not getting reinvited shows that neither his voice, his poetical talent nor his sanctity always offered a very assured livelihood.

The current Matua neo-bourgeois counter-elite has been touched by the Rationalist stream in the caste-Hindu "Bengal Renaissance." They may maintain the aura of the miraculous around the sect's early pioneers as a sort of aestheticism or ethnic memory of bygone beliefs. Or they may still need it for their own — somewhat different — caste-travails.

SELF-MODERNIZATION AND WHITE CHRISTIANS

A Matua bourgeoisie or elite that could aspire to careers in the professions crystallized in the early twentieth century. Its emergence took place inside structures that Western Christian missionaries either had constructed, or played indispensable roles within. There thus was a possibility that the solidifying elite might opt for Christianity and either withdraw from the Dalit community or lead it to collective conversion. The choices with which Christian missions confront the Matua remain contentious in the 1980s and 1990s as Hindu revivalists seek to banish them from India.

A great achievement of Guruchand Thakur was to obtain jobs in government service from 1907 for some educated Namasudra youth. They included his son Sashibhusan Thakur who became a sub-registrar and one of the first government employees among the Dalits in India; Kumud Bihari Mallick, a deputy magistrate; and Mohanlal Biswas who became a police Sub-inspector. After that, other Matuas entered the Legislative Council as representatives of the lower castes: Biswanath Das (advocate) of Orakandi and Nirod Behari Mallik (the brother of magistrate Kumud Babu) as representatives of the Khulna and Barisal districts of present-day Bangladesh. The Matua elite thus was still small, shaky and ingrown, drawing its members from a narrow cluster of families that still resided in, or kept roots in, the sect's East Bengal matrix. The MPs from current Bangladesh may have been the first parliamentarians in India from the Dalits.

The educational institutions essential in Matua self-improvement offered the best means for foreign missionaries to replace Namasudra identity. Orakandi High School was

established in 1908 by the Australian missionary C.S. Mead, although with the energetic aid of Guruchand Thakur. The Matua leader well knew how badly his poor community needed not just literacy in Bengali but the English-medium education that was beginning to open up positions of equality with caste-Hindus in the professions. As the leader of the rural Namasudra masses, Guruchand gave the impression that he might one day become a Christian. With the Holy Bible being read out for one hour every day in the school that bore his name, Mead saw few obstacles to Christianize the Matuas over the long term. Guruchand, though, kept putting off his ever-imminent conversion on various pretexts. To confirm Mead's belief that he might soon become a Christian, Guruchand from 1907 ordered *Durgapuja* to be stopped at his house, — echoing Mead's preachings against "idols." [1]

The Matua elite, solidifying from among Bengal's poorest, was realistic about the resources they had to get to survive in the new India. If they led Mead on, this was with affection for a man to whom they owed so much. Their reading ran that the missionary thought it the best strategy to Christianize these uneducated men as the end-product of giving them education. To precipitately convert Guruchand as an individual might harm long-term Christianization if it cost his key functions for the progress of this community. [2]

Guruchand Thakur suspended *Durgapuja* — the worship of the Goddess *Durga* in early autumn — only briefly in his household. Clearly, the missionaries were becoming able to psychologically pressure the shaky Matua proto-elite to adjust their religious beliefs and practice. The reintroduction of the ritual, though, showed the strength of the links of belief and ritual that Untouchables in Bengal had with the whole range of Hindu classes in the province. There is no mention of *Durga* in the *Gita*, but she came to be conceived in later Hinduism as a female warrior who destroys giant *asuras*: she also is connected to plant life and fertility.[3] Bengal's whole non-Muslim society was

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[1]Debendralal Biswas Thakur, "Shridhamer Durgapuja", *Harisevak* (September 1977): 36. The cloaked tug-of-wills between the missionaries and Guruchand's Matuas in this period is examined by Bandyopadhyay in "Namsudra Movement in Bengal" pp. 189-191.

[2] "Shridhamer..." p. 36.

[3]Durga is portrayed in the Puranas as the female warrior who annihilates ashuras: as Mother Kali she destroyed the giant Raktavija — but she is also linked to plant life. In Durga's principal temple in Calcutta, seven to eight hundred goats are slaughtered during the Durga Puja in the

brought together after a fashion by rituals articulated in the ancient Sanskrit writings of the Brahmans. Current Matuaist intellectuals are aware of the *Mahabharata's* narration that the king Surath first introduced this *Puja* in spring, a timing that had to be shifted when Rama's wife was carried off by Sri Lanka's demon king Ravana: Rama had to rescue Sita without delay, and had to miss that *Puja*. Debendralal Biswas and other recent elite Matuaists thus see *Durgapuja* as a product of a classical high Sanskrit milieu, not of submerged outcaste or Dravidian groups. It then, though, gradually spread to pervade all social groups in Bengal: "previously this *Puja* was done by the Kings, and after that, landlords and the rich used to worship *Durga* personally by spending much money"; the declining landholding classes, though, have been long ago displaced by new rich classes: only a few members of these do this *Puja*, which has now changed into a public *Puja* done by the Ganadevata or collectivity of the common people in a body in West Bengal and Bangladesh. [1]

The presence of a *Durga* shrine-room in the house of Guruchand instanced the influx of Upper-Caste patterns as the protest-sect's proto-elite became easier-off.[2] Given that ritual worship of *Durga* was so woven into Bengali peasant life, Guruchand Thakur faced pressure from villagers and his family to re-introduce the *Puja* again in his house after he suspended it in 1907. The current systematicizing-Matuaist elite's narrative of how his household came to re-worship *Durga* again does also transmit a certain troubled conscience or sense of cultural loss in the turn-of-century proto-elite: were the missionary benefactors harming their psyche more than expected? Towards the end of night one early autumn, Guruchand saw a sickly-looking woman standing in front of his house with folded hands. Since it was still so dark, Guruchand mockingly asked her who she could be to disturb him. "I am the wife of Shiva. No one will truly worship me if you abolish it in your house...I need the *Puja* of your house

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autumn: pigs, fowls, sheep and water-buffaloes are also immolated. Margaret and James Stutley, *A Dictionary of Hinduism: Its Mythology, Folklore and Development, 1500 BC-AD 1500* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul) p. 82.

[1] "Shridhamer Durgapuja" p. 30.

[2]The siting of the Durga mandap in the palatial home of Ramachandra Khan, and his use of it to assert his separation from and supremacy over early Vaishnavas, drawn from a range of "contaminating" castes, was set out in *Chaitanya Charitamrita's* Anta Lila Ch. 3:150-164 with discussion by Prabhupad (Bhaktivedanta Infobase, 1991).

that accords with Vaishnav rules...Your sons are like my sons" — and, with a smile, Guruchand assented. [1]

This narrative symbolizes the frame of mind of the rustic Matua community at the time of the most serious drive by Christian forces to sever its already tense and attenuated link with Hinduism. On one hand, leading Matuas already patronizingly saw many gods, goddesses and demigods of Hinduism as marginal for their group, and might sacrifice them. Simultaneously, of course, those gods and goddesses continued in their psyches, although Harichand and Guruchand were affirmed as co-gods or superior gods in the affection that remained. While the proto-elite felt it was an option to keep linked to sectors of Hinduism now secondary for them, it would strongly assert "the Matua people" as the entity that might keep directing rituals to such deities as *Durga*.

Such connections with Bengali mainstream Hinduism remained fragile. Those gods had to deliver or else. *Durgapuja* was recommenced at the house of Thakur but then Guruchand stopped it again in 1919. In that year, a prolonged tempest killed innumerable men, animals and birds in Bengal and flattened all but a few houses and plants: the Thakur house, too, was damaged. The devastation ended on the 6th lunar day of *Durgapuja*. In the mandap room of the Thakur house, the idol of *Durga* had been broken. In the situation of suffering throughout Bengal, Guruchand Thakur declared that the broken idol would not be worshipped nor *Durgapuja* be done again at the Thakur house.

Current *Harisevak* writers relate that a weeping *Durga* again came to the Thakur house by night. Guruchand finally agrees to lodge *Durga* again in his house and conduct *Puja* if she supplies a completely new idol so that he need not reverse his order. That night, *Durga* instructed the sculptor, the priest and the drummer in dreams to attend to the requirements of the *Puja*, which each of them quickly did on the morrow. [2]

Thus, *Durgapuja* was completed after all in 1919 and continued thereafter. Significantly of both that past and of new secular and leftist elements, though, Debendralal Biswas Thakur in 1977 did add the query: "who can say whether the *Puja* would be stopped or not within the remote future?"[3] — (he could, perhaps, be more than lukewarm towards *Durga* only in a Bangladesh where Muslim iconoclasm imperiled her images and houses of

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[1] "Shridhamer Durgapuja" pp. 36-37.

[2] Ibid., p. 37.

[3] Ibid.

worship). Seen in perspective, the connections of the Matuas at the turn of century to mainstream Hindu belief-motifs and rituals had been weakened but remained too multifarious for the missionaries to cut through. The current elite, though, has little enthusiasm for these beliefs and rituals primarily articulated from Hindu castes that still ill-treat Bengal's Untouchable populations. Indeed, post-independence parliamentarism has now invested politics itself with a religious potency for all castes. The politicized united people acquires an "unlimited" collective power that makes it collectively god-like (*Ganadevata*). The Goddess *Durga* does not become angry as before when the rules of *Puja* are broken because now any action could backfire against her. The titanic power of the Ganadevata (divine people) of India, in order to establish the Janata Government, could sweep away the Congress government of 30 years. In West Bengal, many more *Durgapujas* are done in comparison to other provinces of India: its Ganadevata established the Left Front Government, more radical than the Janata. [1]

The ambivalence to Western Christians who hold out modernity as a bait continues today in literate-elite protest neo-Matuaism. In the more positive vein, elite Matuaists asked this researcher, as an Australian, to help them locate the descendants of Dr. Mead in Adelaide: without the education he gave they might not have made it into modernity. More negatively, the Matuas have striven to learn from the missionaries as predatory rivals who have to be blocked. To incorporate and transform the Namasudra masses, the Matua systemizers around the Harichand mission have tried to imitate the free medical clinics with which the Western competitors have forced the most destitute to consider "Christ" in Calcutta. (By the 1990s, the Matuaists were setting up badly-needed clinics in remote villages for destitute Dalits[2]). And the Matuas have some much more hostile emotions still, given the pressure of the missionaries that their unequal patients pay with their souls for the modern education needed to break out of

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[1] Ibid.

[2]Details of the Harichand Mission's early development of free medical services in Calcutta are given in "Matua Dhormer Ogrogotir Protik Harichand Mishoner Prothom Barshik Shobha" (Harichand Mission's First Annual Meeting Marks Matua Religion's Progress), *Harisevak* (March 1978): 18-19. A decade later, it was establishing homeopathic centres in remote villages for destitute SCs: see Godai Ray, "Harichand Thakur Homeo Datobbo Chikitsalay (Harichand Thakur Homeopathic Charitable Clinic [in Jhakari village, Hoogli]), *Harisevak* (March 1992): 37-38.

malnutrition. In this mood, the Matuas could even link up with Hindu revivalists — caste-enemies — to jointly expel all Christian missionaries from India.

AMBIVALENT CONFLICT WITH HINDUISM

All the shifts and mutations in Hinduism as it grapples with ongoing modernity from the West act both to (a) make Matua religion more distinct but also (b) to draw it and the adherents into India's religious mainstream that will continue to be led and extensively defined by high-caste Hindus. It is in religion that Biswas and his Matua ultras strive to most radically differentiate their sect-ethnos from the overall Indian mainstream (not just from West Bengal and its "Marxist" political establishment). While they want to revolutionize the way that caste Hindus view their sector of Indian Untouchables, this ambivalent drive to wrest recognition as a category from the mainstream at the same time seeks to achieve control over the masses of their own community.

The lead-up to the 1991 Indian census brought out this duality of the magazine. A *Harisevak* editorial — more than the Indian Central government's promotion of "Hindu" as a category — rather rebuked the eagerness of most followers of Harichand Thakur to return themselves as Hindus in the forms. "If, when the census is held, we entered our religion as Matua, comparison with the preceding census would enable us to understand what is the number of Matua adherents in India and Bangladesh, and whether our religion is advancing or going backwards."[1] Self-classification as Hindus by most of the Matua poor was condemned here by a man who had attended some Hindu conferences — were Debendralal Biswas' elite heightened-Matuaists themselves so much more radical or independent?

Today's neo-bourgeois Matua systemizers remain very aware of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's efforts to legislate rights and opportunities for SCs within India's institutional parliamentary politics. For the time, the neo-Matuaists stress religious separation as the priority before Bengal's SC masses: Ambedkar's dual approach interests them, but they believe that his choice of Buddhism was not right for the religious separation component.

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[1]Editorial, "Matua Dhormo O Adam Shumari" (The Matua Religion and the Census), *Harisevak* (March 1990): 1.

Rather, the perceived supra-Bengal ethnic group has to have a religion that it originated from within itself to address subordination — Matuaism.[1] Pan-Indian as much as Bengal-centred in attitudes, Thakur's group has recently started to produce missionary literature in Hindi to convert Harijans in the Hindi belt to their restructured Matuaism.

Although in spasms frequently very hostile to Hinduism, *Harisevak* articles are not a clear call to secede from it in toto. The most angry attacks on sectors of Hinduism stop short of dismissing all of it as a single fraudulent system. *Harisevak* has the same historical frame as South India's *Dalit Voice*: "Hinduism's long history of four to five thousand years." Over these millennia, "small numbers of people" at regular intervals "start oppressing the majority of people in diverse ways in ruining Hinduism by slipping diplomatic distortions" into it. This formulation recognizes that sectors of Hinduism had been good or at least neutral and a further spasm had the impulse to recognize a corrective mechanism within Hinduism that is akin to one of its mainstream concepts: when social supremacism threatens the religion, "then God assumed human form to rescue Hinduism and the oppressed people — God appeared in India as an *avatar* incarnation of God." When in this mood, recent neo-bourgeois Matuaism can still connect itself in a continuum to caste-Hindu reformers who became accepted by lettered orthodox Hinduism: "Sri Gauranga Chaitanya and [Vaishnav] Srinivas were the incarnations in the period of the Muslim administration while Harichand Thakur was the *avatar* during the British Rule." [2]

In this impulse, although very excisive of much of Hinduism, Debendralal Biswas still wants to spare some of that

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[1]Debendralal Biswas Thakur has argued at length that the Matua religion and not Buddhism is the creed to which Untouchables in all provinces of India have to convert as the pathway to separation and liberation from caste-Hindus in *Boddho Dhormo O Matua Dhormer Shomikha* (Calcutta: Matua Literary Council, 1991).

[2]"Shampadikio: Dhormo O Rajniti" (Editorial: Religion and Politics), *Harisevak* (December 1977): 60. One of Gaudiya Vaishnavism's crucial post-Chaitanya leaders, Shrinivas was at the fore of its transition from a despised popular cult to a learned creed officially promoted by local Hindu rulers in Bengal and Orissa: he converted Birhambir, the powerful Malla king of Vana Vishnupur (reigned 1596-1622). Steven Rosen, *The Lives of the Vaishnava Saints: Shrinivas Acharya, Narottam Das Thakur, Shyamananda Pandit* (USA Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: Folk Books, 1992) pp. 15, 48-49, 66.

high tradition which he stretches so that it connects into Matuaism — an incorporative mechanism that has enabled Hinduism to digest many protest movements and enemies. Bengali Untouchable stances, though, are very mercurial. He suddenly becomes angry that most Orthodox Hindus do not include Harichand Thakur's name in the list of the 24 *avatars* and questions if there is any coherent, worthwhile Hindu tradition. It is artificial that Buddhadev ("god" Buddha) has been recognized in this table of *avatars* by Hindu clergy when so many dissimilarities set Buddhism apart from Hinduism. "Where, then", Debendralal taunted the caste Hindus, "are the hindrances to recognize Lord Muhammad and Jesus as Hindu *avatars*?." And after all, how effective have all these avatars really been in "re-establishing the religion"? Debendralal Biswas' sarcasm now almost accepted Jesus and Muhammad as the swords God finally wielded "to teach a good lesson to [a] Hinduism" so repeatedly deaf to correction from avatars. Even all the conversions to egalitarian Christianity and Islam could not make the "selfish" upper caste adherents of Hinduism generous or constructive: for the last time, God "took birth as Harichand in East Bengal." [1]

In spite of the cumulative defections to Islam and Christianity, Debendralal Biswas reflected in 1988, Hinduism's leadership has not grasped the situation. Indira Gandhi — although an ex-Prime Minister of India honored by the world — was not admitted to the Jagannath Temple of Puri (Orissa), just because her (Parsee-born) husband Firoz Gandhi was a convert Hindu. "Moreover, we have come to know that the converted white Vaishnava Hindus of ISKCON staying at Navadwip, too, were also not allowed to enter that same Puri Jagannath Temple." It was one more encounter that underscored to Thakur and his group "that no man can adopt the Hindu religion without a birthright: if anybody takes Hindu religion, he will remain Untouchable." This stubborn segregationism and exclusivity not only blocks novel opportunities to increase Hinduism's populations but may gradually contract the adherents to "zero in course of time." "It is not heard that there is now a single Hindu citizen in Pakistan — and Hinduism could similarly disappear for the same reasons in the future in any province in India." [2]

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[1] "Dhormo O Rajniti", *Harisevak* (December 1977): 60-61.

[2]Debendralal Biswas Thakur, "Matua Dhorme Dikkha O Gurubader Bhumika" (Initiation and the Institution of the Guru in the Matua Religion) *Harisevak* March-December 1988 pp. 18-19. For the development of the cult of Jagannath in Orissa from the thirteenth century, see John Guy, "New

Yet the international missionary Vaishnavism of ISKCON is only one case where the new activist Hinduism models new roles and enterprises for protest Matuaism. Matua MP and lawyer Promothronjon Thakur in 1978 urged Debendralal to proselytize white European and American converts to ISKCON Vaishnavism now living in Chaitanya's birthplace Mayapur: if the faith could be sold, Matua temples would open throughout Europe and America and, indeed, in all countries of the world. [1]

Despite their sharp perception and denunciation of all the ideological justifications of casteist supremacism in Sanskritist high Hinduism, educated Bengali protest Matuas also feel some links to that dominant religion. In one and the same article, a part of Debendralal Biswas wants the Christians and Islam to finish "Eternal" Hinduism in the modern world — but then, on the other hand, he can distinguish good or neutral from evil elements in that high tradition. He imaged a primeval Hinduism with only functional caste-categories that were non-hereditary: if someone had merit, he or she could enter the caste for which he had aptitude and win a livelihood there with no bar to marriage.[2] Even in the 1990s, despite all the totalist antipathy from the South and the Hindi belt to Hinduism, *Harisevak* writers like Debendralal and the late MLA and educationalist Mahananda Halder still sometimes image that Vedic religion and creative, non-hereditary caste only got twisted by a power-hungry elite later on. [3]

Evidence for the Jagannatha Cult in Seventeenth Century Nepal", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (July 1992): 214-219. White American devotees of the Hare Krishna movement with whom I spoke in late 1992 stated without any prompting that the Orthodox Hindu clergy continued to bar them from Puri's Jagannath Temple: "they are very caste-conscious". The cult of Jagannath is a treasured part of ISKCON's Anglophone neo-Hindu culture as we see from the well-written play *Jagannath-Priya Natakam: the Drama of Lord Jagannatha* by Tamal Krishna Goswami (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1985).

[1]Texts of letters, *Harisevak* (March-September 1985): 22-23. Matua devotees who went to Chaitanya's birthplace Mayapur in 1977 managed to perform their sect's Hari kirtan in front of French, American, Australian and other white ISKCON converts in temples. *Harisevak* exulted that those white Western visitors photographed and tape-recorded the Matua kirtan. See *Harisevak* (March 1977): 12.

[2]Debendralal Biswas Thakur, "Matua Dhorme Dikha..." p. 19: he is in part citing Mahanand Haldar here.

[3]Poem of Halder cited by Debendralal Biswas Thakur, "Matua Dhorme Dikha..." p. 19. In a 1992 number, Dr Motindronath Ray approved

There is no doubt that the current Matua elite has maintained all the religion's intermittent sharp sense that Hinduism and its intellectual culture have functioned — if they were not designed — as a weapon of enslavement in the arsenal of a social enemy. Yet they have, on occasion, only selectively rejected old Sanskrit books. The elite has its impulses to further differentiate — or polarize — the Matua as non-Hindu against the Caste-Hindus. Yet, however much the Matua have atomized and restructured Hindu discourse for their own vital interests, the persisting shared vocabulary remains a potential nexus for a new Indianist community. Greater UC readiness to admit Untouchables could very quickly make them feel more Hindu.

Mainstreaming and Indianist Attitudes

The apex academic structures, within which Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Bengalis achieve equal qualifications with the UC elite and become much more like them, concentrate the tensions in society. A minority of elite UC Bengalis can respond with calculated, lethal mental cruelty against SC and ST students whom it is their function to educate to equality. This was underscored by the 1992 suicide of the promising Tribal woman student Chuni Kotal, of the "backward" "criminal" Lodha Aboriginal community at Vidyasagar University, after more than a year of systematic and very public mental torture by a Brahmanist lecturer. [1]

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the vedas as "the creation of the Aryan people" before the supremacism of Brahmans developed. Indeed, the original four-tier caste-system originated by Krishna 5,000 years ago categorized individuals as *brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya* and *shudra* according to their activities and virtues. These categories of functions became hereditary castes only from the Treta yuga: avatars and mahapurush (great men) who took birth on India's soil tried to correct the Brahmanical priest-caste's exploitation but could not. Motindronath Ray, "Dhormo O Dalit Shomaj" (Religion and the Dalits' Society), (*Harisevak* March 1992): 13.

[1]"Chuni Kotaler Attohota" (The Suicide of Chuni Kotal), *Anandabazar Patrika* (20 August 1992). Debashish Bhottacharjo, "Amader Progotir Mukhosh Khule Dilen Chuni Kotal, Tanr Jibon Diye" (By Losing Her Life, Chuni Kotal Has Taken Away Our Progressive Mask), *Anandabazar Patrika* (20 August 1992). More details of the slow-moving inquiries by government ministries against Professor Falguni Chakravarthi following her suicide, and bitter denunciation of Jyoti Basu for "building

BENGALI SANSKRITOID CULTURISM

Eclecticism

Hindu revivalists campaign against reservations (=quotas) for Dalits as discriminatory against merit. Yet, across India, Dalit bourgeoisies have become more like those yuppies as their cultural experiences and new functions have diversified out beyond the resources available to the wretched of the earth amidst whom the Matua sect first took birth. In Bengal, from its popular-rustic origins, the Matua sect has always respected the literate scriptural tradition of the caste-enemy; and the neo-Matuaism of the mid-1980s tried to synthesize (a) that Sanskrit learning, (b) the full extent of Western culture and thought, (c) Ambedkarism's self-improvement drive for education and (d) pristine Matua insights. In the context of the SC thrust for education, Mrs. Jatendra Mitra wove together the attitude of classical Hindus that knowledge (as embodied in the Vedas) was the height of religion with statements by Socrates that ignorance was the eternal and greatest enemy of mankind: "people do evil from ignorance, not choice, and therefore every man should acquire knowledge" (Socrates). Vaishnavism, which considered Chaitanya a reincarnation of Krishna, crucially fostered the emergence of the Matua religion and Mrs. Mitra went to the length of quoting in Sanskrit, and only then translating, statements by Krishna (Gita 9:15; 4:35) viewing knowledge as revealing God. She then quoted Brahman landowner Rabindranath Tagore that knowledge is essential to liberate: now fulfilled in the mass education for which Ambedkar called to bring the uneducated into the mainstream of "the great Indian nation." [1]

The history of cults in Bengal tempts today's Matua elites that protesters on the margin might be able to get into the respectable Hindu mainstream in the end. Harichand Thakur and his first disciples in some ways were already trying to emulate the Sanskrit-steeped bookishness of the once far-from-Orthodox Vaishnavas — whose earlier disregard of caste origins in recruiting is still appreciated by such a current Matua writer as Debendralal Biswas Thakur.[2] By 1984, though, we have an

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brahmanvad in the name of 'Marxism'" are given by Dalit S.R. Biswas, letter in *Dalit Voice* (16-31 January 1993): 13.

[1]Jatendra Mitra, "Proga" (Knowledge), *Harisevak* (March 1984): 2.

[2]Debendralal Biswas Thakur has given (1991) high marks to the

unprecedented multi-lingual acculturated (and culturist) ethos whose self-improvement drive had gone somewhat beyond utilitarian benefits for a caste. The improvement desired had passed beyond dignified functions and salaries, materialism, to cultured discourse now desired for itself. This professional group or constituency still felt social pain as it sharply observed the disparities in Indian life, and, as it uplifted them, kept up enough links to "India's vast backward masses" (Jatendra Mitra's phrase) to qualify as spokesmen.

Ambedkar's own political and intellectual careers had had both (a) more conservative or constructive and (b) radical or revolutionary potentialities. He personally may not have felt so attracted to violence for independent India[1], but he earlier had often been at virulent loggerheads with the Congressite independence movement led by Gandhi, and saw the new national state as precarious. *Harisevak* has never duplicated Ambedkar's total rejection of Hinduism's classical Sanskrit scriptures as unrelievedly depraved and worthless. In accordance with Ambedkar's more appreciative perceptions of good aspects in mainstream India institutions and ideology, the Matuaist counter-elite wants to enter, not dynamite, India. However, its Bengali high culturism may one day open into more affinities to high Hinduism itself than Ambedkar could ever have stomached.

The West — which for Indians in that era meant Britain — always stimulated and tinted the 19th Century UC Bengal Renaissance centred in Calcutta. The current Matua intellectual elite, Westernist with fewer reservations than many modernist Caste Hindus, approves that Western influence and that UC Renaissance for having together loosened up the Indian society and ethos, and thus created openings for later SC entry. Acceptance of this

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early Vaishnavas headed by Chaitanya for "propagating a religion devoid of caste-discrimination". Chaitanya's association with the Chandala Untouchables in Nadia district drew retaliation from Brahmans that forced him to leave. However, the rise of Brahmanism and of sexual license among subsequent Vaishnava adherents after his death destroyed the religion's once-promising egalitarianism and populism. Debendralal Biswas Thakur, *Boddho Dhormo*, pp. 81-82. See footnote 2 on page 37.

[1]Law made up an important component in Dr. Ambedkar's political philosophy: where constitutional means were available, people have no right to resort to violence and unconstitutional methods such as satyagraha, band and dharna — "the Grammar of Anarchy". A.M. Rajshekharia and Hemlata Jayaraj, "Political Philosophy of Dr. B.R Ambedkar", *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 52:3 (July-September 1991): 368.

sector of UC Bengali high literature and high intellectualism, though, opens Bengali Dalits to those elements of Hindu religion and Sanskrit that the Upper Caste practitioners ran into their synthesis, Westernist only in a blended way. Horendronath Bhokto in 1988 saw Harichand Thakur as having been born "at the outset of an era in which Europe's Renaissance was to deal pounding blows to India's rock-rigid Brahmanical culture", but, for all his deep-seated hostility, was alert to synthesis. Raja Rammohan Ray, Keshab Sen and [Rabindranath Tagore's father] Debendronath Thakur were establishing a much-rationalized Brahmanic Religion at the very time that Harichand's teachings were spreading a "realistic awakening" among the low-caste groups in society. Bhokto accepted much more UC high thought in Bengal than many Marxist or Dalitist radicals could tolerate. He saw the assertion of the essential unity of all religions by "god" Ramakrishna [born a poor Brahman] "and his worthy [UC] disciple Vivekananda" — both genuine opponents of caste-discrimination — as having brought out real "democratic" and "humanist" elements latent in Hinduism that also nourished Matuaism.[1] This more conciliatory and thoughtful type of neo-Matuaist writings definitely seeks out more hospitable sectors of the landscape of Hindu Bengal into which the evolving Matua religion can lock for mutual benefit and survival.

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[1]Horendronath Bhokto, "Shrishri Harichand Thakur: Ekti Shamajik Mulayon", *Harisevak* (March-December 1988): 15. Ramakrishna (b. 18 February 1836 at Hoogli: d. 16 August 1886 Calcutta) although a Brahman was born in poverty and had little formal education: he never learnt Sanskrit or English. A worshipper of Kali, Ramakrishna "saw Muhammad" in 1866 and later "saw Jesus" when he studied those scriptures. His disciple Vivekananda (1863-1902) was dedicated to eliminate child marriage and to spread literacy and education among women and the low castes. Vivekananda became the activating force in the Vedanta (interpretation of the Upanishads) movement in the United States and Britain. Debendronath Thakur, another Brahmo Samaj activist, spoke out against suttee self-immolation by widows in Bengal and likewise strove to bring education within the reach of all. He kept more links with Sanskritic Hinduism than Keshab Chander Sen (1838-1884) who supported intercaste marriages and mass education: Sen formed a breakaway Brahmo Samaj much more influenced by Anglo-Saxon Christianity. The most militant Bengali contributors to *Dalit Voice* have argued that Ramakrishna and disciple Vivekananda were subtle caste-supremacists: G.D. Biswas, *Dalit Voice* (16-31 August 1991): 14.

The Matua protest elite uses deconstructed vocabulary and motifs from the high literary language represented by Rabindranath Tagore in part because, with literacy, the environment long ago made it part of their psyche too.[1] Bengal's earlier modern (UC) novelists and poets figure prominently in the private conversations of Matua leaders, who have seen them as providing patterns — despite the class gulf — for their own personalities and careers. This can even endorse figures like the 19th Century novelist Bankimchandra Chatterji (1838-1894) who provided much of the anti-Muslim historical consciousness of Hindu revivalist nationalism across India — including that of the Hindi belt-centred Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS), in conflict with most Dalitist enclavists.[2]

PROVINCE AND CENTER

In tone *Harisevak* has an optimistic expectation that any truly determined government could muster the economic and educational resources to bring development to Untouchables and poor lower castes. It is all a matter of some government in India

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[1]During the 1987 function to mark the Harichand Mission's first decade, Mondol quoted from Tagore's *Gitanjali* in stressing the Matua commitment to "making the country developed". "Harichand Mishoner 10m Borsho Purti..." (The First Decade of the Harichand Mission), p. 13. Debedralal Biswas Thakur printed academic tributes to Rabindranath stressing his contacts with popular Sufism-influenced Baul singers and his progression from worship of idols to humanist worship of Man and of God manifested in the World. Dr. Girindronath Das, "Rabindranather Manobotabade Uttaron" (Rabindranath's Transition to Humanism), *Harisevak* (September 1978): 66-68.

[2]When they met in 1977, *Harisevak* editor Debendralal Biswas Thakur and lawyer and MP Promothronjon Thakur — son of the great Guruchand — engaged in cherishing chitchat about such UC early-modern Bengali Hindu writers as "the World-Poet" Rabindranath Thakur and the [anti-Muslim] novelist Bankimchandra Chothopadhai (Chatterji). Bankimchandra's reluctance to meet people was not really "arrogance" but his only way to find the time to write "immortal jewels of literature" while also working as a deputy magistrate. Debendralal Biswas Thakur cited Bankimchandra to clear Promothronjon Thakur of his reputation of being withdrawn and remote. "Shri Promothronjon Thakur Mohashayer Shonge Ekta Shakhatkar" (A Meeting With the Great Promothronjon Thakur), *Harisevak* (September 1978): 62-65.

taking a decision. The local — as its militant-sounding verbalism goes, Communist or "Socialist" — West Bengal administration of Jyoti Basu, though, is not that government as against a more conservative Indian Center. West-based publicists may look for culturo-political tensions between (a) the regionalist elites in India's peripheral states and (b) that elite which administers or economically leads from its Hindi heartland. The politicized Matuaist protest Dalitism, though, focuses sourly upon an immediate Bengali caste-elite that legitimates its hegemony (with timely restructurings) through charade-leftism. [1]

If educational and economic conditions were improved, caste distinctions would lessen, Debendralal allowed. But West Bengal's Left Front government was carrying forward a dual education policy almost calculated to keep the Untouchable class under the control of the 25% of the population with the powerful positions. On the one hand, the left administration had downgraded English in ordinary primary schools; on the other, it fostered English-medium secondary colleges mainly concentrated in urban areas, where 80% of the 25% who are upper-class/upper-caste live. It was children and adolescents from the affluent families who could afford to get educated in those schools in the international language English, the vehicle of science that qualifies for high positions. In contrast, the poor educated in Bengali-medium schools will only win jobs as petty clerks, peons and in modest numbers as second-class gazetted officers, since English-medium educations are the pre-condition for first-class posts. The Bengali-medium schools of the hierarchist, manipulative Left Front government were thus the factories it had designed to produce a new subordinate shudra class. However, "the shudras" were no longer so easily "brain-washed by the egalitarian or socalist mantra" beneath which the Brahmans carried forward their supremacy. As the 1984 elections approached, the "religious, literary" *Harisevak* incited the Untouchables to withhold their vote from CPM leader Jyoti Basu. In its most threatening (but isolated) twinge at the slowness with which opportunities were being spread

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[1]Western academics who long credited Basu with radical agrarian and other socio-economic reforms. A recent revisionist study, though, saw Basu's agrarian and other reforms as having failed to deliver benefits to the masses because of UC elite dominance over the bureaucracy. Ross Mallick, "Agrarian Reform in West Bengal: The End of an Illusion", *World Development* 20:5 pp. 735-750. See also Mallick, *Development Policy of A Communist Government: West Bengal Since 1977* (Cambridge University Press: South Asian Studies Series, 1993).

out forty years since independence, the editorial wondered if further partitions awaited India. [1]

Yet, with affirmative action, some mainstreaming Untouchables had got jobs within state bodies and the Dalitists' quarrel was with the levels. The ultra-Matuaist intellectuals, shaky in many aspects, still had observed (local) caste-Hindu social engineering and manipulation closely and wanted to wrench official etatist Indian ideals and institutions over the other way so that such procedures as elections really could empower and help the poor (or the poorer). They would not foster subnationalism or more partitions against the Centre, even if a part of their fuming psyche still saluted Jinnah in 1984, because they resist precisely the vivid regional elite that manipulates the same language — shadow-boxes as the champion of a Bengali subnation against Hindi-speakers — mainly just to enrich its cluster of classes and castes. Instead of seeking a geographical nation with Bengali-speaking UC peers, Matua professionals rather are now thinking of intermarriage with the parallel professional elites of other Dalit language groups in India as a whole. [2]

Harisevak editor Debendralal Thakur Biswas migrated from East Pakistan in the late 50s: his worried efforts to improve the prospects for Bangladesh Matua Untouchables by dissociating them from Hinduism are not served by the West Bengal Matua leadership's links to Indian nationalism. Alienated from the high-caste West Bengal provincial administration of Jyoti Basu, Biswas and his colleagues tried to link up with the farther-away Indian mainstream centered in New Delhi and led by the Indian National

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[1]Editorial "Bam Front Shorkarer Shikhaniti Notun Shudrajati Srishti Korchhe" (The Left Front Government's Education Policy Creates a New Shudra Caste), *Harisevak* (March 1984): 1-3. For militant Dalitist denunciation of the Basu regime as a facade for upper-caste (Brahman-Vaidya-Kayastha) supremacy, and denial that the associated "leftist intellectuals" of Calcutta — "the sacred thread Marxists" — really have any genuine conflict with their expanding Hindu revivalist caste-cousins, see "Why Rulers Worship Communist Cow?", *Dalit Voice* 1-15 (December 1991): 15,.45.

[2]See proposal by Bengali Dalit engineer Bikas Kusum Roy that *Dalit Voice* allot one or two pages for matrimonial advertisements to foster "inter-state matrimonial relationship among Dalits throughout India to help them come closer": as a handsome assistant engineer of 30 years serving under the West Bengal government, Roy "wants a bride below 25 years, preferably a doctor of any state but Dalit": *Dalit Voice* (September 15-30 1992): 11.

Congress Party of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi as an alternative center of power. The emotionalist excesses of this outreach to the far-away metropolis showed the pervasive, if sometimes almost unconscious, appeal the culture of that modern ruling class had on even poorer classes of provincial societies such as West Bengal's. In a rare printing of English materials so that New Delhi would see, a mid-1985 issue of *Harisevak* carried a tribute to Indira, "the savior of Democracy" cut down by "the traitor's gun": "sacrificing her life, she gave us [Indians] integration"; "she had become the Mother of India, nay, of Bangladesh also"; "she taught the world how to use nuclear devices in peaceful purposes." This was far from the Bangalore *Dalit Voice*'s exaltation of "the brave Sikhs" and stress on the Dalit ethnic descent of her Sikh assassin. The same *Harisevak* issue published the English text of the appeal by the Harichand Mission's General-Secretary Debendralal Biswas to the Norwegian Nobel Prize Committee to confer its Peace Prize on the late Indira, who like her late father Jawaharlal worked "to save mankind from the total destruction of nuclear warfare and settlement of international disputes by arbitration." The issue carried PM Rajiv Gandhi's greetings to the Mission, pledging to achieve "National Unity ... and faster transformation."[1] Perhaps much more than his Anglophone grandfather Nehru, Rajiv was West-orientated. Past preparedness of this group of Bengali writers to rein their antipathy to Brahmans and attend all-Indian Hindu religious conferences were more attempts to align with India's overall secularoid supra-Bengali system.[2] This, though, has been shifting over towards neo-Hindu fundamentalism much more than some aging Matua litterateurs understood until, on 6 December 1992, those revivalists demolished the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya.

Clearly, these Dalit-Bengali writers could not pattern after that more radical (or vituperative) opposition to the foreign policy of the Indian establishment articulated from Southern India by the Bangalore *Dalit Voice* which took China's side in the territorial dispute and flirted with anti-Hindu Pakistan and Bangladesh. In regard to verbal fire against the Indian mainstream's icons, such

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[1]*Harisevak* (March-September 1985): 2-4.

[2]Debendralal Biswas Thakur at the last moment angled an invitation to address the Vishva Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) about Matua religion and prepared an elaborate English speech but was unable to deliver it. "Amar Chokhe Proyat Promoth Thakur" (My Impressions of the Late Promoth[ronjon] Thakur), *Harisevak* (March 1991): 13.

tribunes as the Bangalore *Dalit Voice* and the Hindi Anarya Bharat ("Non-Aryan India") have denounced the Hinduoid Indian Nationalism articulated by Mahatma Gandhi, including his call to incorporate the Untouchables, as an elaborate strategy to maintain the supremacy and wealth of the caste-Hindus. In contrast, *Harisevak* published a 1985 article that depicted Gandhi in a conventional way as "the Father of the Nation" who since childhood had rebelled against the practices of Untouchability in his extended family: when he found that Untouchables had been put on the margin of a Congress rally, Gandhi walked over and delivered his speech from among them.[1] These Calcutta-based Matuaists' conventionally Indianist and integrationist stances thus were more endorsive of the system than both the old Maharashtra-centered Ambedkarism which had loathed Gandhi and the new Dalit enclave-nationalist confrontationists.

Harisevak's drive to draw the Central Government more into West Bengali society and politics serve the improved class position that sector of adherents has achieved. Biswas and his Matuaist faction accept tepid routinized expression of Hinduism within Congress because that Party's westernist drives and modernism are expected to forestall RSS-style Hindu revivalism. This recourse to the mainstream was well instanced by *Harisevak*'s advice to the incumbent Rajiv Gandhi in 1985. The journal urged the center to ban communalist political parties — besides the RSS, would this include the Jama'at-i-Islami that his mother had imprisoned during the Emergency? — ; to block the concealed inflows of funds with which the Arab countries were so skillfully and energetically converting Untouchable populations in such villages as Meenakshipuram; to bar foreign Christian missionaries from India; to raise the salaries of dedicated teachers and to end disorder in schools by forbidding pupils from joining the political parties or forming proxy student unions. [2]

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[1]Dibbendu Bhushan Mitra, "Harijan", *Harisevak* (March-June 1985): 18-19. Ordinarily, even usually mild or conservative Bengali Dalit writers are hostile to the official cult of Gandhi: cf. Nani Gopal Das, *Was Gandhi a Mahatma?* (Calcutta: Dipali Book House, 1988).

[2]Editorial, "Dhormo O Rajniti" (Religion and Politics) *Harisevak* (March-June 1985): 8-12. The Harijan writer here was echoing the fears of Bengali caste-Hindus for whom insurgency in Muslim-majority Kashmir was to be just another thrust by a "pan-Islamic lobby which is busy turning India into a Muslim-majority state. The lobby wants to erase the saffron patch of Hindu India which does not match with the green of the Darul-Islam which extends from the arid lands of North Africa and West Asia to

These proposals sought a protector to counter the local Bengali caste-Hindu elite organized around a post-Marxist party; and to foster the class growth of the rickety Matua elite. This group was ready to function as a junior partner or auxiliaries in a drive by Congress from Delhi to sweep the Bengali UC "Marxists" out of those structures within which they had flourished the most. The ascription of mass conversions to Islam in Southern India to Arab petro-dollars was a lapse for an Untouchable journal elsewhere very well aware that ill-treatment and degradation made Tamil Nadu Dalits seize Islam as a protest emblem that would draw sanctions from Indian society. The journal was surely echoing the paranoia of the Hindu-revivalist right in its exaggeration of Arab institutionalization, knowledge and evangelizing effectiveness in India.[1] As in regard to missionaries, *Harisevak* appeased the limited Hinduist concerns in the Congress while offering help to crush parties now escalating those to carry off and hijack Hindu middle-class and mass voters. A more mainstream insensitivity was the editorial's justifications for the storming of the Golden Temple: the pro-Khalistan Sikhs who barricaded themselves there had been engaged in a conspiracy to dismember India, and three quarters of Indians in giving their votes to Congress after Indira's murder had signaled their resolve to allow no further partition. *Harisevak* here did not mention the

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the lush green of Islamic Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia up to the Philippines. The zealots of pan-Islam are spending billions of petro-dollars to speed up [the] conversions. Fifty million Bangladeshi Muslims are poised to enter India to effect a bloodless coup". Jagat Bandhu Mukherjee, "Pan-Islam", letter in *The Statesman Weekly* (2 May 1992): 10.

[1]A dispassionate and empathic discussion of the social contempt that led Tamil Pallar Untouchables to convert to Islam was Ayappa Prasad, "Why Harijans are Converting to Islam in Ramanathapuram", *Sunday Observer* (Bombay) (27 December 1983): 2. This observer found no sign of Arab petro-dollars or fresh prosperity after the mass conversions, which had to brave considerable harrassment by the Tamil Nadu police. S.H. Venkatramani (1984) tended to agree with local police that the greater likelihood of getting contracted for work in the Gulf countries was one "allurement" for young Harijans considering conversion to Islam in rural Tamil Nadu: they remitted considerable sums back to their converted families. Yet, this account, too, documented prior exclusion and violence by (often themselves only humble) caste-Hindus, and harrassment by the Tamil Nadu police that only took new forms after the conversions: Islam was a rallying-point. "Conversions: the Gulf Stream", *India Today* 31 January 1984, 32-33.

terrible communal massacres of Sikhs in New Delhi that followed the Indira assassination.[1]

ATTITUDES TO MUSLIMS AND MUSLIM STATES

The elite protest-Matuas around *Harisevak* at best choose with marked unenthusiasm between Islam and Hinduism, both perceived to have ill-treated the Matua. The marginality, indecision and alienation that these writers voice vis-a-vis the tension between Hinduism and Islam is unlike the attitudes of any caste-Hindu Bengali group.

Debendralal Biswas Thakur swung repeatedly between Hinduism and Islam in the course of just one 1977 article:

Pro-Islam

Christian missions function in every country to propagate Christianity. In contrast, judged from the statistical viewpoint, we find that Hinduism, although the world's oldest creed, shrinks gradually as Islam and Christianity progressively expand at its expense. The English administration came and passed: a fair number of Hindus have embraced, and embrace, Christianity. A Hindu administration never came back in India [=a Congress-like secular interpretation of India's post-independence history]: accordingly, the ratio of Hindus has not been increasing. Rather, the emergence of Pakistan and Bangladesh marks a sort of return of the old Muslim Mogul state power. The infiltrations in the rules of true Hinduism that enable some men to live on without any labor from generation to generation as parasites, virtually forced the lower castes of Hindus gradually to convert to "generous Islam." The upper-caste Hindus did not have it in them to try too hard to hold them in their doomed "Eternal Hinduism."[2]

Anti-Islamic

Debendralal Biswas Thakur had lived in an East Pakistan whose Bengali Muslims categorized him and all Matuas among "the Hindus": he had enough ambivalence to the fate of a self-penalizing Hinduism in which his community was not welcome.

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[1]Editorial, "Dhormo O Rajniti", *Harisevak* (March-June 1985): 9.
[2]Editorial, "Dhormo O Rajniti", *Harisevak* (December 1977): 59.

After the creation of the Pakistan State, almost all the Hindus left West Pakistan (although not East Pakistan, now Bangladesh). A very insignificant number of Dalit leathermen continued to live in Karachi: when, finding no other way, they converted to Islam the India government of upper caste Hindus never tried to save that community, Debendralal reflected bitterly. In the case of the [heavily Dalit] Hindus of East Pakistan (Bangladesh), the Congress Government did not arrange any exchange of populations, as was done in East and West Punjab.[1] [India's caste-Hindus had as little desire for community with Bengali Untouchables as the Pakistani or Bangladesh Muslims did].

Overall, Debendralal Biswas disliked both Hinduism and Pakistani or Bangladesh Muslims in this last swing, but definitely identified more with caste Hindus and India. His response to the final decline of Hinduism in (West) Pakistan was quite different from the totalistic anti-Hinduism of *Dalit Voice* of Bangalore that would hail conversion to Islam by the leather-workers as a decisive liberation.[2] With Debendralal there does remain an iota of the attitude that Hinduism has in it at least parts of the positive self of the Untouchables, that they may be losing things crucial to themselves by converting to Islam (or Christianity). He could prefer Islam to "noxious" caste-Hinduism in rare spasms, but never enthusiastically: here, he felt that the Untouchables would be less harmed in a Hindu milieu and they therefore should be prepared to sacrifice birthplace rather than try to live among Muslims. The problem was the refusal of both major communities, India's Hindus and Pakistani or Bangladesh Muslims, to admit the Untouchables. Debendralal felt more links of culture to the caste-Hindu groups that ran India: any signals by the latter of readiness

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[1]Ibid., pp. 59-60.

[2]*Dalit Voice* in 1991 reproduced an objection by Charles Amjad-Ali, Director of the Christian Study Center in Pakistan, that the 3.5 million Christians there, descended from "lower-caste Hindus", continue to find themselves marginalized and segregated "even though Islam rejects these [allegedly Hinduism-patterned] prejudices". *Dalit Voice* retorted that "Pakistan has no such thing as Untouchability (racism) which is so rampant in India": the church leadership there was itself making the problems for its Dalit-descended adherents by calling them "lower-caste converts when Pakistan's Muslims had "suffered so much at the hands of Hindus". "Untouchables are not 'lower caste' Hindus but the casteless original inhabitants of India". "Warning to Pakistani Church on Dalit Converts", *Dalit Voice* (1-15 December 1991): 15.

to grant real citizenship would make this Bengali sect mute its non-orthodox tenets and outbursts very quickly.

The development of various attitudes to Bangladesh and Islam among West Bengal Dalits since 1971 has been largely determined by (a) the continued difficulties of Bangladesh's Hindu minority[1] and (b) the need of West Bengal Matuas to make those mass pilgrimages into Bangladesh that religiously distinguish them from the caste-Hindus. India geo-politically surrounded smaller Bangladesh on three sides, and various Bangladesh elites since independence have whipped up polarization against India and Hinduism to integrate the nation.

Over the decades, a more and more officially Muslim Bangladesh has vented increasing suspicion of any Indians who want to enter its territory. By the late 1980s, *Harisevak* was protesting the difficulties West Bengali Matuas were meeting when organizing pilgrimages into that foreign country. The annual pilgrimage of thousands of Harichand Mission adherents for the Baruni festival at Orakandi, Bangladesh — a commemoration of Harichand Thakur's birth there in 1812 — was entangled in the pre-doomed relations of the two governments. Protested the Harichand Mission in 1987: every year in February, the Indian High Commission in Dhaka grants Muslim citizens of Bangladesh long-term visas to visit the 'Urs mela (Sufi saint's festival) of the Medinipur District in West Bengal: they can leave in a group by a Bangladesh train. But in the case of pilgrims of the Harichand Mission, the visas granted by the Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Calcutta allow not even a 3 days stay at the Orakandi Baruni festival. This restricted religious experience struck the West Bengal Matua as "abnormal, painful, truncated": they begged the Indian Government to pressure Bangladesh to grant more time.[2]

The Harichand Mission's members perceived that the Orakandi Baruni festival was exposing them to mounting hostility from Muslim Bangladeshis as the years went by. A 1992 editorial

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[1]A clenched-fistedly left overview of the plight of the minorities in Bangladesh, including Untouchables and Tribals, is Francis Rolt, "Racism in Bangladesh: Below the Lowest", *Inside Asia* (July-August 1986): 28-30.

[2]Mondol, "Harichand Mishoner 10m Borsho..." pp. 12-13. Although it had been inconvenient to have to sometimes work through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in New Delhi, the procedure of conducting the pilgrimage into Bangladesh had still been quite workable in 1984. Debendralal, "Mishoner Tritiyo Dibarshik Protibedan" (The [Harichand] Mission's Third Biannual Report), *Harisevak* (March 1984): 5.

on the pilgrimage, by Debendralal Biswas Thakur himself, reviewed the successive encounters, his reactions showing how such frictions can activate real links of the WB Matua to the Indian system and UC Hinduism.

The very real hostility to Indians and Hindus that he was meeting in Bangladesh made him rally to the most unnuanced establishment Indian line of how ungrateful the "fanatical" Bangladesh Muslims proved after the truly secular India sacrificed 18,000 soldiers to liberate them from Pakistan in 1971. Bangladesh's responding identification as a secular state allied to India had not remained tolerable to its Muslims for very long. Biswas recalled in 1992 that, during the 1982 pilgrimage-walk of his Society to Orakandi, a teenager told them to stop playing on their instruments as they passed a tin shed that was an unmarked mosque. A Muslim reprimanded the youth and asked the pilgrims not to lay a charge with the Bangladesh government: this courtesy pleased Debendralal Thakur as a token that Bangladesh was still somehow holding as a secular state in 1982. By the 1990 pilgrimage, he and his colleagues, as their bus drove through the Bangladesh countryside, were scarcely allowed to smoke a cigarette during stops because it was the Ramadan fasting-month. In its more hostile twinges, the editorial doubted that even Mujib and the Awami League that led Bangladesh to independence had been truly secular. The Pakistan Army had destroyed the *Kali* temple in Ramna Park while killing Muslim Bengalis: neither Mujib's nor any subsequent Bangladeshi administration had allowed that temple to be rebuilt, or returned the Hindu minority's property that Pakistan had confiscated. Ergo, there were no secular Bangladeshi Muslims.

There is no doubt that his experiences in Bangladesh were making the *Harisevak* editor identify more as a Hindu. But in one passage, he realized that precisely such wide supra-territorial, compound hyper-identities as Hindu and Muslim — more than anything else — could devastate the Matuas of Bangladesh. Most East Bengali Muslims might be descended from Untouchables who found in Islam their rallying-point against Brahmans. Their vendetta against all whom they classified as "Hindus" thus blended caste with religious antipathy. The Calcutta-resident Debendralal accordingly proposed that the Bangladesh Matuas publicly identify themselves as likewise a non-Hindu protest religion. India's Brahmanical Central and West Bengal governments were all equally unconcerned about what happened to Untouchable "Hindus" in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Matua had a satisfactory ratio of tertiary graduates: a public anti-Hindu stance

by them might lead the Muslims to grant them a fairer number of places in the Bangladesh civil service and parliament.[1]

The writer noted that most Bangladesh Matua considered themselves Hindus. Overall, the editorial manifested a situation of Muslim-Hindu tensions or polarization in Bengal that has, since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, worked with other factors to push Matua adherents in West Bengal towards caste-Hindus who do not want them.

The great inroads and harm that Islam has historically inflicted on the religion of Brahmans gave it some lustre for Debendralal and his colleagues. Yet, they could no more consider Islam than Communism as an alternate power-camp in international relations. By keeping religiously impartial or neutral (niropekh), "democracy has succeeded and become firmly established" in India — in contrast to recurring chaos in such "Islamist" "dictatorship" states as Pakistan and Bangladesh.[2]

Bengali Indian Untouchables have idealized Pakistan and Bangladesh much less often than those in the broader Hindi zone or in India's deep Dravidian South.[3] A shared language gave more off-stage access than Dravidian Dalits had to internal Pakistani and Bangladeshi discourses that have not been urgently concerned to forge wider alliances or relationships with non-Muslims in the region. On the other hand, some Bengali Dalit organs voiced from the early 1980s some openness to far-away verbally radical Arab regimes, publicizing al-Qadhdhafi's Third Universal Theory to see where the interactions might lead.[4]

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[1](Debendralal Biswas Thakur) editorial "Poshaker Ontorale" (Behind the Costume), *Harisevak* (March 1992): 2.

[2] "Dhormo O Rajniti" *Harisevak* (March-June 1985): 107.

[3]Consistent with its much more Islamophile stances and readership, the Bangalore *Dalit Voice* has drawn letters and articles that stress not only the educational progress of Namasudras in Bangladesh, noted by *Harisevak*, but also that they are more accepted in Bangladeshi universities than West Bengal's Dalits are by Caste Hindus. "Regarding food, all students are welcomed with honor to all halls: there is no racial discrimination [in Dhaka] as we find in the West Bengal of firebrand `Marxist' Jyoti Basu". B.K. Ghatak, "Namasudras: Hindu Persecution of Bengali Dalits Leads to Conversion", *Dalit Voice* 1-15 (August 1992): 5.

[4]See, for example, Dr. Bhubaneshwar Nath, "Kornel Gaddafir `Greenbook' O Dr Ambedkarer Chintadhara" (Colonel al-Qadhdhafi's 'Green Book' and Dr Ambedkar's Thought), *Bahujan Nayak* (Calcutta) 26 (October 1986): 3-4. Embittered by Dalit-Caste Hindu bloodletting in rural Andhra Pradesh, this article seized al-Qadhdhafi's images that every multi-national

SYSTEM DISORDER AND RADICALIZATION

Usually constructive in their protest, the Matuas have seldom sympathized with Muslim or Communist states opposed to India in the region: even at their angriest, they have kept a shrewd focus on those features and motifs in establishment Indian parliamentarist discourse that could be implemented or modified to admit Untouchables into the mainstream of a coming national life. Yet fluid caste has adaptably continued since independence to partition spiritually those Bengalis who now share modern structures and spaces — radicalizing the Bengali Dalit writers.

New issues, political parties and parliamentarist movements develop: these bring the most diverse people together and look set to make the old distinctions fade from mind. Yet they never do. There are few days in public space in which the educated Bengali Untouchable is not reminded of what he is. Jagjivan Ram (1908-1986) was the outstanding Harijan politician in the Congress independence movement who in 1935 founded the All-India Depressed Classes League: he repeatedly excelled in various semi-technocratic portfolios in post-independence Congress governments — and as Minister of Defence presided over the 1971 creation of Bangladesh. After the 1977 general election that brought down Indira Gandhi, preliminary arrangements were being made for the formation of the Janata government in the Centre. In West Bengal as everywhere else in India the newspapers and public were discussing "who would be the Prime Minister — Babu Jagjivan Ram or Morarji Desai?." On the way to Sealdah by bus, a passenger interjected: "so its come to this — finally, a Muchi (Dalit leather-worker) would be the Prime Minister of India?." Exhausted, Biswas wondered in his mind what any

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state had to break up in the end through insurrections of the suppressed linguistic nationalities [—— very hard to stretch to fit a pan-Indian Dalit experience or enterprise!]. Nath applied al-Qadhdhafi's ridicule of parties and parliamentarism to an Indian political system so slow to impose equality. The editor of *Bahujan Nayak*, Mahendra Nath Talukdar, is a Matua leader. V.T. Rajshekar, editor of the Bangalore *Dalit Voice*, and D.M Thimmarayappa and Narayan Swami of the Karnataka Dalit Action Committee, attended the 1986 Mathabah Conference of persecuted nationalities at Tripoli, Libya, in March 1986: there, Rajshekar linked up with the US Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan. See Dennis Walker, "U.S. Black Muslims: From Millenarian Protest to Transcontinental Relationships" in Garry Trompf (ed.) *Cargo Cults and Millenarian Movements* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter 1990) pp. 343-391.

Untouchable would have to achieve in India for his abilities to nullify ancestry or ancestral livelihoods. If Jagjivan Ram had not led a faction out of the Indira-led Congress and joined the Janata, the latter could not have defeated her Party. Yet the very caste Hindus who had so badly wanted Indira to go, could only remember that the man who did that for them was born in the lowest caste.[1]

Debendralal's Dalit sector had built, wrested or been granted more changes than he allowed, and neither he nor Jagjivan Ram (born rich) were exactly jim-crowed street-sweepers: yet the deranging discrimination and rejection within the nationalist house had some agonies, and sparked furies, that the physically unsafe Untouchables with no newspapers outside were spared. Precedents for his elite's grudging half-admission came to Debendralal's mind from the high Hindu texts it shared as a language with the Upper-caste enemy: "Karna, the son of the lower-caste Adhiratha was not allowed to take part in the contest of weapons until the king Durjodhan of Hastinapur recognized him as a king by donating a province." "After four thousand years" admission of gifted or rich SC individuals still cannot wash away their pollutedness in the mock-integrated structures. In 1969, when the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, (Muslim) colleague Fakhruddin 'Ali and Jagjivan Ram were expelled from the Syndicate Congress, Debendralal's UC fellow-officials in the Railways office had exulted in his hearing at the downfall of "that leatherworker".[2]

For the discreetly more mainstreaming *Harisevak* writers, Ram's failure to achieve the highest office in India was heartbreaking because the integrationist venture was right. For enclave-separatist *Dalit Voice* it was a futile fraud: the Bangalore weekly derided Jagjivan Ram, when he died in mid-1986, as a capable Uncle Tom whom the UCs built up before independence to contain and destroy Ambedkar.[3]

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[1]Haripad Palkiwala (pseud), "Shochokhe O Shokorne" (With My Own Eyes and My Own Ears), *Harisevak* (September 1977): 38.

[2]Ibid., pp. 38-39.

[3]The radical Dalitist enclave-nationalists who proliferated from the early 1980s derided the futility of Jagjivan Ram's pursuit of the Prime Ministership in apex national politics. When he died in mid-1986, *Dalit Voice* noted that Ambedkar kept his vow not to die a Hindu whereas Ram in 1976 told the readers of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* "I feel proud of being a Hindu". Given his success in every portfolio he assumed, "when the Janata Party won, [Ram] should have been the Prime Minister but two

The electoral overthrow of Indira Gandhi got unprecedentedly Hinduist forces started in elite politics — and was accompanied at grassroots level in a host of provinces by widening violence against Untouchables who were trying to enrol their children in schools and defying segregation. Biswas wondered: would the mainstream political parties, and the elections safeguard within which his group had tried to work, ever protect or offer development to the Untouchables in India?

The Untouchables have to save themselves unaided, as one political unit. All Harijan MPs, he reflected, should have formed themselves into a separate group or party in the Legislative Assembly, to apply on the Government the pressure needed to make it check the atrocities and see that village Harijans get their constitutional and legal rights. For, while they are members of the UC-dominated established political parties, all Dalit MPs find their mouths padlocked as they represent mixed electorates: to speak out much for the interests of their fellow-Harijans can lose getting party denomination for the next elections. In this situation, Debendralal Biswas Thakur and his colleagues toyed with some sort of political separatism in sheer self-defense — perhaps, though, only to form a communalist Dalit political party within parliamentarism (arduous enough an enterprise!).[1]

Ex-Communist Dalit enclave-nationalists based in South India deny that wealth disparities and class determine inequality and conflict: castes are India's only real warring units. In contrast, Debendralal sometimes has seen caste-supremacism somewhat as a cultural superstructure of class. He informed the Dalits in 1977 that "with the object of removing casteism, the present Janata Party government has written all provincial Chief Ministers that at the time of admission into schools, the titles of students are not to be recorded", implementing at last one recommendation of the late Dr. Ambedkar. Abolishing titles could weaken caste-arrogance or

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upper-caste Hindus — Jayaprakash Narayan and Kripalani — manipulated things to make Morarji Desai, a Brahman, as Prime Minister. Again, after the Janata Party split in 1979, President Sanjiv Reddy refused to accept his claim for [the] Prime Ministership and preferred Charan Singh. Upper Caste Hindus, who were till then with the Janata, swung to Mrs Gandhi's Congress fearing that another Janata victory would surely make an Untouchable as Prime Minister of India... He swallowed all these insults after insults, hoping against hope that one day the Hindus would make him the PM of India". "Jagjivan Ram Dies A Hindu", *Dalit Voice* 1-16 (August 1986): 11.

[1]"Shochokhe O Shokorne" p. 41.

supremacism to some extent, but "the differences based on wealth and education", and weakened caste-discrimination "will remain to play hide-and-seek behind the screen."[1]

The Matua Bengali leader did draw towards the Marxists here in his readiness to consider that trans-generational economic disparities, as much or more than caste, might have caused the deprivations and torments that the Dalits faced. The ingrained religiosity of the Matua, though, — and the Jyoti Basu government that cynically invoked Communism to justify its casteist grip in the neighborhood? — ruled out Communism as the alternative. Biswas wrote in 1985 that the 38 years since Independence had proven that there is no chance of establishing any Communist government at the Center because most Indians faithfully follow a range of religions while Marxists cannot believe in God.

To usher in a more equal society in India, the state should redistribute excess incomes to the proletarians and offer the same free education equally to all up to higher secondary. Wholesale businesses had to be nationalized to hold down prices. Most forces in the Indian political system, though, would resist the economic assault on inequality in India that he proposed. Power to administer the state is under the full control of political parties whose wealthy parliamentarians will never vote for draft laws to limit incomes. Hence, established parliamentarism gives no real scope to remove soon the disparities determined by wealth, which in turn will maintain the difference of castes.

That he himself deeply assented to its prescriptive functions made Debendralal Thakur feel the more deeply the parliamentarist system's failure to actualize Indianist integration, glaring by 1977. He now had an impulse to move from Congressite parliamentarism to in effect demand separate electorates, through which the Muslim League had wrested Pakistan in 1947. In the other — mainstreaming — direction, though, he tended to the Congressite modernists' disdain for sectarian special interests as dysfunctionally divisive and anachronistic as the Center led India's transformation: "the polygamy and *talaq* (divorce) system in the Muslim community is undemocratic in our present age: yet no political party raises any proposal against it because of the need to get and keep the Muslim vote." The Muslim minority's manipulation or modification of parliamentarism to preserve its autonomy harms that system's higher vision or potentiality to make society neutral

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[1]Ibid., p. 39.

and undivided — the impulse that could phase out discrimination against Untouchables and admit them. In his other mood-swing, he covertly envies the cohesiveness and adaptability with which the Muslims have continued, since independence, to preserve a distinct society unacceptable to both secularist and revivalist-theocratist Hindus.

If one fourth of ministerial posts — as against the futile reserved parliamentary seats — were reserved for Harijans, their role in distribution from the apex would ensure that ordinary Untouchables got more of the limited food distributed at the Indian banquet. Here, though groping for a political communalism of its own, *Harisevak* was again trying to win meaningful admission for the Dalits into the system's key institutions.[1]

For the now deeply alienated majority of educated Bengali Untouchable activists, the liberal-ameliorist Indian dream that sustained the struggle for independence, and inspired real attempts to make society fairer under Congress, is now close to failure as a political enterprise. A movement whose integrationism had sought a live-and-let-live accommodation with the groups already in the house now toyed with a winner-takes-all approach that would sweep certain classes out of the parliamentary parties or system for good.

Perspective

The 150 years of Matua self-transformation in Bengal offer a case-study of how much capacity degraded groups have in Indian societies to free their consciousness and carve out middle class status.

The Indian Union is a strong state with a central culture attractive even for poor and oppressed groups in the non-Hindi states. Dalit elites feel little drawn to secessionist nationalisms. Ill-treatment from childhood periodically underscores that not all who speak the same mother-tongue are automatic brothers and sisters. Tamil Nadu may be another case where the prevalence of conflict at village level between even very poor caste-Hindus and Dalit Tamils (as well as the Muslim category) likewise fractures a potential linguistic nation vis-a-vis India's very different Hindi coreland. In the elite of Bengal's Dalit ethnos, the current perception is that political parties centred in West Bengal, notably

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[1] "Shochokhe O Shokorne" pp. 39-40.

Jyoti Basu's Marxists, are caste-enemies to be countered by linking up with Congress — or more recently the protest-parliamentarist Bahujan Samaj Party conducted from the Hindi belt by Kanshi Ram.[1]

The usage of various motifs in Matua religious intellectualism has by no means been consistent over time: for instance, one writer can more or less accept the Sanskritic-Hindu division of history into four *yugas* and that the last, *Kali yuga*, is the worst — challenging it only by branding the Brahmanical clergy and scholars as the acme of the *Kali* period's evil. In other *Harisevak* articles meant to shock and to reverse Brahmanical categories much more, history is presented as progression: the fourth, *Kali yuga* is the best of all, with the laments of Brahmans only due to the collapse of their supremacy. More than a century of Matua writings showed considerable shifts and changes in the stances of this protest (or self-improvement?) movement and in the social and economic status of its adherents. It is still open, even now in the 1990s, if the sect will (a) bind itself more to the Indian mainstream and Hinduize beyond recognition, or (b) radicalize towards confrontation with society and Hinduism.

Matua writers have not yet irrevocably identified the sect as non-Hindu. When visualizing India in relation to the region with its Muslims, and in international relations, older *Harisevak* writers who lived Partition do feel more linked to caste-Hindus — not many of whom, though, want the Untouchables. The Congress Party's pinkish quasi-secularist nationalism that brought India to independence was long held by Debendralal Biswas Thakur to offer the best prospect for Harijan/Dalit advancement. His assumption is challenged in the 1990s by young Bengali Dalit militants who style themselves as solely "Ambedkarite" and thus in revolt against the established UC parties, and Matua politicians who are pro-Congress for the most part. The same youth, though, accept Debendralal's poetical recreations of early Matua history and theology as "great" and likely to become the "classics" that will define what Matuaism is for future generations.[2]

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[1]"Our oppressed people in [West] Bengal are now under the banner of the CPI M-L and the Bharatiya Janata Party. Kanshi Ram is the only man in India who has challenged the Brahmanical Social Order, without aligning with any political party". If half of the 85% of the population suffering oppression and exploitation rallied to Kanshi Ram, then "our problems are solved". Letter by Dalit physicist Prof. Jagatbandhu Biswas, *Dalit Voice* 16-31 (December 1992).

[2]Letter from Nadia Dalit activist 29 September 1993.

The new Hinduist-revivalist nationalism is now penetrating even special, marginal West Bengal from the Hindi belt. The Hinduization of politics could (a) corner the awakened Matuas, now divided into classes, into resistance or (b) integrate Bengali Untouchables with Bengali Caste Hindus against Muslims and Bangladesh. Following the December 1992 Ram Janmabhumi/Babri Mosque conflagration, Debendralal Biswas Thakur published a plague-on-both-your-houses book that equated Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists but mainly blasted Bangladeshi Muslims and the Middle Eastern countries as religiously "intolerant."[1] It remains to be seen if the new Matua generation now maintains his Indian nationalism and alienation from Islam and Muslim states. From the Dravidian South, *Dalit Voice* has at last amplified those Bengali Dalits who want a joint struggle with Indian Muslims, Bangladesh and Pakistan against the UCs, into a coherent option in West Bengal. At bay, Thakur toyed with the RSS charge that the *Dalit Voice* editor was an agent paid by the Arab states to convert India's Dalits to Islam and thereby rob them of "their Indianness."[2] Thakur (and his constructive Indianist protest Matuaism) thus remains one contender for the psyche of the new generation that is now taking over the leadership of Bengal's Untouchable ethnos.

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[1]Debendralal Biswas Thakur, *Dhormodondo Mormokotha* (*The Meaning of Sectarian Conflict*) (Calcutta: Matua Shahitya Porishod 1994).

[2]Ibid., pp. 130-131. Thakur was clearly concerned that some Bengali Dalit youth were now considering embracing Islam to defy the Brahmans. He was, though, also specifically targeting the article by (ex-East Pakistan) S.K. Biswas, "'Operation Ambedkar': Babasaheb never criticized Islam but hailed it for liberating Dalits", *Dalit Voice* 16-31 (December 1994): 16-23. That article had in turn been sparked to refute an "Open Letter to V.T. Rajshekar" published by Bengali Dalit Debajyoti Roy and others, which had imaged that Ambedkar wanted a reformed Hinduism and condemned Islam for social prejudice:see advertisement for Bengali edition in Bahujan Nayak 6 (June 1993): 2.

The Struggle Between Hindu and Secular Nationalisms in India

David Fado

This paper investigates the debate between secular nationalism and Hindu nationalism at the federal level of India's government. Relying on many of the English-language pamphlets, books, and articles recently produced in India, this paper tries to provide a fair summary of what divides and unites the two sides. Throughout the debate, the importance of India's constitutional tradition as a federal republic makes it difficult to apply theories of "Third World" nationalism. Furthermore, India resembles other federal republics more than governments marked by totalitarianism, military rule, Islamic fundamentalism, or fascism.

India holds a prominent place in the history of imperialism and decolonization, making recent events in this country of nearly one billion especially important to the student of twentieth century world history. India also faces problems associated with accommodating religion and diversity within a large federal republic, making their experience important for Americans concerned with these issues. India faces what one observer describes as "a growing crisis of governability" which invites the use of violence to achieve political objectives.[1] In spite of India's size and importance, it is hard for an American to gain an understanding of the issues and conflicts which have set the stage

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[1]Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

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for the most recent resurgence of Hindu nationalism. The central feature of this new landscape in Indian federal politics is the clash between Hindu and secular nationalists. The contour of the struggle convinces this observer that a focus on the "Third World" nature of India obscures processes common to large federal republics.

The overview of this situation comes from the perspective of an American interested in Indian history and federal systems, so the observations are intended as provocative suggestions designed to encourage more comparative work both in India and the United States. While the prominence of Hindu themes affects many levels of Indian government, this paper will focus only on India's central government. This key arena of conflict is crucial to understanding the current situation in India. However, since this arena has less political violence than many Indian states and cities, a bias toward stability enters into this summary. Such a bias underscores the contention of this paper that Hindu and secular nationalism enhance the political stability of India to the extent they focus attention on the federal level of politics.

According to some observers, Indian democracy and secularism face a menace from the forces of militant Hinduism which aspire to turn India into a Hindu state. What is the nature of the present challenge to secularism in India? What do Hindu nationalists hope to achieve by making their government more assertively Hindu? One can begin to answer these questions by examining the large body of writing on secularism recently produced by Indians. Academics, lawyers, journalists, and political propagandists have explored the many facets of Indian secularism. These works provide clues to the nature of Hindu nationalism's appeal in contemporary Indian politics. While reading many of these tracts, one is reminded of Benedict Anderson's observation on the paradox between "the political power of nationalisms versus their philosophical poverty and even incoherence."[1] These writings, then, are interesting not for their logic but for what they reveal about India and its versions of nationalism.

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[1]Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* (London: Verso Press, 1983), p. 14.

The Challenge to Indian Secularism: An Overview

Sudipta Kaviraj, a scholar from Jawaharlal Nehru University, confesses that, "among those who consider themselves secular individuals there is an intensifying sense of crisis."[1] Radhey Mohan, another academic, says that "I am firmly of the view that secularism never faced greater danger than at present."[2] What are the criticisms of secularism which lead to the perception of a predicament?

At first glance, the challenge appears minuscule, since all political parties, even the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), accept secularism in some form. As government official P.K. Nijhawan remarks, "the contending sides swear by secularism."[3] However, secularism as it has come to be practiced by the Congress Party and the Indian government (hereafter referred to simply as secularism) comes under scrutiny for four general reasons: the unequal treatment of different religious groups, the implied hostility to religion, the poor translation of secularism from the West to India and the inability of secularism to create a national identity for India. That both sides attempt to appropriate the term secularism can lead to tremendous confusion; even the U.S. government had some problems in its effort to catalogue the journalistic debate about secularism in the wake of the violence in Ayodhya.[4]

In the opinion of the Hindu nationalist, the Congress commitment to secularism does not bring about the tolerance, the *Sarva Dharma Sambhava* to be expected of Hindu rulers. Rather, Congress appeases the communal demands of minority religious groups while masquerading as a force for equal treatment. P.N. Joshi, President of the Rashtriya Hindu Manch, a militant Hindu

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[1]Sudipta Kaviraj, "On the Discourse of Secularism," in *Secularism and Indian Polity*, ed. Bidyut Chakrabarty (New Delhi: Segment Book Distributors, 1990), p. 186.

[2]Radhey Mohan, ed., *Secularism in India—A Challenge* (New Delhi: Caxton Press, 1990), p. xviii.

[3]P.K. Nijhawan, "Secularism: A New Paradigm", in *Secularism in India: Dilemmas and Challenges*, ed. M.M. Sankhder (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1992), p. 159.

[4]Foreign Broadcast Information Service and Joint Publications Research Service, Near East and South Asia, *India: Secularism Reconsidered*, JPRS-NEA-93-022 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government, 1993).

organization, explains in his 150 page pamphlet, *Secularism in Action: A Fraud, A Conspiracy to Destroy Hinduism.*

> But, in reality, the picture of secularism in action in this country is neither beautiful not presentable. In fact, it is ugly and abominable and the produce even though so well packed in gorgeous colours is foul and stinking. The concept of secularism in this country, in fact, means to ignore the Hindus, to sell the rights and interests of the Hindus with a view to appeasing the Muslims, Sikhs and Christians for buying their votes.

The BJP also attacks the government's application of secularism, referring to current practice as "pseudo-secularism." According to these critics, policies such as a separate personal law for Muslims and educational policies which grant special status to various groups within India are damaging to the secular credentials of India. By implication, the factional aspects of democracy help create the situation because of the need to secure "vote banks."[1]

Many academics, although writing in a less inflammatory style than political pamphleteers, agree with the basic observation about Indian politics. K. Roghavendra Rao of Mangalore University asserts that "whatever the noble rhetoric, this form of democracy is simply a system of power-grabbing through periodic electoral contests between parties....The business of vote-getting turns out to be a communal game."[2]

P.K.B. Nayar, a sociologist from the University of Kerala, observes that "secularism in India is interpreted not as the right of all religions to pursue their legitimate religious activity without let or hindrance but to claim special privileges and to develop vested interests and form and use organizations to promote their non-religious interests."[3]

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[1]For a journalistic account of the reservation system in education see Manoji Mitta, "Reservations: Racketeering in Quotas," *India Today* 19, 21 (November 15, 1994): 36-38.

[2]K. Raghavendra Rao, "Secularism, Communalism and Democracy in India: Some Theoretical Issues," in *Secularism and Indian Polity*, ed. Bidyut Chakrabarty (New Delhi: Segment Book Distributors, 1990), p. 46.

[3]P.K.B. Nayar, "A Sociological Analysis of Communalism with Reference to Kerala," in *Secularism and Indian Polity*, ed. Bidyut Chakrabarty (New Delhi: Segment Book Distributors, 1990), p. 215.

A few academics see democratic secularism encouraging communalism. D.D. Joshi of the Indira Gandhi National Open University argues that "the religious minorities are nurtured and encouraged to maintain their separate identity as political pressure groups and then used as 'vote banks' to obtain legitimacy through the elections."[1] K. Roghavendra Rao explains that "an increase in the quantum of secularism leads to an increase in the quantum of communalism" in large part because the individualism bred by secularism means that people will "not hesitate to use community interest and identity opportunistically to promote their self-interest."[2]

Few political groups want to bear the label "communal," indicating that within India, secularism as a general goal remains a popular concept. K. Roghavendra Rao declares that "Communalism is a dirty word which none is anxious to use but it is a dirty act which everyone who wants to stay in the power game is anxious to do."[3] Rabindra Ray, from the Delhi School of Economics, observes that "the dispassionate disavowal of communitarian sentiments becomes the necessary personal form of even the most partisan of political goals."[4] Academics observe these developments in India; the politicians try to blame each other for the circumstances.

While secularism is not necessarily hostile to religion, antagonism between these two forces exists for many in India. Some secularists see a fundamental conflict between a polity based on reason and one based on religion. Head of the Department of Political Science at Dayanand Arts College, R.L. Chaudhari, in his *The Concept of Secularism in Indian Constitution*, sees a secular polity as one based on reason, without reference to religion. For Chaudhari, "elimination of the importance of religion, especially in social and public life is prerequisite of Indian Secularism. ... secularisation is the most important need in India."[5] Unfortunately for Chaudhari, "the people are not prepared to

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[1]D.D. Joshi, "The Relevance of Secularism to Indian Polity," in *Secularism and Indian Polity*, ed. Bidyut Chakrabarty (New Delhi: Segment Book Distributors, 1990), p. 229.

[2]Rao, "Secularism ... Some Theoretical Issues, p. 45.

[3]Ibid., p. 44.

[4]Rabindra Ray, "The Secular Ideal," in *Secularism and Indian Polity*, ed. Bidyut Chakrabarty (New Delhi: Segment Book Distributors, 1990), p. 166.

[5]R.L. Chaudhari, *The Concept of Secularism in Indian Constitution* (New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1987), p. 4.

separate religion from the social institutions like: marriage, family, caste, and language and education."[1] Chaudhari recommends education to wean people from their local institutions.

Nasim Ansari of the G.B. Pant Social Science Institute in Allahabad provides another example of this hostility in his argument that "a secular policy to contain excessive proliferation of places of worship is of utmost importance in a multi-religious society like India." According to Ansari, one must distinguish between interfering with and containing religion, and "containment must certainly not be ruled out especially in a multi-religious society if the very edifice of democratic secularism is not to be collapsed." Ansari concedes "that the dividing line here is rather thin" yet still possible to discern. As an example, Ansari observes that Soviet laws against religious propaganda are in many ways containment.[2]

This anti-religious slant disturbs many Indians, even those who would not adopt the entire Hindu nationalist agenda. Ashis Nandy, Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi, asserts that religion can make positive contributions to the public sphere. Nandy observes that "the belief that the values derived from the secular ideology of the state would be a better guide to political action and to a more tolerant and richer political life (as compared to the values derived from religious faiths) has become even more untenable to large parts of Indian society than it was a decade ago."[3] Nandy points to Gandhi as an example of a political figure acting from a religious value system.

Secularism hostile to religion seems futile to many simply because religion is an integral part of the life of India. The anti-religious aspects of secularism prompted respected Indian scholar T.N. Madan to write "I submit that in the prevailing circumstances secularism in South Asia as a generally shared credo of life is impossible, as a basis for state action impracticable, and as a

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[1]Ibid., p. 12.

[2]Nasim Ansari, "Some Current Issues of Secularism and Democracy in the Indian Polity: Lesson of Allahabad of July 1988," in *Secularism and Indian Polity*, ed. Bidyut Chakrabarty (New Delhi: Segment Book Distributors, 1990), p. 276.

[3]Ashis Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance," in *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, ed. Veena Das (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 81.

blueprint for the foreseeable future impotent."[1] Madan applies his critique to secularism, not just that strand of secularism which does not tolerate religion. Upendra Baxi, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Delhi, points out that secularism has developed a legal definition within the constitutional history of India; hostility to religion is not a central component of that definition.[2]

The third criticism of Indian secularism portrays the concept as an imposition from the West not suited to the culture of India. For Madan, a western concept cannot fit India because of the central importance of religion in South Asia. "Models of modernization...prescribe the transfer of secularism to non-Western societies without regard for the character of their religious tradition or for the gifts these have to offer." Therefore, these models "can only mean conversion and the loss of one's culture, and, if you like, the loss of one's soul."[3] Although not as melodramatic as Madan, Nandy persists in referring to "the imported idea of secularism."[4]

Tapan Raychaudhari, professor of Indian history at Oxford University, also argues that imported western ideas make it difficult for India's leaders to challenge Western dominance in a useful fashion. Raychaudhari contends "the deep impact of Western, rationalist values on [Nehru's] perception and personality, however. modifies his role as a challenger." Nehru was handicapped by an inability to empathize with Indian tradition. This handicap was not limited to Nehru, but "was, and is still, shared by our modernizing intelligentsia, who refuse to acknowledge the centrality of religious values in the lives of our masses."[5]

Perhaps the most important criticism of secularism by the Hindu nationalist relates to the claim that secularism cannot unite India, but will only encourage divisiveness. To understand this element of the challenge to Indian secularism the view must

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[1]T.N. Madan, "Secularism in its Place," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46 (November 1987): 748.

[2]Upendra Baxi, "Secularism: Real and Pseudo," in *Secularism in India: Dilemmas and Challenges*, ed. M.M. Sankhder (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1992), pp. 88-109.

[3]Madan, "Secularism in its Place," p. 754.

[4]Nandy, "Politics of Secularism," p. 71-75.

[5]Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Nehru and Western Donminance," in *The Legacy of Nehru: A Centennial Assessment*, ed. D.R. SarDesai and Anand Mohan (New Delhi: Promilla & Co., Publishers, 1992), p. 286.

extend beyond the description of the current debate and consider India's position as a post-colonial state.

The Challenge to Post-Colonial Indian Federalism

English academic Anthony Smith's description of the problems faced by political leaders in ethnically diverse post-colonial societies applies loosely to India. Smith explains that the government, or those who aspire to govern, will attempt to develop a form of identity which conforms to the territorial unit of the state. Governments try to carry out this project through reinterpreting various ethnic attributes.[1]

The analysis of Benedict Anderson also applies loosely to India. Anderson emphasizes the role played by print and language in developing the "imagined community" of a nation. Anderson's analysis proves useful in understanding state politics in places such as Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, where linguistic issues have been prominent. At the federal level, Anderson's analysis would lead one to despair over India's capacity to forge national unity, although Anderson does suggest that those in the "last wave" of nationalisms have a larger array of tools with which to forge the imagined community. The perspective of both Anderson and Smith, as will be shown, do not easily explain developments in India.

India faces tremendous challenges to her unity. With states organized along linguistic lines and a fragmented regional party system, the federal government has no monopoly on loyalty and interest. Most of those participating in the debate over secularism tend to favor greater centralization. Issues of local control and regional autonomy are given greater scrutiny in another vibrant debate currently taking place in India—the debate over center-state relations within Indian federalism.[2]

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[1]Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986) pp. 146-147. Smith does not show great familiarity with the Indian case—he accepts sanskrit as a unifying force for India without mentioning the Dravidian south—but the activities of many in India conform to his model.

[2]On this debate see H.A. Gani, *Centre-State Relations and Sarkaria Commission: Issues, Institutions and Challenges* (New Delhi, Deep and Deep Publications, 1990) and Babulal Fadia, *Sarkaria Commission Report and Centre-State Relations* (Agra: Sahitya Bhawan, 1990). On some of the broader tensions in Indian federalism, see Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and*

In the goals for the central government, secularists and Hindu nationalists agree on the need for a unified India which accepts diversity, squelches communal violence, and is prepared for the modern world. The following statement by R.L. Chaudhari is notable because by simply inserting the word 'Hinduism' for 'Secularism' one has a declaration strikingly similar to those made by Hindu nationalists.

> Secularism is of great significance in view of India's social, economic and political frame work. Secularism can meet the demands of a multi-religious, multi-culture, multi-caste and multi-lingual society like India. Secularism is essential for fostering ties between people of different communities in India. It seems to be the most effective cementing force in this context. The Concept of Secularism is also relevant to the process of nation building. It is a thread which has been binding us and keeping us united as a nation. Its increased influence will eradicate communalism and sectarianism from the country.[1]

H.V. Seshadri, General Secretary of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), perhaps the most influential Hindu nationalist organization, makes a similar point when discussing the identity of India, or Bharat.

> Then which is the 'nation' existing down all these countless centuries during all the ups and downs of its fortunes? And what is the supreme factor which has helped maintain its identity undisturbed all along? What is that unifying life-stream which, in spite of the vast variety of regions, climates, customs, languages, religious faiths, political and economic disparities, etc., has held and harmonized them all into one organic national entity? Even in the recent times what was that urge which inspired our freedom fighters all over the country to sacrifice themselves at the

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Nationalism, Theory and Comparison (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991) and Robert L Hardgrave, Jr. and Stanley A. Kochanek, *India: Government and Politics in a Developing Nation* 5th ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Javanovich College Publishers, 1993).

[1]Chaudhari, *The Concept of Secularism*, p. 207.

altar of nation's freedom, born though they were in distant parts of the country?[1]

For Seshadri, it is a "life-stream" born out of "the deeply ingrained love and adoration for the Motherland—Bharat" which accounts for this. By quickening this life-stream, the Hindu can seriously set about "revitalizing our natural oneness and neutralising the forces of national disruption."[2]

Indian author Jalalul Haq in his *Nation and Nation-Worship in India* argues that the traditions of Hindu and Secular nationalism have much in common in that both, in a sense, deify the nation. In an analysis comparing *Discovery of India* by Jawaharlal Nehru and *Hindutva* by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Haq writes "although considered to be representing two opposite poles of national thinking, the two writers are found to have more things in common with each other than they could individually have with any other thinker or writer among their contemporaries."[3]

In spite of similar goals, the two different ideologies conflict with each other. It is in this fourth challenge to secularism in India that one can most easily talk about two defined camps: secular nationalism and Hindu nationalism. These camps do not debate so much as they argue about national symbols and blame each other for the worst of India's problems.

While Hindu nationalism was not the organizing principle for Nehru's India, Hindu symbols were used freely by the independence movement, much to the chagrin of many Muslims. Hinduism has been used as an effective political tool by such leaders as B.G. Tilak and Mohandas Gandhi. Most influential in the latest surge in Hindu nationalism has been the RSS, founded in 1925 to develop the cultural attributes needed to make India a strong nation. With their focus on discipline and the creation of small, trained, and devoted cadres, the RSS has emerged as a potent force in the Indian political culture.[4] With the success of

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[1]H.V. Seshadri, *The Way* (New Delhi: Suruchi Prakashan, Yugabda 5093 [Vikram era 2048]—1991), p. 23.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Jalalul Haq, *Nation and Nation-Worship in India* (New Delhi: Genuine Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1992), p. 13.

[4]The best general work on the RSS remains Walter K. Andersen and Shrindhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987). Another important book on this subject illustrates the value of the

cultural nationalism in India, one can already see a shift in Indian historiography away from a stress on the triumph of the Indian National Congress and Nehru.[1]

The cultural content of Indian nationalism preoccupies Hindu nationalists. H.V. Seshadri, commenting on Dr. Hedgewar, founder of the RSS, argues for a cultural purpose of independence: "the prophets and pioneers of our freedom movement had conceived of political freedom not as an end in itself but as an opportunity of the nation to flower forth with its pristine genius in all its facets."[2] Seshadri responds negatively to explanations of India which do not recognize its underlying unity. The reference in the Constitution to India as a "Union of States" receives criticism because this "means our country is just a confederation of several political units. And the only binding links between them are common political rights and economic interests." Seshadri exclaims, "it is evident that such materialistic factors can hardly unite the people at heart."[3]

Hindu nationalists emphasize that Hinduism is not a religion in the sense of Islam or Christianity, but merely refers to the culture of the people who live in India. P.K. Nijhawan observes that formerly the Hindu "never projected himself to be the champion of any particular religion." Seshadri asserts that "'Hindu' is not the name of a religious faith like the 'Muslim' or the 'Christian.' It denotes the national way of life here."[4]

Hindu nationalists portray Hindus as a persecuted majority. Seshadri declares that "this is the only country in the

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RSS emphasis on disciplined cadres in achieving their limited inroads in Kerala, see K. Jayaprasad *RSS and Hindu Nationalism: Inroads in a Leftist Stronghold* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1991). A more official history of the RSS is H.V. Seshadri, ed., *RSS: A Vision in Action* (Bangalore: Jagarana Prokashana, 1988).

[1]See especially Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990) and Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988). See also Sugam Anand, *Modern Indian Historiography: From Pillai to Azad* (Agra: MG Publishers, 1991); H.V. Seshadri, *The Tragic Story of Partition* (Bangalore: Jagarana Prakashana, 1982); Suneera Kapoor *Sri Aurobindo Ghosh and Bal Gangodhar Tilak: The Spirit of Freedom* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1991); and Jalalul Haq, *Nation and Nation-Worship.*

[2]H.V. Seshadri, *The Way*, p. 9.

[3]Ibid., p. 22.

[4]Ibid., p. 55.

whole world where the so-called minorities enjoy more rights than the majority itself! And the majority is required to agitate for equal rights!" To further insult the Hindu, "the recipients of this special honour under freedom are those who sided with the British and cut up our country."[1] In another article, Seshadri explains that "our present day anti-Hindu slant of secularism has not only aggravated social tensions and discriminations and fostered anti-national divisiveness but deprived our nation of its sublime cultural ethos that is capable of lighting up a new and purposeful vision of statecraft for the entire world."[2]

The 1947 partition of India remains one of the gravest sins attributed to the secular nationalists.[3] Balraj Madhok, former President of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, a precursor of the BJP, consistently refers to the political boundaries of the country as "truncated India." According to Madhok, it is Gandhi and Nehru who "paraded their perverted communalism as secularism" who are most to blame for partition.[4]

Hindu nationalists claim the religious diversity and tolerance of India are only safe in a Hindu state. Madhok asserts that "religious freedom, tolerance, and democracy will survive in India only so long as it remains Hindu."[5] Those resisting the greater assertiveness of the Hindu identity of India, according to T.R.S. Sharma, professor of English at Mysore University, "scarcely realize that at the present historical juncture no democratic and truly secular polity in India can survive without the support and strength provided by a majority."[6] Those who claim that a *Hindu Rashtra*, or Hindu state, would be a theocracy exacerbating communal tensions do not understand the nature of Hindu statecraft. As C.P. Bhishkar, an RSS member, points out in his analysis of the concept of the Rashtra as understood by Deendayal Upadhyaya, leader of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh in the

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[1]Ibid., p. 52.

[2]H.V. Seshadri, "Secularism: An Insight," in *Secularism in India*, ed. M.M. Sankhder (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1992), p. 151.

[3]The best sustained example of this argument is found in H.V. Seshadri, *The Tragic Story of Partition.*

[4]Balraj Madhok, *Rationale of Hindu State* (Ballimaran Delhi: Indian Book Gallery, 1982), p. 73-74.

[5]Ibid., p. 95.

[6]T.R.S. Sharma, "Secularism and Hindu Identity," in *Secularism in India*, ed. M.M. Sankhder (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1992), p. 253.

1950s and 1960s, "Hindus have never supported the idea of a sectarian state....No king used his kingly power to propagate any particular religion. The Kings were expected to obey only one *dharma*, viz. *Raja-Dharma*." Great confusion results "from the wrong belief that the two terms *dharma* and religion are synonymous."[1]

The secular nationalists are the heirs to the tradition of the Indian National Congress and Nehru's vision of a secular socialist society. They have the prestige associated with maintaining power but can be blamed for current problems. Secularism, they claim, allows for diversity within India. Harvard professor Amartya Sen, in his recent Nehru Lecture at Cambridge University, gave an argument for secularism resembling the appeal of Hindu nationalists.

> But secularism is, in fact, a part of a more comprehensive idea—that of India as an integrally pluralist country, made up of different religious beliefs, distinct language groups, divergent social practices. Secularism is one aspect—a very important one—of the recognition of that larger idea of heterogeneous identity. I shall argue that the sectarian forces that seek to demolish Indian secularism will have to deal ... with India's regional, social, and cultural diversity.[2]

Given the evident diversity in India and the need to act as a modern state, secular nationalism is often presented as the only alternative. Asghar Ali Engineer, Director of the Institute of Islamic Studies in Bombay, asserts that "Secularism has been our ideal since the day Indian National Congress was founded. It could not have been otherwise."[3] R.L. Chaudhari maintains that "it is revealed from the experiences of many states in the world that religion cannot be the basis of the State in modern times.

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[1]C.P. Bhishikar, *Concept of the Rashtra*, Volume V of *Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya: Ideology and Perception*, Trans. by Yashwantrao Kelkar (New Delhi: Suruchi Prakashan, 1988), p. 31.

[2]Amartya Sen, "The Threats to Secular India," *The New York Review of Books*, 8 April 1993, 26. Sen in part confronts the activities of regional groups such as the Shiv Sena which are largely outside the scope of this paper.

[3]Asghar Ali Engineer, "Secularism and the Emerging Challenge of Communalism: Practical Aspects," in *Secularism and Indian Polity*, ed. Bidyut Chakrabarty (New Delhi: Segment Book Distributors, 1990), p. 243.

Therefore, there is no alternative to secularism."[1] Mahip Singh, Reader in Hindi at the University of Delhi, claims that "the biggest guarantee of the unity and integrity of this country is to recognize its plurality and diversity. Secularism is the only answer to the problems created by religio-cultural pluralism and caste system in this country."[2]

Emil D'Cruz, in *Indian Secularism: A Fragile Myth*, a book written for the Indian Social Institute, provides a view of secularism which recognizes its power as a quasi-religious symbol.

> One can ask whether the constitutional ideal of a secular state serves as a quasi-religious myth to remind the leaders of the country of that vision of a pluralistic society which our founding fathers had at the time of independence, and to guide them in making that vision a reality. At the same time, the myth serves to reassure all religious communities, but especially the minorities, that the country is committed to respecting their religious freedom.[3]

D'Cruz recognizes that secularism is under threat, in large part because of "the divergent expectations that the majority and minority communities have regarding the role of the state toward religion."[4]

The forces of secularism do seem on the defensive. The strength of Nehru's vision for an Indian state based on socialism, secularism, non-alignment, democracy, and nationalism has eroded with the collapse of socialism as a respectable ideology and the growing irrelevance of non-alignment in the post-Cold War world. Girilal Jain, former Chief Editor of the *Times of India*, points out that for Nehru "the concept of secular nationalism more or less divorced from the country's cultural heritage could not have been a viable proposition if it was not guided by the promise of a brave new socialist world of equality."[5] L.M. Singhvi, India's High Commissioner in the United Kingdom, agrees, arguing that the Indian mainstream only tolerated Nehru's rationalism and his "supposedly western brand of secularism." Nehru's perspective is

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[1]Chaudhari, *The Concept of Secularism*, p. 207.

[2]Mahip Singh, "Secularism: The Answer," in *Secularism in India*, ed. M.M. Sankhder (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1992), p. 302.

[3]Emil D'Cruz, *Indian Secularism: A Fragile Myth* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1988), p. 8.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Girilal Jain, "Secularism and Nehruism," p. 132.

"traceable to his western moorings and the hold and spell of the Soviet Union on his mind—a great leader's two errors of judgment."[1] The reinterpretation of Nehru's legacy casts a shadow over many of the writings on secularism.

Many secular nationalists, then, recognize the need for reforming their appeal. Sudipta Kaviraj thinks the government has failed to inject secular nationalism with elements to appeal to the masses. "The greatest default of the bourgeois ruling elite in India has been its inability to see the need for continuing the cultural construction of the nation." This project has not been carried out because "nationalist forces underestimated and misunderstood their own historic tasks precisely because they started seriously believing their own political rhetoric." The historiography emerging from nationalism "conveyed a false sense of something like modern secularism having been achieved in the precolonial past, disrupted only by the evil designs of the colonial administration." As the concerns of maintaining power moved to the forefront, "the ideology of nationalism gradually converted itself from an ideology of the people into an ideology of the state, or to put it more cynically, into a Central subject."[2]

In order to respond to the challenge of Hindu nationalism, some secular nationalists desire a greater awareness of and sensitivity to religion. Asghar Ali Engineer insists that "one must understand in all earnestness the psyche of Indian people and their religio-cultural traditions. It would not do to merely eulogize western concept of secularism. ... such a position, however desirable for some, would alienate us from the masses."[3] Sudhir Chandra of the Centre for Social Studies, South Gujarat University, reflects that "however comforting we may find it morally, may be even intellectually, as supporters of secular democratic polity we should be shaken out of our cynical devaluation of much that tradition denotes."[4] Chandra admits that "I find myself employing the language of fear and condemnation when it comes to my own contemporaries, a language that is

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[1]L.M. Singhvi, *Freedom on Trial* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1991), p. 92.

[2]Quotations from Sudipta Kaviraj, "On the Discourse of Secularism," p. 194.

[3]Asghar Ali Engineer, "Secularism and the Emerging Challenge," p. 250.

[4]Sudhir Chandra, "The Lengthening Shadow, Secular and Communal Consciousness," in *Secularism and Indian Polity*, ed. Bidyut Chakrabarty (New Delhi: Segment Book Distributors, 1990), p. 65.

hardly conducive to understanding."[1] Sudipta Kaviraj agrees with this assessment, arguing that "if we are really interested in engaging it [religious thinking], and not enjoying the thrill of admiring our own secularism, this contestation has to be done on a discursive terrain on which religion exists."[2]

In considering the case of Hindu and secular nationalism in India, the theoretical approaches of both Smith and Anderson encounter difficulty. The Indian case merits three additional observations in terms of Smith's model. First, the Hindu nationalist ideology involves an identity which extends beyond the territorial boundaries of present day India. In India, the concept of a broader country has a basis in fact, especially due to the recent occurrence of partition. Unlike other post-World War II partitions, however, no one seems to anticipate any form of impending reunion.

Second, the effort to develop an identity takes place within a vibrant federal polity, in which competition for resources, patronage, and control over government occurs on a more complicated playing field than that described in Smith's theoretical work. Both ideologies, in large part, support policies which enhance the power of the federal government.

Finally, there are two opposing versions of a national identity in competition. Such a situation may actually facilitate the process of building a stable nation, with the rivalry helping to clarify the issues involved and force self-definition. Hindu nationalists and secular nationalists are in some ways co-conspirators in the effort to secure loyalty to the central government.

While the need to create an identity corresponding to national boundaries does not explain events in India, neither does Benedict Anderson's focus on the "Russifying," or centralizing, impact of the British Empire and the material impact of a capitalist mass culture. This approach, while illuminating some aspects of Indian politics, cannot adequately explain the cohesive nature of an India constructed from a variety of communities. Indeed, many of these communities were able to grow, prosper and develop their "imagination" under British rule.

What can account for India's unity in diversity? One important element may well be the experience and tradition accumulated during India's time within the British Empire. With the collapse of efforts to maintain federal models in the Soviet

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[1]Sudhir Chandra, "The Lengthening Shadow," p.65.

[2]Sudipta Kaviraj, "Discourse of Secularism," p. 206.

Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia and the fraying of the European Community, the overwhelming majority of working federal models have emerged from the British Empire. India may well have attained unity, then, for reasons similar to those that allowed the thirteen American colonies to create out of many one (*e pluribus unum*) following their independence from Britain.

Hostile Elements of Hindu Nationalism

Even though the theory of a Hindu state presents a tolerant polity, many still feel threatened by Hindu nationalism. P.K. Nijhawan, a Hindu nationalist, seems puzzled that "if all paths of worship are sacred for the Hindus, including that of the Muslims or the Christians or the Sikhs, then where is the problem in not calling themselves as Hindus which should mean the citizen of Hindustan only?"[1] Given such an outlook, why does Hindu nationalism threaten?

The major weakness for Hindu nationalists is that, although they profess to unify India, they deal in symbols with great potential to divide and their rhetoric harbors a thinly veiled hostility toward Muslims. Although the BJP has retreated somewhat from the effort to install Hindi as the unifying national language, Hindu nationalism retains a Hindi and especially Sanskritic bias. Balraj Madhok argues that "India has a distinct culture which is common to all people of India. Being a vast country it has a number of developed languages with Sanskrit as the common link between them."[2] Such a formulation cannot easily appeal to the linguistically distinct Dravidian south.

Aryan racism also enters the Hindu nationalist appeal. Madhok points out that "the fact remains that the Aryan race spirit has pervaded the various racial and ethnic elements that constitute the Indian or Hindu nation, just as the Anglo-Sexan (*sic*) racial and Cultural characteristics have pervaded the life of people of England...."[3] V.T. Rajshekar, in a political pamphlet, disputes such a view: "Singing Bhajans, offering kumkum, arati, adopting names of Hindu gods, using Sanskrit expressions, building churches resembling temples—are not Indianising. They are Aryan symbols. And Aryans are not Indian. They are

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[1]P.K. Nijhawan, "Secularism: A New Paradigm," p. 185.
[2]Balraj Madhok, *Rationale of Hindu State*, 29.
[3]Ibid., p. 14.

foreigners."[1] In spite of its desire to speak for all India, Hindu nationalism does not.

Hindu nationalism hardly conceals its contempt for Islam and Muslims. Balraj Madhok refers often to the "Muslim mind" and speaks with some regret that the "re-incorporation of Muslims" into "Hindu Society" stopped with British protection of Muslims.[2] On the Muslims who are in India, "they are the progeny of the weakminded Hindus who could not stand up to the military, political and economic pressures or Muslim rulers and became Muslim to save their lives and properties."[3]

In this view, Muslims share the blame for partition. Seshadri asserts that "it was the Muslims remaining in Bharat who had spearheaded the agitation for Pakistan and had voted for partition." Seshadri goes so far as to argue that "the Muslims, in fact, should have been promptly asked to pack up and leave for the Islamic dreamland. But our Hindu leaders, in all their generosity, decided otherwise." This generosity was misplaced. Now, Seshadri assures somewhat ominously, the Hindu "has decided to mend matters."[4] One wonders why Hindu nationalists wonder why their appeal engenders concern in some parts of India.

Hindu nationalism also faces a threat from those forces of militant Hinduism not willing to make the compromises necessary to participate in the political system. These Hindu revivalists form a dedicated core of support for many Hindu positions, but they are unlikely to display the tolerance normally associated with Hinduism. Some revivalists are critical of the BJP, claiming it impedes the rise of Hinduism by embracing "positive" secularism and the vote getting process, which forces compromise. P.N. Joshi explains, "to the Hindus, BJP remains a secular party and in the secular circles, BJP remains a communal party."[5] As events in Ayodhya and Bombay show, it may not be easy to curb

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[1]V.T. Rajshekar, *Hinduism, Fascism and Gandhism: A Guide to Every Intelligent Indian* (Bangalore: Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 1985). Rajshekar has the bizare formulation that in the progression of Hinduism, fascism, and Gandhism, each term is worse than the term which preceded it.

[2]Madhok, *Rationale*, p. 22.

[3]Ibid., p. 31.

[4]H.V. Seshadri, *The Way*, p. 100.

[5]Joshi, *Secularism in Action*, p. 141.

communal violence when some local groups see the imposition of a Hindu state as a license for brutality.[1]

Although this strand of cruel fundamentalism can be found in Hindu nationalism, one risks confusion by focusing on this aspect as the central element in the Hindu appeal. While it makes good press to talk of a Hindu fundamentalism analogous to Muslim fundamentalism, as a dynamic and open federal polity India is much more complicated.

Even if the Hindu nationalists take power there are reasons not to anticipate disaster. Indeed, such a development could stabilize the situation. M.M. Sankhder, Professor of Political Science at the University of Delhi, points out that "power breeds responsibility and brings the ruling party face to face with the realities of internal power equations within the parliamentary and federal arenas of government." Sankhder also observes that "governmental power ... strengthens the arms of a parliamentary/legislative party in dealing with its mass membership organization and allied mass movements in the civil society."[2]

The challenge to secularism consists of a variety of distinct criticisms, which implies that a group which gains power on an anti-secular platform will find fashioning a ruling coalition for positive action difficult at best. At the heart of the Hindu nationalist agenda is an effort to refashion the Indian government and the federal system into a more unified structure bolstered by sentiments of nationalism. While chauvinistic and even violent elements are unleashed, many Hindu nationalists seem to accept constitutionalism and tolerance. India does not, as some observers would have it, sit on the verge of fascism along the lines of Nazi Germany or an Islamic-like Hindu state. Compromise and moderation are required by any group seeking power at the center. India's diversity becomes its bulwark against extremism.

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[1]For more on issues of communalism and violence, see Pramod Kumar, *Towards Understanding Communalism* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991) and Veena Das, ed., *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[2]Mahendra Pratap Singh, "Secularism and Communal Dialectics," in *Secularism in India*, ed. M.M. Sankhder (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1992), p. 233.

Implications for the Student of India

The study of the current debate about secularism in India reveals the shortcomings of many models commonly used by Americans to explain Indian history and society. While there is probably a large degree of Indian exceptionalism which makes India comprehensible only in its own terms, two strategies may help enrich the understanding of India.

First, the factional nature of Indian politics, as emphasized in the current debate and explained by academics like Atul Kohli, Paul Brass and B.R. Tomlinson, reminds this historian more of the situation faced by the American colonies in their effort to achieve a unified central government following independence from Britain than of the situation in most "third world" countries.[1] While not denying the many important differences between India and the United States, an American historian cannot help but be reminded of James Madison's observations in *The Federalist* Number 10 regarding factions in a large scale federal republic when analyzing the situation in India.[2] Rather than comparing India to fascist Europe, the Soviet Union, or the "third world", comparisons to the United States may prove more fruitful.

Second, excessive use of historical analogy from other periods in time runs the risk of incorporating outmoded assumptions regarding development stages so prominent in modernization theory. India's current problems relate directly to developments in this phase of world history; one could go so far to say that India's problems foreshadow those the United States is likely to face when the resources used to lubricate the machinery of a diverse federation can no longer be borrowed. Furthermore, those familiar with the constitutional debate over the separation of church and state in the United States and Stephen Carter's recent book *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* understand that questions regarding religion and politics are by no means confined to the so-called "developing" world.[3] Rather than grappling with issues already

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[1]Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent*; Paul Brass *Caste, Faction and Party in Indian Politics* (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1983); and B.R. Tomlinson *Indian National Congress and the Raj, 1929-1942: The Penultimate Phase* (London: MacMillan Press, 1975).

[2]Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (New York: New American Library, 1961).

[3]Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

solved by Western countries, India faces dilemmas associated with the modern state. Understanding India's experience in confronting these problems may provide unanticipated insights into problems faced by federal government in the United States.

Reconstituting South Asian Studies for a Diasporic Age

Rosane Rocher

This lecture, delivered at the first session of the South Asia Seminar "Reconsidering Boundaries in South Asian Studies" at the University of Texas at Austin on September 22, 1994, argues that South Asian Studies ought to be reconstituted to learn from the culture, account for the experience, and serve the needs of the growing South Asian ethnic community in the United States.

I am grateful for the opportunity this Seminar gives me to discuss an issue over which I have been mulling a lot recently. I have not spoken on this subject before, even less written about it. I intend this presentation to be a prelude to a discussion to which I invite you. To that effect, I will be purposely challenging. It is my contention that the issue that I will address is important, and that the field of South Asian Studies has not yet faced it squarely. I will argue that, at this juncture, a revision of what we are about is required; I will argue that the social context in which we work has been so altered that we need urgently, perhaps even belatedly, to reset the parameters of South Asian Studies and to reach across past boundaries to find new partners.

So that you can appreciate where I am coming from, I must set forth the basis on which I found my theory of knowledge, and hence my approach to scholarship and pedagogy. I subscribe to a non-foundational view of knowledge. Knowledge is more than cognition, it is more than a binary relation between an individual scholar and an object of enquiry. Scholarship, the production and dissemination of knowledge, is a complex exercise

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in which scholars are engaged with other practitioners in their own field and in other fields of enquiry, and with publics that provide the subjects, targets, and consumers of produced knowledge. Knowledge is generated, configured, and marketed in temporal and societal ambits. It is incremental at times, yet is more endemically negotiated. The pursuit of knowledge is a social exercise.

Perhaps because I work much on the eighteenth century, the period of the Enlightenment, which was dedicated to the notion that knowledge is liberating and forward-looking, and perhaps also because I teach at an institution that was founded by Benjamin Franklin, I adhere to the notion that knowledge, at its best, ought to be useful. When Franklin spoke of "useful knowledge," the promotion of which he enshrined in the charge of that other Philadelphia institution he founded, the American Philosophical Society, what he had in mind was mostly of a technological order. My version of this is that, ideally, knowledge ought to be socially useful. At the risk of sounding corny, I will state that knowledge, its acquisition through research, and its propagation through publication and teaching, the entire business of scholarship, ought to contribute to the betterment of the world we live in.

In the past fifty years, area studies have been at the forefront of combating isolationism by stressing the importance, whether economic, political, or cultural, of the areas of the Third World with which we are concerned. Our educational mission has been predicated on the notion that South Asianists are informants on, or teachers of, a foreign culture that is insufficiently known and inadequately represented in an American curriculum and in an American culture at large that have not yet shed their presumed European sources.

Meanwhile, the world around us has been changing. In 1965, new immigration laws took effect which have drastically altered the American landscape. The United States, engaged in a technological race with the Soviet Union, sought to import ready-made talent rather than wait to have it come slowly and home-grown. New immigration laws were enacted which favored the educated, the talented, the skilled. It was the era of the brain drain. For all its self-serving siphoning of worldwide brain powers, this new immigration policy had its socially enlightened aspects. It removed the old barriers based on "national origin," that euphemism for the troubling, but more accurate, term "race." The new immigration policy did not favor Asians, but it gave Asians, for the first time, a chance to immigrate that was on a par

with that of Europeans. This change was all the more dramatic since it was implemented only two decades after the Asian exclusion laws were repealed, when the racial discrimination ceased to be legally mandated that had denied Asians entry, stripped them of citizenship, barred them from land ownership, and culminated, during the Second World War, in the internment of Americans of Japanese descent.

The effect of the 1965 change in immigration law on South Asians has been particularly notable. With a tradition of learning that is at the root of Indian culture, with a strong system of advanced education, and with a knowledge of English and of Western ways which is one of the few blessings of their colonial past, South Asians were in a strong position to avail themselves of opportunities in America. This group of immigrants was very different from the early Indian immigrants who had come in the first decades of this century, and who were primarily manual, rural labor, mostly from the Punjab and primarily Sikh, on the West Coast, a community that attrited in California when Asian exclusion laws prevented them from importing wives and other family members and when this overwhelmingly male community was forced to find mostly Mexican wives steeped in a different tradition—the community of which Bruce La Brack and Karen Leonard among others have offered gripping studies.[1] The "new immigrants" of the post-1965 era were educated, ambitious, and upwardly mobile. They were predominantly young, and, with the introduction of family-reunification clauses in the immigration legislation, they were able to import spouses of their own background. Though the fertility rate of this immigrant group has been low, in keeping with their dual-employment trends and upwardly mobile aspirations, their children have now reached early adulthood and are joining the college population in increasing numbers.

We first experienced the impact of this new population in South Asian language classes. Here is how Gauri Bhat, who was a student at the University of Texas at Austin, describes the situation:

> Last fall [that was in 1990] I took a first-semester Hindi course at the University of Texas which was wall to wall

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[1]Bruce La Brack, *The Sikhs of Northern California 1940-1975* (New York: AMS Press, 1988); Karen Isaksen Leondard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

> ABCDs (American-Born Confused Desis as we are disparagingly called). Non-Indians in the class included only a handful of (white) Asian studies majors and one intrepid zoology major who wanted to study large cats in Uttar Pradesh. The Indians were of the usual premed, business, engineering ilk . . ., and were from not only Dallas and Houston, but Amarillo, Lubbock and Temple. I had only recently returned from a visit to India, so it was still a slightly surreal experience to hear a slack-jawed, thick-tongued West Texas drawl issuing from the mouth of someone who, in a *mundu* and *chappals*, could have been our Bangalore *rickshawalla*. Culture is a remarkable thing.[1]

With apologies, I confess that the initial reaction that we, language teachers, had to this new clientele was mixed. They beefed up enrollments nicely at a time when deans were becoming number-conscious, but they tended to be—well, disturbing, that is disturbing of business as usual. We were used to cohorts of students who came in as blank slates and who proceeded in lockstep fashion predictably to acquire linguistic and cultural knowledge in amounts that we carefully dosed. We were suddenly faced with a motley group of folks, some of whom had been exposed to lots of spoken, let us say Hindi, at home, who knew the kinship terms and the proper forms of address which we devoted so much time inculcating in our prior clientele, who knew about foods and controlled a host of other elements of cultural knowledge which we used to package along with linguistic skills, but who were often illiterate in the language and were not always eager to work on reading and writing skills, or to ingest huge doses of corrective grammar. At Penn, coping strategies included creating a separate track, labeled "accelerated," at least for Hindi, where enrollments allowed it. For some other languages, such as Panjabi or Gujarati, enrollments consist almost entirely of undergraduates of South Asian descent. In all South Asian language classes at Penn, and I hear elsewhere, a majority of the population is now of South Asian descent.

The next area in which we noticed the influx of South Asian ethnic population was in introductory courses on Indian culture. At Penn SARS 101, "The Legacy of India," an undergraduate lecture course devoted to a cultural history of

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[1]Gauri Bhat, "Tending the Flame: Thoughts on Being Indian-American," *Committee on South Asian Women Bulletin* 7:3-4 (1993): 4.

South Asia, has seen enrollments boom, braking for the first time the 200 mark last Spring. Of those enrollees 48% were of South Asian heritage and 23% of other Asian heritage, for a total of 71% students of Asian ethnicity in the course.

Whether in language or in other courses, we need to serve this population in sensitive ways. We can no longer teach South Asian Studies as a foreign subject, but we must view it as a form of ethnic studies, much as Jewish studies has been taught in ways that are not dominated by either world-civilization or antiquarian concerns, or by a location in the Near East. A majority of our students are no longer intellectual adventurers with an eye peeled for an exotic India, but young people who struggle to recover the cultural heritage from which they have been separated by a primary and secondary school curriculum that remains western and Eurocentric.

I have put pedagogical concerns up front because this is how I was first confronted with this issue, but the impact of this new situation on scholarship should be no less remarkable.

Let us think of economics, for example. The Helwegs' book, *An Immigrant Success Story: East Indians in America*, has an interesting chapter on the impact of expatriation on the Indian economy.[1] The Helwegs' estimate that the average Indian family in the US sends between $50 and $100 per month back to India. There are business investments as well. The impact of expatriate Indian investment has been massive in areas such as the Punjab, which owes much of its development into the breadbasket of India to such investments. The states of Punjab, Gujarat, and Kerala, which have the largest emigrant populations, have established bureaus to woo expatriate investment. Look at the advertisements published in the bimonthly magazine *India Today* that are specially aimed at Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and which offer special breaks on investments in their country of origin and acquisition of real estate for after retirement. The assets of diasporic South Asians have now a significant impact on South Asian capital flow. On the other hand, consider the loss that South Asian countries sustain by the emigration of many of their best graduates. The Helwegs' estimate that the rate of emigration of graduates from the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology

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[1]Chapter 13 "Emigration from India and Immigration to America" in Arthur W. Helweg and Usha M. Helweg, *An Immigrant Success Story: East Indians in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), pp. 210-25.

was about half the total in the years 1968 to 1976.[1] The medical profession also loses many of its best practitioners to emigration. It is estimated that the emigration of a qualified doctor represents a loss of $40, 000 to India, and his/her immigration a gain of $648, 000 to the U.S. The South Asian diaspora, not only to the US and Canada, but to Great Britain, Australia, Hongkong, Singapore, and the Gulf states, has a significant impact on the economies of South Asian countries.

South Asian foreign policy and domestic politics are also affected by diasporic constituencies. There were suggestions that India's policy during the Gulf War was mindful of the presence of great numbers of Indian citizens in the Gulf states. There is also little doubt that political groups in cultural or religious guise, such as the VHP and Sikh separatists, receive much of their funding from supporters settled abroad, a feature that makes it easier for them to flaunt bans imposed on their activities by the Indian government. Political and social affairs in North America may also be impacted. Think of the repercussions of the bombing of the AirIndia flight by terrorist cells based in Canada. On a less tragic, but still intriguing, level, I would love to know how it came about that AT&T put the VHP on the list of charities to which it contributed. There was such an outcry that they opened an 800 number for people who wanted to register complaints. I was startled, when I called that number, that the operator automatically addressed me in Hindi!

What lessons does the cultural evolution of diasporic populations hold for our understanding of Indian culture? There have been diasporic Indian populations in prior centuries, most notably those brought by indenture to the Caribbean and Fiji. That situation was, however, different, in that those populations, like that of the early California Sikhs, were made primarily of poor, rural-labor, uneducated males who severed contact with their homeland since they did not have the financial and other resources that allow today's diasporic South Asians not only to bring over spouses and other family members, but also to make regular family trips to South Asia at an estimated average of once every three years in the case of Indians settled in the US.[2] In the case of the later diasporic populations with which I am primarily concerned, it is harder to dismiss evolutionary patterns as little

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[1]Ibid., p. 61.

[2]Arthur W. and Usha M. Helweg, *An Immigrant Success Story*, p. 144.

more than a loss of culture to be blamed on severance from the home country; active choices seem to be a key.

It seems clear that caste does not weather expatriation well. This was so for indentured, rural migrants to the Caribbean and elsewhere; it is equally so for professional immigrants from urban India in the US. I do not mean to say that Indian immigrants in America instantly forget and forego their caste identity, but commensality patterns and other social associations promptly ignore it, and it appears to be less important in the selection of mates for their offspring than other criteria such as financial and professional status and regional origin. Certainly, the American-bred generation tends to have little patience with caste. It seems to me that the concept and the importance of caste need to be reexamined against the lessons of the diaspora. Perhaps more than any other feature, caste has been considered to be a fundamental element of Indian culture; to use Louis Dumont's title, the Indian human has been defined as *Homo Hierarchicus*. Yet caste seems to be a fragile plant, not easily transplanted on foreign soil. Have we made too much of caste?

And what of regionalism? The preferred pattern of association for immigrants from South Asia is by regional and linguistic groups. Immigrants look forward to opportunities to converse in their mother tongues and about familiar haunts. Yet families in which English is the primary mode of communication place little emphasis on passing on their mother tongues to the successor generation, and young people raised in English have little interest in maintaining regional patterns of association. Most identify themselves by nationality, i.e. by the nationality of their parents as Indians, Pakistanis, etc. With young people of Indian or Pakistani origin, Hindi and Urdu have acquired the status of national languages. Even at places like Penn, where instruction in a wide array of South Asian languages is available, students of Indian/Pakistani origin whose family language is other than Hindi/Urdu are eager to study it, as the language they construct secondarily as the national language of their parents, according to a pattern that prolongs Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. As in Trinidad, Hindi has also acquired a sacred aura, displacing Sanskrit in much of the rituals, except for the sacred mantras. In the Caribbean, this evolution had much to do with the missionary activities of the Arya Samaj. Is the same influence at work in the United States, or are there other factors at play? Instead of regional groups, what appears to be emerging is a North/South divide, apparent, for example, in the existence of two temples in Pittsburgh, one North Indian, the other South

Indian. Marriages that cross the North/South boundary are frowned upon, whereas more regional collocations, such as between persons originally from Gujarat and from UP, are increasingly frequent. There appears, therefore, to be a return to older, racial, Aryan/Dravidian distinctions, a phenomenon that raises the question whether this binary division was ever erased, or whether it was just made less apparent within more regional subtexts. I am puzzled by the fact that the steadiest ethnic clientele for my Sanskrit courses appears to be made of people of South Indian Brahman background, a pattern that raises a host of interesting, and possibly troubling, questions. Might Sanskrit knowledge constitute an ultimate self-affirmation by an elite (Brahmanical) minority of an ethnic (South Indian) minority of an ethnic (Indian/South Asian) minority in the US?

On the religious side, there appears to be a worrisome tendency among diasporic Hindus to conflate Indian and Hindu identities, that is, to define Indianness in Hindu terms. This may be due in part to the influence of the VHP of North America, which has stepped in the Indian cultural vacuum and provides summer camps for youths, in which Hindu rituals are taught and Indian culture reinforced in a purposely integrative fashion. But there may be other forces at work as well. The North Indian temple at Pittsburgh is labeled, and organized as, a Hindu-Jain temple, a result, it would seem, of a reasonable desire to meet the needs of a community in which Gujaratis constitute a majority, and Jains a significant minority among Gujaratis. Yet the temple landscape in Pittsburgh raises puzzling questions, in that it is laid out in ways that accommodate two religions, Hindu and Jain, for Indians of North Indian extraction in a single temple structure at the same time that it segregates Hindus from North and South India in two distinct temple complexes. Sikhs clearly have separate gurdwaras and appear to emphasize a close-knit religious community rather than seek a common ground with other South Asian religions. John Fenton, in his book *Transplanting Religious Traditions: Asian Indians in America*, forecasts a movement of South Asian Muslims toward pan-Islamicism. He may be right, though this trend is unlikely to apply to Ismailis, many of whom were displaced from East Africa and have a tradition of maintaining strong communal ties. I tend to doubt Fenton's assessment of Indian Christians, who he forecasts will assimilate promptly with majority-community churches. All the evidence I have points, to the contrary, to Indian Christians emphasizing their Indian identity, establishing their own separate churches as soon as their density allows, and generally joining Hindus in an effort to

maintain their Indian culture. Similarly, there appears to be no impending merger of the Hinduism of immigrants with that of American converts to Krishna Consciousness, Ramakrishna Mission, and other proselytizing groups. Even though, in smaller communities, Indian Hindus may link up with Western-style Hindu movements that may provide them with a venue for their functions, such linkages appear to be temporary, ad-hoc, remedial measures. Other evidence points to a direct affiliation between temples in America and orthodox religious centers in India, such as the vertical link between the South Indian temple in Pittsburgh and the Srivenkatesvara temple in Tirupati. Ultimately, the current emphasis on temple construction may be misleading. In most cases, and as community leaders freely admit, temples are not primarily intended as places of worship, but as community centers, meeting grounds for immigrants and marriage markets for their children. Those of my students who identify themselves as Hindu, including those who have participated in summer camps organized by the VHP, seem pessimistic about the maintenance of Hinduism in America. In order to survive, Hinduism may have to become congregational, and may require a switch to English for rituals that successor generations find gratingly obscure. Such modifications are unlikely to come easily as long as priests are imported from India; and there appears to be little interest here to create American Hindu seminaries, and even less interest in directing children to priestly careers. Perhaps the notion that some of us have long held, that Hinduism is more a way of life than a religion of worship and dogma, has merit, and, if so, Hinduism may not be easily maintained. Hinduism in America deserves to be watched closely, and I will be curious to see the results of Diana Eck's ongoing and encompassing project.

Perhaps, as with other Asian communities, Indian culture may be largely lost in time, except for the usual three Fs: food, films, and festivals. Each of these aspects would deserve some discussion, but let me pass on to what is clearly the most important for the South Asian community in America, the F of family. the maintenance of family ties is the primary concern of the immigrant generation and, in spite of their worries that their children will sever these bonds, all the evidence shows that the pattern of family closeness and of extended family ties is the tradition that South Asian immigrants have transmitted most securely to the next generation, so securely that that generation is likely to emphasize its transmission to the next. There have been

some comparative studies of family trends in India and in the diaspora.[1] More are needed.

What does the apparent evolution of Indian culture in America tell us about its nature? In a short but stimulating article entitled "The Diaspora in Indian culture," Amitav Ghosh argues that diasporic Indians carry with them less items than processes. Thus, he says, "India exported with her population, not a language, as other civilizations have done, but a linguistic process—the process of adaptation to heteroglossia."[2] Ghosh sees in the diaspora an extension of the importance of the periphery, which he considers to be characteristic of Indian culture. He contrasts this phenomenon with the notion of "the colonial" in Britain. In Britain, being a colonial, whether Canadian, Australian, or South African, is being "imperfectly British." This argument resonates with me even more in the French context, in which being merely "francophone"—and within France itself, being "provincial"—is being imperfectly French, which is defined as being Parisian, in a culture in which there is no one, no thing perfectly French outside Paris. Ghosh argues with considerable merit,

> It is impossible to be imperfectly Indian. There is no notion comparable to that of the colonial. Were it possible to be an imperfect Indian, everybody in India would be. This is not merely because India has failed to develop a national culture. It is not a lack; it is in itself the form of Indian culture. If there is any one pattern in Indian culture in the broadest sense it is simply this: that the culture seems to be constructed around the proliferation of differences (albeit within certain parameters). To be different in a world of differences is irrevocably to belong. Thus anybody anywhere who has even the most tenuous links with India is Indian; potentially a player within the culture. The mother country simply does not have the cultural means to cut him off.[3]

I urge that we not dismiss or neglect the evolution of diasporic South Asian cultures as of little or no relevance for a deeper

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[1]See, for example, *Family in India and North America,* a special issue of the *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 19:2 (1988), edited by Dan A. Chekki.

[2]Amitav Ghosh, "The Diaspora in Indian Culture," *Public Culture* 2:1 (1989): 75.

[3]Ibid., 77-78.

understanding of South Asian culture, but rather that the boundaries between features of South Asian culture in South Asia and South Asian culture elsewhere be systematically questioned and problematized.

Another boundary line that I urge be crossed is that which has thus far separated South Asianists from intellectuals of the South Asian diaspora. Intellectuals of the South Asian diaspora constitute a small, but notable group in the American academy. They often express misgivings at being treated as privileged voices and at being charged with the burden of speaking for, of "representing," South Asia or the Third World at large. That this burden imposed on them stems from considerations more of race than of birth, and that it affects women in particular is attested to by Gauri Bhat:

> The voices of political correctness in academia, where I now reside, were indeed correct when they told me that my color is incontrovertibly relevant to my life. But they did not tell me that, barring those spotlight moments of truth, I would feel more brown in a room full of leftist academics than I do walking down the street. In the classrooms of radical discourse, the darkness of my skin is like a badge of honor. I am marked as an Empath. Guilty and solicitous white male scholars tiptoe around my privileged understanding of texts. And I think: I was not raised in the barrios, in the ghettos, under the British colonial empire, so how is my color a window? Sometimes the academic attentiveness to women of color dovetails with that long fascination with Asian women as exotic sexual objects, so that I begin to feel like the flavor of the month—dark and mysterious, and politically correct to boot.[1]

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, one of the leading Third-World feminists in this country, speaks likewise:

> in speaking *about* Third World peoples, I have to watch constantly the tendency to speak *for* Third World peoples. For I often come to embody the "authentic" authority and experience for many of my students; indeed, they construct me as a native informant in the same way that left-liberal white students sometimes construct all people

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[1]Gauri Bhat, "Tending the Flame," 3-4.

> of color as the authentic voices of their people. This is evident in the classroom when the specific "differences" (of personality, posture, behavior, etc.) of one woman of color stand in for the difference of the whole collective, and a collective voice is assumed in place of an individual voice.[1]

South Asian diasporic intellectuals tend to be located in departments of English, of comparative literature, of women's studies, and the like, in which they teach subjects such as cultural studies, postcolonial literature, or Third-World women. South Asianists have tended to view them as more bent on theory than on the specifics of South Asian or other cultures. This is indeed the case, and yet, while South Asian diasporic intellectuals are mostly engaged in building theoretical constructs, the examples they use often come from South Asia. I amazed at the prominence of South Asia in the fields of postcolonial literature and cultural studies. There are obvious reasons for this in the colonial past, such as the abundance of South Asian literature in English. Yet, we, South Asianists, need to ask ourselves why it is that we still need to insist that attention be paid to South Asia within Asian Studies, when South Asian issues are so prominently and seamlessly featured in fields such as postcolonial literature and cultural studies? Contrast, for example, the job lists in the Newsletter of the Association for Asian Studies, in which openings for South Asian Studies are few in between openings for East Asian Studies, and, on the other hand, the fact that the only time we had an overflow crowd in our 47-year old South Asia Seminar at Penn was when Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was the featured speaker. We had made no special effort to advertise her lecture, but huge crowds showed up, colleagues in other departments who had never attended a South Asia Seminar, and hordes of undergraduate majors in English.

What I argue is not that we should attempt to merge our scholarly concerns with those of these, indeed very differently focused, scholars, but that we should make it a point to read them at least occasionally. Read articles such as "Postcoloniality and the Boundaries of Identity," published in *Callaloo*, a journal of African American and African Studies, by critical theorist R. Radhakrishnan, past the theoretical jargon, for the way in which, groping for the familiar, he brings up South Asian examples—

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[1]Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in the 1990s," *Cultural Critique* 14 (1989-90): 194.

Salman Rushdie, Nehru and Gandhi, Ranajit Guha's subaltern group—and for the references he makes to a bevy of authors both from South Asia and from the South Asian diaspora.[1] For relief, and still to appreciate the impact of these current trends on American campuses, read Kirin Narayanan's just published novel, *Love, Stars and All That*, about a student who comes from Bombay to study postcolonial literature at Berkeley and goes on to teach at a Whitney College—nicknamed Whitey College—in Vermont. It features delightful spoofs of academic jargon and mores, such as a portrayal of a flamboyant avant-garde, feminist lecturer whom she names Kamashree Ratnabhushitalingam-Hernandez.[2] I also argue, on the evidence I have that theoretical books by authors of the Indian diaspora are constantly out on loan or locked in reserve in the Penn library, that, when we offer general undergraduate courses, we should not assume that European American students have no clue about South Asia if they have not had instruction in a South Asian language or taken a course on South Asian civilization. Many may have been exposed to various strands of information about South Asia, made to support a theoretical point in some general course or in theoretical books that are assigned readings, strands of information that we may help them collocate and build into a broad perspective on South Asia that may again be tapped further in support of their general education interests. The South Asian diasporic intellectuals who provide this information may also lead us to rethink the way in which we approach our task: the information they provide may be scattered as far as an integrated view of South Asian culture is concerned, but it is probably more integrated in the intellectual lives of American students than what we provide. Let us attempt to minimize, not maximize, the geographical distance and the intellectual exoticism of South Asian culture.

Much of what we do as South Asianists has featured a western gaze at South Asia—a western-gaze attitude to which South Asianists of South Asian extraction are not necessarily immune, and which is one of the points on which I take the anti-orientalist critique seriously. Diasporic intellectuals have, quite differently, developed a double gaze directed at both South Asia

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[1]R. Radhakrishnan, "Postcoloniality and the Boundaries of Identity," *Callaloo* 16 (1993): 750-1.

[2]See in particular chapter 4 "Dashing Means Danger" in Kirin Narayanan, *Love, Stars, and All That* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994), pp. 124-59.

and America. Many are long-term green-card holders, who react, often sharply, to the threats of racialization and minoritization that American citizenship would involve. Their intellectual stance is not a comfortable one. R. Radhakrishnan describes the diasporic consciousness as "a condition of pain, and double alienation," and a location "of painful, incommensurable simultaneity."[1] Bharati Mukherjee, who did become an American citizen and who is a contrary voice on behalf of a commitment to purposeful immigration, argues, to the contrary, that the diasporic stance is a position of snootiness. In a piece published in celebration of her new American citizenship she writes:

> I thinks there is . . . some forgivable fraud involved in the maintenance of expatriation. In literary terms, being an immigrant is very déclassé. There is a low-grade ashcan realism implied in the very material. The exiles (or their even haughtier cousin, the God-help-us! émigré) come wrapped in a cloak of mystery and world-weariness. By refusing to play the game of immigration, they certify to the world, and especially to their hosts, the purity of their pain and their moral superiority to the world around them. In some obscure way, they earn the right to be permanent scolds, soaking up comfort and privilege and nursing real grievances until privilege and grievance become habits of mind.[2]

Wherever we stand on this issue—and I admit to oscillating between these two positions depending on the specifics of the case— I argue that South Asianists ought to explore this diasporic consciousness. It is a space occupied by creative minds, with whom we ought to be in dialogue, sometimes even in alliance, particularly when, instead of speaking from a perspective of double privilege, they speak from a perspective of double responsibility. In a sensitive piece dedicated to his eleven-year old, bicultural son, in which he probes the different validities of competing perspectives on South Asia, that of the resident Indian, the diasporan—his own— and the bicultural—that of his son's second generation— R. Radhakrishnan states:

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[1]R. Radhakrishnan, "Postcoloniality and the Boundaries of Identity," *Callaloo* 16 (1987): 764, 765.

[2]Bharati Mukherjee, "Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists," *New York Times Book Review*, August 28, 1988.

> As diasporan citizens doing double duty (with accountability both here and there), we need to understand as rigorously as we can the political crises in India, both because they concern us and also because we have a duty to represent India to ourselves and to the United States as truthfully as we can.[1]

At is best, the diasporan perspective is less that of a double distance than that of a double engagement.

I realize that, by urging a rapprochement between South Asianists and diasporic intellectuals, I propose a partial deprofessionalization of our field. It is my opinion that we may have placed too much emphasis on too narrowly defined professional credentials and been too dismissive of people whose primary qualifications may appear at first blush to be that they happen to be South Asians by birth. One of the challenges of having in our midst a host of persons of intellect and of influence who are concerned with South Asian issues is that we may have to let go of professional smugness and make judgments solely on the basis of whether the thoughts that are being expressed enlighten the issues. I suggest that we ought not to try to protect our academic turf, but that we should cross academic boundaries that have so far hemmed us in a foreign East. We may do well to follow the path that Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge have blazed with the journal *Public Culture: Bulletin of the Society for Transnational Cultural Studies*, and to heed the diasporic voice of those whom Appadurai calls "transnational intellectuals." Read his piece entitled "Patriotism and Its Futures" and the revised version of it that appeared under the title "The Heart of Whiteness."[2]

In this prelude to our conversation, I have brought up a host of different considerations, all linked by my contention that we need to rethink South Asian Studies as a part of ethnic studies, no longer as a division of foreign studies. Let me conclude by suggesting some of the practical steps that we might take to effect changes in our activities that meet some of the challenges which

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[1]R. Radhkrishnan, "Is Ethnic 'Authentic' in the Diaspora?," in *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s,* ed. Karin Aguilar-San Juan (Boston: South End Press, 1994), p. 230.

[2]Arjun Appadurai, "Patriotism and Its Futures," *Public Culture* 5 (1993): 411-29, and "The Heart of Whiteness," *Callaloo* 16 (1993): 795-807.

the presence of a permanent South Asian community in North America poses.

As teachers, we ought to think through and ethicize our role as providers or boosters of cultural knowledge for South Asian ethnics. We need to do better than dish out to them in a marginally revised version materials we had prepared as an introduction for European Americans to the cultures of South Asia. It is all the more crucial that we teach thoughtfully, responsibly, ethically, since the only alternatives for our new clientele may be total ignorance or parochial notions such as those provided by the VHP. The programs for youths organized by the VHP of North America perform an important function, in the order of what a Sunday school provides for youngsters brought up in other creeds, but majority-community youngsters have a host of complementary and competing opportunities to learn about the underpinnings of their culture; their entire cultural training does not come from Sunday school. South Asian American youths also need to learn about their culture in ways that are not hemmed in by parochial concerns.

We need also to modify our outreach work to and on behalf of our South Asian community. Our outreach efforts have often focused on helping high schools develop responsible curricula for world-culture courses, a role predicated on the notion that South Asian culture is foreign. We need now to develop a consciousness among primary and secondary school teachers and in the public at large that there is not just a South Asia out there, but that there are people of South Asian heritage right here, as part of our ethnic make-up, who are not just our friends and our neighbors, but who are us. We must work to establish the notion that Indian curry is no less American than European apple pie, that being brown is no less American than being white.

Our outreach to the community has all too often consisted of showing up at formal functions on invitation, and delivering predictable remarks about the greatness of Indian culture. Now that there is a South Asian American community, and particularly a second generation, who may need us to enlighten issues about which they care, we must accept the duty of occasionally voicing thoughts that might be controversial. We may not shirk the responsibility of challenging tendentious propaganda and of setting the record straight on issues that relate to South Asia.

Most of us might prefer to stay in strictly academic, and hence presumably safe, zones. Yet the parameters of such zones shrink when we live and work in the midst of people for whom

issues that may be of professional interest to us are of intense personal relevance. On contentious subjects, academic coolness, tempered by sensitivity—let me underscore this—academic coolness tempered by sensitivity to the fact that such subjects are, and are legitimately, of intense personal relevance to a segment of the American public—academic coolness of this kind can produce much that is both scholarly legitimate and socially useful. An outstanding example of such a collocation is that of a conference that was held at Columbia University in the Spring of 1989, and of the publication that ensued from that conference. *Studying the Sikhs: Issues for North America* is all the more remarkable because of the particular difficulties that have surrounded Sikh studies; it is a model of both impeccable scholarship and sensitivity to the community concerned, a community that is acknowledged as a constituent part of the American fabric.

We should also educate ourselves in the American part of the hyphenated identity of South Asian Americans, and of Asian Americans in general. We should read anthologies such as *Our Feet Walk the Sky: Women of the South Asian Diaspora; Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian American Women; Asian American Experiences in the United States;* and *Growing Up Asian American* among other books. We should also have more than a nodding acquaintance with the concerns of ethnic studies generally, and of Asian American Studies in particular. It is probably no accident that one of the most sensitive pieces in the book Studying the Sikhs is the liminal essay by Mark Jurgensmeyer, who happens to be married to Sucheng Chan, the grande dame of Asian American Studies.[1] In an article published in one the yearly anthologies of the Association of Asian American Studies, Sucheta Mazumdar observes:

> Though some scholars of Asian Studies do, on a personal level, have some interaction with faculty and curricula in Asian American Studies, by and large most ignore Asian American Studies. Asian American Studies, with its politics of protest and challenge to existing curricula of higher education in America, has been seen as "too political" by a field used to thinking of politics only in distant lands. The centrality of race and issues of racism

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[1]Mark Jurgensmeyer, " Sikhism and Religious Studies," in *Studying the Sikhs: Issues for North America*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Gurinder Singh Mann (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 9-23.

> in scholarship on Asian American Studies have also been uncomfortable topics for Asianists who have tended to leave such issues unexamined.[1]

I am told by the friends I have made in the field of Asian American Studies that the writing course on the Indian American experience I introduced at Penn last year is the very first course in which South Asian American Studies is taught in an ethnic studies mode. Look for a report on the first run of that course to appear in the next anthology of the Association of Asian American Studies.[2]

Besides collaborating with colleagues in Asian American Studies, we ought also to link up, as I intimated before, with colleagues who are members of the South Asian diasporic intelligentsia. Many are on the left-leaning, progressive side of things; not all of us may feel comfortable with that. On the other hand, the South Asian community at large is, for the most part, on the right-leaning, conservative side of things, and not all of us may feel comfortable with that either. I suggest that it is not necessary for us, either collectively or as individuals, to agree with a particular stance in order to develop a meaningful partnership, and, even if the dialogue that ensues is more in the nature of a debate than of a chorus, let it be that way, but let us not ignore what appears meaningful in their intellectual and social lives. One of the specific and all-important questions on which we may collaborate—or argue—with great benefit to both scholars of Asian American Studies and scholars of postcolonial literature and cultural studies, is that of canon formation, maintenance, an subversion.

National Resource Centers for South Asia should broaden the compass of their mandate. We have been in partnership with a variety of departments and programs—international relations, anthropology, etc.—to train disciplinary specialists who have a particular expertise in South Asia. We need now to link up with other departments and schools that have not been traditional

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[1]Sucheta Mazumdar, "Asian American Studies and Asian Studies: Rethinking Roots," in *Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives*, ed. Shirley Hune et al. (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1991), p. 30.

[2]Rosane Rocher, "Building Community Spirit: A Writing Course on the American Experience," in [title to be added in proofs], ed. Lane R. Hirabayashi et al. (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, forthcoming).

partners: schools of education, to train those who will responsible for tomorrow's curricula in primary and secondary schools; schools of journalism and communication to train those who will investigate and report on South Asian community affairs; and, most urgently, schools of social work. While the South Asian community glories in its hard-won successes, deep cracks are developing, which cannot be papered over. Mounting tensions have resulted in a high incidence of spousal abuse cases, worsened by the fact that separation and divorce are not easily considered options. Women's shelters run by Sakhi and other groups in New York, Chicago, Boston, and other cities are heavily used. The latest issue of *India Today* reports a rising incidence of elder abuse in the Indian Canadian community.[1] The need for social services grows as the profile of the community changes. After the influx of highly educated, professional, and now affluent immigrants of the late 1960s and 70s, family sponsorship clauses and other factors have brought since the mid-1980s immigrants who are less skilled. More of today's South Asian immigrants man newspaper stands, Seven-Eleven counters, and taxicabs in cities like New York Philadelphia than they do hospitals and research labs. More live in cramped quarters in inner-city little Indias than in suburban ease. These latest immigrants need the support of social workers who are not only capable of understanding their language—for a knowledge of English is no longer standard—but who are also sensitive to aspects of South Asian culture, deportment, and family dynamics. We lag far behind Canada in meeting this need.

Perhaps most important, we ought, as individuals and collectively, to expose and combat anti-South Asian racism, which is on the rise. By this I do not mean denouncing only the hate crimes committed by the infamous "Dotbusters" of Northern New Jersey, but also, and vigilantly, seemingly innocuous instances of insults, crude jokes, taunts, and the like, which exemplify and nourish a climate of prejudice. We must communicate to any offenders that our role is not just to teach about South Asian culture and society in the rarefied groves of the academy, but also to demand that Americans of South Asian descent by treated with respect.

In sum, I submit that we must link the pursuit of knowledge with social responsibility. We must remove the

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[1]Satinder Bindra, "Autumn of Discontent: Elder Abuse Is On the Rise in the Indian Community," *India Today*, September 15, 1994, North American Special, 56b-c.

boundary between the academy and the world we live in. We must cease treating South Asian affairs as a foreign topic, to be investigated only on research grants funded in Rupees. We must acknowledge our responsibility toward the ethnic South Asian community at home. We must re-constitute South Asian Studies, by which I mean that we must form a special bond with, and accept a special duty toward, a new "constituency" here at home.

Book Review

When God is a Customer: Telugu Courtesan Songs by Ksetrayya and Others. By A. K. Ramanujan, Velcheru Narayana Rao, and David Shulman. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. Pp. 158.

This work introduces a new genre of South Indian poetry to the Western audience — the Telugu *padam*, defined as "short musical compositions of a light classical nature, intended to be sung and, often, danced" (p. 1). The bulk of the fifty translated poems in *When God is a Customer* were composed by the wandering court poet Ksetrayya (mid-seventeenth century). Ksetrayya's *padams* are framed between those of the earlier Tallapaka Annamayya of Tirupati (late fifteenth century) and the later Sarangapani of Chittoor district (early eighteenth century). This not only gives the reader access to a variety of poetic voices, but also highlights the changing nature of the *padam* tradition over time. A lengthy introduction precedes the translated poems, in what has now become a standard format for such translations following the model of A. K. Ramanujan's previous works.

The poems as rendered in English are utterly charming, speaking to the reader with a freshness and directness that transcend the distances of time and place. One would expect no less, given the demonstrated poetic sensibilities and interpretive skills of the volume's editor-translators. A. K. Ramanujan, Velcheru Narayana Rao, and David Shulman have all achieved recognition for their mastery of South Indian literature; perhaps less well known is their stature as poets in their own right. It is this combination of a thorough immersion in South Indian poetry and a personal poetic vision that enables the translators to convey the meaning of the *padams* to us in such an understandable and contemporary manner. Listen, for example, to their version of a wife's plaint as envisioned by Ksetrayya:

> Don't tell me what he did in some other country.
> What has it got to do with me? For god's sake, stop it.
> What are you saying: that he went to her house, fell for her,
> gave her money and begged her?
>
> More likely, she saw his beauty, wanted him,

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fell all over him, begged him, melted him with her music.
After all, he's a man. He couldn't contain himself, that's all.

Don't tell me what he did.
(from Ksetrayya 233, p. 93)

The introduction to the poems represents a considerable contribution in and of itself, as the first major essay in English on the *padam* genre. It begins by situating *padams* within the larger *bhakti* tradition of devotional poetry. Like earlier *bhakti* poems, *padams* are generally cast in a feminine voice and addressed to a male deity-lover. But while the dominant tone of classical *bhakti*, as exemplified by the eighth-century poet-saint Nammalvar, is that of frustrated desire and anxious separation (*viraha*), the late medieval *padam* is said to be more playful in mood as well as more often suggesting sexual fulfillment. Hence, "a lover's pique, never entirely or irrevocably serious, is the real equivalent in these poems to the earlier ideology of *viraha*" (p. 16). Above all, the *padam* is far more unabashedly erotic than earlier poetry, and the translated poems contain many explicit references to sexual union. This eroticism reflects the late medieval emphasis on bodily knowledge, an argument developed at greater length in *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamil Nadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), a recent book by two of the editor-translators, Narayana Rao and Shulman, along with Sanjay Subrahmanyam. By refuting the misguided metaphorical interpretations of the last century, which attempted to obscure the forthright sexuality that is so central to *padam* poetry, the editors of this volume have restored the erotic element to its rightful place in Indian literature.

The title *When God is a Customer* alludes to another major departure from earlier *bhakti* traditions. The female-devotee is no longer so helpless and subservient in her longing for the male deity-lover. Instead, the female voice in the *padam* genre is often that of an independent and bold courtesan, who on occasion even withholds her favors from the god-customer if insufficiently remunerated. In these poems, it is the woman, the devotee, who has the upper hand, in a startling reversal of previous patterns. The insouciance of the courtesan comes through loud and clear in verses such as the following:

Prince of playboys, you may be,
but is it fair
to ask me to forget the money?

I earned it, after all,
by spending time with you.
Stop this trickery at once.
Put up the gold you owe me
and then you can talk,
Adivaraha.

Handsome, aren't you?

(from Ksetrayya 1, p. 69)

Yet, the majority of the female voices in the translated poems are not so self-assured nor indifferent. The most common character is the woman hurt by her man's unfaithfulness, who lovingly accepts him back nonetheless. In this sense, the *padams* resemble their predecessors more than the introductory essay and title might suggest.

In short, *When God is a Customer* is a delightful addition to the growing body of Indian verse in translation, considerably augmenting the meager quantity of Telugu literature available in English. Poetry, it was said in medieval Andhra, was one of the *sapta-santana,* the seven offspring that would perpetuate a man's memory. And, without doubt, *When God is a Customer* will long serve as a reminder of all that we gained through the presence of A.K. Ramanujan amongst us and all that we have lost as a result of his untimely death in 1993. It is surely fitting that one of Ramanujan's last works was a collaboration, for he will be remembered not only for his skills but equally for his generosity of spirit.

Cynthia Talbot
Northern Arizona University

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Michigan South Asia Language Program: The Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies and the International Institute at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, are developing plans for a 1995 South Asia Summer Language Program. The South Asian Languages in which tentative arrangements are now under serious consideration include: Gujarati, Hindi/Urdu, Marathi, Punjabi, Sanskrit, and Tamil. For further information, please contact:

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Errata

The following are corrections to volume 1, number 1:

Inside, front cover: Roger Goodding should read Robert Goodding

Quotation from Said on page one: Should not contain the word Blurb. The sentence should correctly read: "It is a much graver mistake, however, to read them stripped of their countless affiliations..."

Biographical note on page sixteen: There should not be the word "she" following the name "Leah".

Biographical note on page 60: Should read: "Geetika Pathania is a second-year doctoral student..."

SUBMISSION AND SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Submissions

Submissions should be no more than 6,250 words (approximately 25 double-spaced pages) on any topic dealing with South Asia. Please include full footnotes and bibliographies according to the latest edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style* (Turabian); do not use parenthetical references. Contributors are encouraged to submit their articles either on diskettes or by email. Printed or typewritten articles are also accepted; 8.5" by 11" paper is preferred. Authors must include their names, addresses, phone numbers, fax numbers, email addresses, titles, universities and year in graduate school (if appropriate). All relevant information must be provided in order for submission to be considered. Authors shall retain copyright if their article is selected for publication. However, by submitting an article, authors grant *Sagar* permission to publish it. Contributors should refrain from seeking other avenues of publication until *Sagar*'s selection process is complete.

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