

Studies in
Inequality
and

social
Justice



Essays in honor of Vedprakash Vatuk

EDITED BY

Kira Hall

STUDIES IN
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VED PRAKASH VATUK

Edited by
KIRA HALL

MEERUT
ARCHANA
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This book could not have materialized without the assistance of numerous friends and colleagues who share my enthusiasm for the collected writings of Ved Prakash Vatuk. The twenty-one authors who agreed to contribute to this volume, influenced in varied ways by the ideas of Dr. Vatuk, all demonstrated great patience while I marched slowly through a project that took me much longer than I had originally anticipated. I am especially grateful to Donna Goldstein, one of the volume's contributors and also my partner and colleague, who offered continued support as I edited numerous drafts of the volume, even when I accompanied her on a six-week field visit to Argentina. The volume would never have come to fruition had it not been for the tireless work of my three editorial assistants, Lal Zimman, Joshua Raclaw, and Jennifer Davis. As graduate students in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Colorado, their insightful feedback and keen attention to detail helped transform a stack of very interesting papers into a collection of finely tuned essays. Thanks also goes to my sister Jeanne Hall, who provided me with friendly and supportive company when we traveled together to Meerut in 2007 to present the first draft of this book at Ved Vatuk's 75th birthday celebration, and to my parents Arlene and Leo Hall, who through their everyday encouragement and belief in education set me on the path to meet the honored recipient of these essays. Finally, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Ved Prakash Vatuk himself, whose influence on me has been nothing short of transformative in its own right. I first met Ved Ji fifteen years ago while I was a graduate student at UC Berkeley, and he has since become one of my most respected mentors and dearest friends. I offer this collection of essays to him, in celebration of his ongoing commitment to a vision of social justice and equality for all peoples.

Kira Hall
December, 2008

*jo dhahātā hai nit pyār kā har qilā,
jisse āpas mē koī nahī ho milā,
ho kurukṣetra mē yā juṭē karbalā,
bhāī-bhāī kā hī kāṭe jisse galā,
aise har dharm ko,
pāp-duṣkarm ko,
maī nahī māntā, maī nahī māntā.*

That which demolishes the castle of love,
That which never lets people unite,
Whether it happens in Kurukshetra or Karbala,
When a brother cuts another brother's throat,
I reject all such dharmā,
I reject all such heinous acts.

Ved Prakash Vatuk, 2000
Itihās kī cīkh (The Cry of History)

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INTRODUCTION

A POET'S JUSTICE

Editor's Introduction

A POET'S JUSTICE

Kira Hall
University of Colorado

ag lagā do in vidhān ke pannō mē,
āg lagā do sabhī dhārmik granthō mē,
jō na sahāyak hō nirīh jan ko kincit,
āg lagā do sabhī viśva ke panthō mē.

If they provide no help to the destitute,
burn these constitutions,
burn all the religious scriptures,
burn all the religious sects of the world.

Ved Prakash Vatuk, 1955

(at age 23, previously unpublished)

The essays in this volume, written by authors who have published extensively on the subject of inequality and social justice, have been brought together to honor the life and work of poet, essayist, linguist, and folklorist Ved Prakash Vatuk. Author of over thirty internationally recognized volumes of poetry as well as numerous political essays and academic articles, Dr. Vatuk has developed an influential body of work that is intimately grounded in his life-long quest for social justice. The nineteen chapters included here, consistent with Vatuk's ongoing interest in advancing social critique through both poetry and scholarship, employ varied disciplinary perspectives and research methodologies to confront systems of social hierarchy in diverse contexts. The four sections of the book address the ways in which social hierarchy is fostered and instantiated by dominant social institutions and movements, among

them caste, race, and religion (Part I), gender and socioeconomic class (Part II), migration (Part III), and globalization (Part IV). Taken together, these essays provide a provocative portrait of the mechanisms that underlie and create social disparity, each exposing the workings of inequality within particularized historical, social, and cultural contexts.

If there is one idea that could be said to underlie all of Vatuk's writings, whether poetic or academic, it is skepticism regarding the potential of established political structures to improve the state of humanity. In keeping with his passion for folklore, Vatuk's work reflects upon the potential of the "folk"—or in his own words, "the thousands of little Nehrus and Gandhis spread all over in the villages and towns of India" (Vatuk 2003a)—to contest and challenge the saturation of state power, even if only within the localized warp and weft of everyday life. As I describe in my introduction to the recent publication of Vatuk's collected academic writings, *Essays in Indian Folk Traditions* (Hall 2007), Vatuk's research in folklore and linguistics focuses not upon the elites who govern, but on the men and women who lead lives that are extraordinary only in their ordinariness: the tired sugarcane workers of Western Uttar Pradesh who survive twenty-four-hour shifts at the presses by singing a special type of work song (Vatuk 1979); the highly skilled yet overlooked performers of local folk operas in eastern Meerut (Vatuk and S. Vatuk 1967a); the poor women of a North Indian village who secure their futures by secretly stashing goods with a Brahman neighbor (Vatuk and S. Vatuk 1971). These are the lives that interest Vatuk, precisely because they are the very people who have the potential to talk back to power. It is the ordinary folk who experience the effects of political decisions, not the politicians. And it is therefore the ordinary folk who are uniquely situated to propose more equitable visions of social justice, if only their voices could be heard.

Vatuk's academic mission is thus to bring the collective voices of these ordinary actors into scholarship: their songs, their dramas, their conversations. These are the voices that fill the pages of his work and provide the data for his ongoing exposition and critique of social hierarchy. In many senses, Vatuk's academic work stands as a forerunner to the expansive body of scholarship that in the 1980s and 1990s came to be known as "resistance studies," an intellectual

perspective that arose in tandem with subaltern studies and drew its inspiration from Foucault's (1972, 1978) and de Certeau's (1984) concern with everyday forms of resistance. In short, Vatuk's scholarship focuses on the disenfranchised who counter injustice with whatever tools they may have for expressing dissent. And what all people have—even the poorest of the poor—is a voice. The dominant dismissal of localized expressive genres as both trivial and common is precisely what gives these “weapons of the weak” their potential power, to borrow a phrase from James Scott's (1985) influential account of everyday peasant resistance. For Vatuk, power is not the top-down prerogative of a select elite, but rather something that is available to all through the everyday workings of social practice.

A bottom-up understanding of power is not limited to Vatuk's academic inquiry; it also serves as the inspiration for much of his poetry. His epic *Bāhubalī* (2002a) is a case in point, which earned him the Hindi Sansthan's prestigious ‘Jaishankar Prasad Award’ for best epic of the year. In this *khaṇḍa-kāvya*, or ‘story-in-verse,’ Vatuk portrays the strength of ordinary resistance in his rewriting of a Jain scriptural narrative. The storyline involves two feuding brothers who are ironically the sons of Adi Tirthankar Lord Rishabdev, the apostle of non-violence. When the elder brother Bharat undertakes to conquer the entire world in the name of peace, his younger brother Bahubali threatens to sacrifice the lives of his subjects in order to protect his kingdom from his elder brother's aggression. As Vatuk (2002b) explains when reflecting upon his writing of the epic, the battle between these two feuding brothers “could have been as horrific as the war in Mahabharat, had not the blameless subjects and its leaders stood up to protest the imminent bloodshed of the innocent in the impending *dharmyuddh* (righteous war).” It is thus the everyday folk, not the kings, who have the experiential wisdom to see through the pointlessness of war and propose a nonviolent alternative.

Vatuk's passion for the revolutionary potential of ordinary citizenship originated in a childhood infused with anticolonialist energy and unrest. The youngest of thirteen children, Vatuk was born on the thirteenth of April, 1932, fifteen years before India won its independence. Although his home village was far removed from the bustle of its closest neighboring city Meerut, the struggle for

independence infected the lives of even the most isolated, fostering the development of diverse grassroots sentiments that permeated everyday life. (See Jagdish Sharma's chapter in this volume for a personal narrative regarding what it was like to come of age in an Indian village during this historical period.) Vatuk's father Krishna Lal (1886-1941), the only Sanskritist Arya Samaji priest in the village, had long engaged in freedom fighting at the local level, particularly with respect to caste discrimination. Foremost to this effort was his founding of the first Arya Samaj temple in the area, established in opposition to the local Shiva temple's refusal to allow low-caste dalits to worship alongside other villagers. Consistent with the platform of the early Arya Samaj movement, his father's belief in the value of education extended to all people in the village, even Vatuk's recently deceased elder sister, Narayani Devi (1916-2008), who was the only daughter in the village who learned to read and write. So even though Vatuk celebrates the voices of the progressive folk in his academic writings, he also recognizes the small-minded potential of popular religious institutions to incite the worst elements of humanity through religious, ethnic, and gendered fundamentalism and conservatism.

Vatuk's attraction to the idea of equality was evident as early as the fifth grade, when he renounced his caste surname Prakash and took on his penname 'Vatuk.' Inspired by the political poetry of the performing *bhajnopdeshaks* who came to his village during the annual Arya Samaj conventions, Vatuk began writing folk lyrics on freedom and revolution at only ten years of age. Some two decades later, with the benefit of years of higher education in Agra, London, and Boston, Vatuk used the tools of folklore to analyze the early influence that these performers had on his poetry, publishing a well received article entitled "The *Bhajnopdeshak* as an Agent of Social Change." In his discussion, Vatuk (1967) outlines how something as purportedly "simplistic" as folksong can produce radical change with respect to systemic inequities. In fact, as Vatuk asserts in his autobiographical essay "Still Dreaming," it was precisely the spread of this "singing"—or rather, the jointly vocalized hope of a world based on social justice, equality, and freedom—that made his pre-Independence fellow Indians "free even in bondage, rich even in abject poverty" (1998a:31).

Many of the chapters that appear in this edited collection, particularly in Parts II and III, share Vatak's interest in bringing to the fore voices that have been traditionally underrepresented in the academic literature. Sharat Lin analyzes the recent Latino-based resistance movement in the United States that culminated in "the largest collective outpouring of street protest since the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement" (p. 251). Responding to initiatives by the U.S. Congress to crack down on undocumented immigrants, movement organizers chose "May Day" 2006 as their day of protest, a strategy that proved extremely effective in its alliance with a much larger international labor movement recognized across the world as International Worker's Day. Chandana Mathur shares a similar focus on undocumented workers in the United States, though her concern is with women who are employed as domestic workers in the suburban homes of South Asian American professionals. Exploring what she identifies as "class cleavages" in the South Asian immigrant community (p. 276), Mathur questions the effectiveness of middle-class feminism for the lives of these workers when it emerges in the context of patron-client relations.

Mathur's interest in the plight of domestic workers is furthered in contributions offered by Raka Ray and Donna Goldstein, who explore, albeit within very different sociocultural contexts, the ways in which ideologies of gender and socioeconomic class work to maintain a hierarchy of labor. Ray explores how dominant *bhadralok* (or 'middle-class') understandings of idealized femininity and masculinity in Calcutta are at odds with the very structure of domestic servitude, since these ideals require independence for men and staying-at-home for women. This latter ideology of femininity, incidentally, is markedly different from that experienced by the educated middle-class female protagonists of the novels examined in this volume by Indu Prakash Pandey, who "seek to free themselves from the tyranny of social tradition" (p. 197) by leading more independent lives. Ray is particularly interested in how domestic workers resist these dominant ideologies by defining their own understandings of masculinity and femininity over and against that of their employers. Likewise, Goldstein's chapter, reprinted from her award-winning ethnography *Laughter Out of Place*, takes us to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where we experience the day-to-day banality of race, class, and gender relations that structure

domestic-worker and middle-class identities. Goldstein argues that hierarchical relations between domestic workers and their employers are historically constituted in that middle classness is a state of mind, or more critically, a “cultivated incompetence” marked by an abhorrence of manual labor and a dependence on others for the daily work of living. Moreover, the development of domestic servitude out of the ashes of colonial slavery in Brazil has constituted hierarchies of race and gender that also inhabit the emotions and affective life, making these hierarchies largely invisible to participants. Most notably, domestic workers are discursively made to feel as if they are part of the family—e.g., a child, a sibling—while at the same time being passed down to future generations as property.

Goldstein's chapter mirrors Vatuk's long-held interest in voices of alterity, particularly when she analyzes the everyday laughter of these domestic workers as a subversive response to the structures that oppress them. Two other chapters in the volume elaborate upon this theme directly: Nitasha Sharma's chapter on the lyricism of South Asian American hip hop artists and my own chapter on the use of verbal insults by hijras in Varanasi. Sharma goes so far as to characterize the music of the hip hop artists that are the subject of her study as “the sounds of social consciousness.” Drawing an overt parallel between their lyrics and the poetry of Vatuk, Sharma elaborates upon the ways in which artists associated with this genre “critique the racial hierarchies that both oppress and inform South Asian communities in the United States” (p. 110). My own article shares a similar interest in the potential of linguistic performance as an instrument of social critique, although my focus is on the hijras' association with verbal insult, both in historical and contemporary perspective. Marginalized socially and spatially, hijras employ highly sexualized insults in their everyday interactions as a means of calling into question some of the assumptions that undergird normative understandings of gender and sexuality. By so doing, they manage to carve out space for themselves in an otherwise hostile world, even if this space is problematically interpreted by nonhijra listeners.

Sharma aptly concludes her chapter with reference to the protest poetry that Vatuk wrote for his elder brother Sunder Lal (1906-1988) while he was imprisoned during Indira Gandhi's

Emergency period of 1975-1977. Sunder Lal in many ways serves as the model for Vatuk's belief in the power of everyday resistance. Even before Vatuk was born, his brother had been jailed three times in the fight for Indian independence. Indeed, one of Vatuk's most vivid childhood memories, as he expresses in his autobiographical essay (2003a), involved watching his elder brother rally the masses from atop an elephant. His brother sat together with Chaudhry Charan Singh, the renowned farmers' leader from Meerut whose political convictions later won him notoriety, albeit brief, as India's first "peasant" prime minister. Boosted by a sound system and loudspeaker, the two freedom fighters were singing out songs of protest in the hope of inspiring their listeners to join the fight for independence. "You have the power to bring down the world to its knees," they sang, "if only you rise."

It is with a similar ferocity of spirit that a much older Vatuk composed a series of political poems for his brother during the Emergency, later published under the title *Kaidī bhāī, bandī deś* 'Jailed brother, imprisoned nation' (2006a[1977]). Sunder Lal was one of the 376 activists who were imprisoned on the first day of the Emergency, shortly after the government had essentially suspended all elections and civil liberties under article 352 of the Constitution. Vatuk sent these poems to his brother over the course of the next eighteen months, providing him comfort as he sat in solitary confinement in a Varanasi cell (and, according to some accounts, even winning the admiration of the jailor and jail censor through his verse). Although Vatuk had moved to America fifteen years earlier, he lived in India during a significant part of this troubling period, both to accompany his daughter as she attended an Indian high school and to visit his then seventy-year-old brother as much as possible. At a time when most Indian intellectuals were terrified to speak out against the workings of the government, including the would-be Vice President Krishna Kant, Vatuk opposed the Emergency openly. He submitted essays of condemnation to the *San Francisco Examiner*, *India Abroad*, and any other forums that might consider publishing his controversial opinions, even securing an hour-long interview with KPFA radio in San Francisco. His network of activists in India consisted of students at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) as well as friends like Gandhi's grandson Ram Chandra Gandhi and writer Nirmal Varma. Vatuk's activism

during this period eventually captured the attention of Shiv Kumar Goel, a famous Hindi journalist, who in 1977 published an article on Vatuk's work for the respected Hindi weekly *Dharmayug*.

Vatuk wrote literally thousands of poems during the Emergency; indeed, during one three-day period alone in the summer of 1975, he reportedly composed over 150 short and long poems. His two subsequent volumes on the Emergency, *Āpat śatak* 'One hundred poems of the Emergency' (1977) and the English publication *Between Exile and Jail* (1978), are a testament to his productivity, with many of these poems circulating underground in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada long before publication. One of the most well known poems that emerged from the Emergency period carries the title *Maīne āj īsā ko marte hue dekhā* 'Today I Saw Christ Being Crucified' (Vatuk 1977:79). In it, Vatuk reflects upon his hospital visit with freedom fighter Jaiprakash Narayan, who was in extremely poor health after his release from five months of imprisonment. Like Vatuk's brother, Narayan had been sent to jail for his opposition to the increasingly undemocratic government of Indira Gandhi. This poem, together with a second poem from *Āpat śatak* on the same subject, were translated into English by Professor B. N. Varma and printed in *News India*. Vatuk was at risk of being arrested at any time for these activities, particularly given their highly public nature, but he carried on out of a strong sense of social justice.

The seeds of extreme disillusionment that these books of poetry express with respect to the political process had emerged in Vatuk's political essays decades earlier. Vatuk's first major essay, written when he was only nineteen years old, was published in 1951 as a lead article in the Sunday magazine section of one of the most widely circulated newspapers in India, the *Navabharat Times*. Delivering a scathing critique of the unethical and corrupt practices used by India's national leaders to win elections, the essay launched Vatuk's career as a political soothsayer. When his friends and colleagues celebrated the elections of promising new leaders, Vatuk remained nonplussed, if not skeptical. As he so potently expresses in a stanza published in the collection *Itihās kī cīkh* 'The Cry of History' (2000), even the best of rhetoric is meaningless when the discriminatory structures that constitute society remain unchanged:

bas mukhaṭe hī chand badle haī.
kaīculī ke hī rang badle haī.
zahar phan, sāp kuch nahī badle.
kāṭne ke hī ḍhang badle haī.
Vatuk 2000:122

Only a few masks are changed,
Only the color of the snake-skin is changed,
Neither the snake, nor its hood, nor the poison has changed,
Only the ways of stinging are changed.

In his more recent writings, including the volume in which the poem just quoted appears, Vatuk applies a similar skepticism towards globalization, another phenomenon which holds the promise of change yet simply alters the “ways of stinging.” As Vatuk states in 2002, “the surging tide of privatization and liberalization is in reality nothing but a new ruse for capitalist oppression. The affluent nations of the West are replacing yesterday’s transnational imperialism with the capitalist colonialism of multilateral organizations” (Vatuk 2002b).

Many of the chapters included in Part IV of this volume approach the current celebratory rhetoric regarding globalization and neoliberalism with the same skepticism voiced here by Vatuk. Surinder Kumar and Sohan Sharma’s chapter on the role of multilateral international organizations in shaping the world economy reveals how institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, while founded upon the promise to provide capital for reconstruction and development, have in actuality crippled the economic sovereignty of developing countries. The financial debt that is the byproduct of this New Imperialism has only served to intensify human suffering, forcing “local governments to cut jobs, eliminate subsidies to farmers, remove price controls, and reduce government assistance to education, health, water supply, and sanitation so that the country can ‘service’ its loan” (p. 338). Ashok Bardhan’s chapter expresses comparable skepticism with respect to the industrialized world’s offshoring of blue-collar jobs. As a challenge to those who believe in “the seemingly limitless possibilities unleashed by a combination of technological hubris and free market-based economic optimism”

(p. 423), Bardhan details the problematic impact of offshoring for future job creation and inequality in both India and the United States. Both of these chapters thus share Vatuk's skepticism regarding the contemporary middle-class belief in the promise of neoliberalism for economic development and growth.

Yet as the poem that opens this introductory essay suggests, Vatuk's skepticism is directed as much toward "religious scriptures" and "religious sects" as it is constitutions. Two of the chapters in Part I address the disconnect between rhetoric and structure within organized religion, examining the emergence of caste within two belief systems that are ideologically positioned as casteless: Sikhism and Islam. Puri, for instance, traces the historical evolution of a Sikh caste hierarchy in the Punjab as a product of both political power and economic relations, thus challenging the abstraction that "the Sikh community represents homogeneity of caste rather than division" (p. 59). In a detailed review of decades of complex interactions between religious principles and the dominant power interests of Jats, Puri provides a compelling explanation for why and how a distinct caste system emerged within the Sikh community, even when Dalit political leaders like Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had once considered *en masse* conversion of the "Depressed Classes" to Sikhism with a view to liberate them from the shackles of caste in Hinduism. Imtiaz Ahmad likewise refutes the common assumption underlying the work of many scholars that "Islam is an egalitarian religion and that there are no status differences among Muslims" (p. 64). Through appeal to his own sociological research among the Ansaris in Rasulpur, Ahmad argues that groups like the *biradaris* and *zats* are constituted through the same discriminatory hierarchical structures as found in the Hindu caste system. He thus reflects upon the appropriateness of a term like "Dalit Muslims" for those Muslim groups who have suffered "an extreme degree of stigmatization and exclusion" (p. 78). Both Puri and Ahmad are careful to present these systems of stratification as distinct from those found in the Hindu caste system, yet at the same time they note the parallelism in the hierarchical principles that govern them. In Vatuk's terminology, the color of the snake-skin has changed, but the snake, the hood, and the poison remain the same.

Vatuk's adult experiences in Britain and the United States contributed significantly to the evolution of his political mind. After earning an advanced degree in Hindi literature from Punjab University in 1953 and an M.A. in Sanskrit from Agra University in 1954, Vatuk, lacking the usual elite connections, found himself without a job. Inspired by the traveling scholar Rahul Sankrityayan's (1949) book *Ghumakkaṛ śāstra* (Science of Wandering), he borrowed a bicycle from a friend and rode fifty miles a day to collect money for a world adventure. Although before this time he had hardly even traveled through India, it was only a matter of months before Vatuk boarded a Polish ship headed for Britain. He arrived in London eighteen days later with half a pound in his pocket, eager to take work wherever he could find it—grocery stores, offices, restaurants, factories. It was here that he eventually met his wife Sylvia Vatuk, an American anthropologist who coauthored several of his folklore articles and later became the mother of his four children. But he also breathed in a hefty dose of Western-style racism, even at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies, where he began work on his Ph.D. dissertation. The realities of British daily life compelled Vatuk to rethink his previous imaginings of both home and abroad, launching his interest in a broader interrogation of structural inequality that considers systems of race as well as those of caste and class. Gerald D. Berreman's chapter entitled "Inequality in America" is thus a fitting introductory piece for the current collection of essays, particularly as he draws overt parallels between racial hierarchy in the United States and caste hierarchy in India. Recounting his own experiences as a young adult stationed in the racially torn city of Montgomery, Alabama, Berreman offers a compelling argument in support of affirmative action, the American equivalent of India's caste reservation system. Identifying this policy as "one step in the direction of overcoming the grievous and devastating effects of birth ascribed inequality," Berreman embraces a view of social justice that, like Vatuk's, necessarily requires structural change.

Vatuk's move to the United States in 1959 marks the onset of one of his most productive decades with respect to the writing of academic essays. It was during graduate school at Harvard University and his subsequent years at the University of California at Berkeley that Vatuk became increasingly attracted to folklore, a

field that shared his discomfort with many of the elitist assumptions that guide academic scholarship. Indeed, the field of folklore had emerged in large part through the rejection of academia's preoccupation with so-called 'high' forms of literature and poetry, a perspective that informs Vatuk's investigations of both non-standard Hindi dialects and localized performance genres. This is a kind of anti-elitism that emerges in the details of Vatuk's research—for instance, in his exposition of the metrical complexity of Hindi folk riddles as rivaling what is found in classical Sanskrit (Dundes and Vatuk 1974); in his critique of Sahlin's cross-cultural account of gift-exchange in so-called "primitive" economies for relying too heavily on Western concepts of self-interest (Vatuk and S. Vatuk 1967b); or quite simply in his decision to analyze the riddles of a thirteenth century writer like Amir Khusro, whose work has been overlooked by academics because it is written in "the language of the layman" (Vatuk 1969a).

Vatuk's academic writings during the 1960s and 1970s thus illuminate an understanding of history that only in the 1980s came to be identified as *subaltern*: a theoretical perspective initially developed within South Asian studies that places non-elites at the analytical center as agents of social and political change. The origins of Vatuk's formulation of this perspective can again be traced back to the village of his youth, where his father, one of the village's few educated men, would read aloud the national Hindi weekly *Pratap* before a crowd of listeners every day at noon. It was here "at the knees of my father and brother," as Vatuk remembers it, that he became aware that there are two distinct types of history: the master narratives learned through the literature associated with the educational system and the more localized subaltern narratives learned through the everyday exchange of story and song. His childhood memory of how villagers would circulate portraits of political reformers—among them Nehru and Gandhi—provides an apt metaphor for why he later came to embrace the study of folklore. "Through [the exchange of these portraits]," Vatuk recalls, "we learnt the history that was never taught in our school system" (1998a:30). History in Vatuk's conceptualization is both learned and lived, the inevitable social result of everyday transaction. His scholarship thus feature the voices of the "little" Nehrus and Gandhis whose memories of the past rarely make the pages of a

textbook, among them villagers in northwest India who critique Western institutions in their tales and proverbs (Vatuk 1969b) and East Indians in British Guiana who sing against the abuses waged by a century of indentured servitude (Vatuk 1964).

Several of the folklore articles published by Vatuk during this period seek to challenge the account of the making of modern-day India that surfaces in the Western historical record, an undertaking that syncs well with Vatuk's interest in subaltern perspectives. By bringing everyday voices into his scholarship that counter dominant narratives of British rule in India, Vatuk is able to position the historical scholarship on India as fiction rather than fact, or at best, just one of many perspectives. For Vatuk, Indian history as written by Westerners betrays a self-congratulating perspective that fails to reflect the experiences of those who have been colonized:

At no point does the chasm between East and West seem more unbridgeable than when we compare the history of British rule in India as written by Western historians (and by some Western-educated Indian historians) with the same history as retold by the folk. Whereas the emphasis of the former is on the advantages of education, economic development, and modernization brought to the subcontinent, on the reform of the evils of a backward Indian society by enlightened representatives of a great civilization, the latter describes the mindless eradication of revered traditions and the destruction of a prosperous and highly advanced culture by greedy and immoral invaders. While the Western historian accedes to the British claim to have brought justice, peace, and the concept of social inequality to the Indian populace, the folk tell of British atrocities, injustice, and racism. (Vatuk 1969b)

Several authors in this volume follow Vatuk in questioning the way in which Western scholars have promulgated Eurocentric views, among them Janet Abu-Lughod and Deana Heath. Abu-Lughod's chapter reflects on the ways in which historians have offered

European-centered accounts of the rise of “the modern world-system”; she compares, for instance, ideas expressed by theorists such as Alan Smith, Jerry Bentley, and Immanuel Wallerstein. Ultimately, Abu-Lughod argues for a deeper consideration of multiple historical perspectives, asserting that the academic “struggle for truth is a fundamentally political matter” (p. 399). Heath, on the other hand, is concerned with the developmentalist logic that guides scholarly characterizations of Indian modernity, and more specifically Hindi cinema, as an ‘incomplete’ or ‘failed’ version of Western modernity. Through a careful reading of the ways in which the films *Khakee* and *Nayak* differentially characterize the relationship between community and state, she suggests the possibility that “India’s modernity is not only both viable and distinct, but serves as a model for the West to follow” (p. 416).

Vatuk’s move to America during a tumultuous 1960s climate also fueled his rebellious artistry as a popular essayist. During this period, Vatuk wrote over 500 essays for Indian publications, addressing such subjects as the civil rights movement, the free speech movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement, and finally, the agricultural labor movement led by Cesar Chavez. He worked in an activist capacity within all of these movements, marching to protest the Vietnam war and participating in political teach-ins. The strength of his activism left a great impression on those around him, not the least of which were his daughters, who as children refused to eat grapes for many years in solidarity with American agricultural workers. In 1963, Vatuk published his first book in English, *British Guiana* (1963), which offered a condemnation of U.S. policies against the world’s liberal governments. But after his mother Kripa Devi (1886-1971) died in 1971, Vatuk ceased writing political essays for the most part, turning his attention back to his first passion, poetry. Indeed, since the death of his mother, Vatuk has written at least one poem a day, without fail.

Poetry is usually not the first medium that comes to mind when one thinks of the articulation of sustained critique against war, but for Vatuk, nothing is more suited to a portrayal of war’s atrocities than a poem. He came to this view early on when listening to the protest songs of the bhajnopdeshaks as a child, but his anti-war artistry reached new heights after his adult initiation into the

lyrics of American folk singers like Pete Seeger. In this volume, Susham Bedi offers a provocative discussion of the ways in which Vatuk's travels "from home to diaspora" have contributed to his poetic uniqueness, not the least of which is his development of a global stance against violence of all kinds. His first book of poetry in English, *Silence is Not Golden* (1969c), both promoted civil rights and condemned the Vietnam War, reflecting inspiration from a variety of American protest movements. But his most powerful statements against war-inflicted violence are undoubtedly located in his recently published trilogy of epics: *Bāhubalī* (2002a), *Uttar rāmkaṭhā* 'The later life of Ram' (2003b), and *Abhiṣapta dvāpar* 'Dvapara—The cursed age' (2007). In his critical examination of central scriptural narratives (*Uttar rāmkaṭhā* reviews the life of Lord Rama while *Abhiṣapta dvāpar* focuses on the Mahabharat period), Vatuk illustrates how these texts, far from promoting freedom, instead advocate the enslavement of humanity in the name of *dharma* 'righteousness.' What good is dharma, he asks, if it buries Sita and cannot save Draupadī from torment? What war is not fought in the name of dharma and truth, and what war is there where dharma and truth are not sacrificed?

jo bhī bahānā ho kisī kā, dhyey jo ho dṛiṣṭi mẽ,
 hai yuddh se baḍhkar adharm nahī bhayāvah sṛiṣṭi mẽ.
 Vatuk (2002a:61), *Bāhubalī*

Whatever one's pretext, whatever one's goal,
 there is no *adharmā* in the universe
 greater and more heinous than war.

Even though Vatuk's epics are based on Indian myths, the interpretation that he offers to his readers regarding the unjustifiable relationship between religion and war is both global and timeless.

Two chapters in this volume follow Vatuk in exploring the atrocities of war: Maharaj K. Kaul's historical account of the victimization of Jammu and Kashmir through the collusion of Western imperialism with the Pakistani military, and James M. Freeman and Nguyen Dinh Huu's exposition of the "terror" that faced post-Vietnam War asylum seekers, particularly children, who lived in the Dong Rek refugee camp on the border of Thailand and

Cambodia. On the surface, these two chapters appear to have little in common. Kaul takes us through the historical details of a conflict that has its origins in the 1947 partitioning of India and Pakistan, while Freeman and Nguyen interrogate an international bureaucratic foul-up that prevented resettlement and resulted in the decade-long detainment of Vietnamese refugees. Yet what both chapters vividly elucidate, albeit from markedly different sociocultural and historical contexts, are the longitudinal effects of war. The victimization exposed within the pages of these articles does not end with the conclusion of war, whatever that may mean, but replicates itself across generations in—to borrow Vatuk's terminology—truly *bhayāvah* 'heinous' proportions.

The passions of Ved Prakash Vatuk that I have outlined in this introductory essay—his belief in the power of protest poetry, his skepticism regarding the empty rhetoric of political leaders and the corruptive potential of religious sects, his drive to reframe history from the standpoint of the folk, his opposition to violence, war, and imperialism—all come together in his recent publications on the Gadar party (e.g., Vatuk 1998b, 2003a, 2006b; see Assisi 2006), an early twentieth century freedom movement discussed in this volume by Vijay Prasad. Associated primarily with South Asian Americans in California, the movement seeded a diasporic uprising against British rule in India. Spearheaded by Indian immigrants and university students, its professed goal was to liberate India from British servitude using whatever means possible. As part of their mission to involve the Indian diaspora in the fight for independence, a group of San Franciscans published a number of political booklets between 1915 and 1918, distributing them to Indians everywhere free of charge. Vatuk began writing about the movement as early as 1966, when he coauthored an article for the journal *Folklore* that stands as the first scholarly examination of the Gadar Party protest songs (Vatuk and S. Vatuk 1966). Their songs have been viewed as historically significant because they advocate the use of violence, yet Vatuk chooses to focus on the ways in which these songs inspired community. Specifically, the songs' poetic depictions of the nature of the British regime, the glories of India's past, and the desirability of freedom resonated with Indians at home and abroad, including those who advocated non-violence.

As I suggest in the concluding paragraph of my earlier essay

on Vatuk's academic writings (Hall 2007), it makes good sense that Vatuk—folklorist, Bay area resident, and author of over thirty internationally recognized volumes of political poetry—would be attracted to a San Francisco group that published folk poems written in revolutionary style for Indians living abroad. Vatuk has since made it his life's work to research and publish the histories of several of California's Gadar Party activists, among them Hari Singh Usman, a farmer in Southern California who sold all of his possessions so that he could sail to India and fight for independence, and Kartar Singh Sarabha, a UC Berkeley student who joined the revolution only to be hanged by the British at the age of nineteen. Many of these stories have appeared in *The Gadarite*, a quarterly publication founded by Vatuk in 1998 that is dedicated to the ideas and actions of the Gadar movement (Vatuk 1998c). The twenty-one authors contributing to this volume, all inspired by Vatuk's rebellious aesthetics and activities, seek to honor and reflect upon Vatuk's contributions to their own interests in the subjects of inequality and social justice. I imagine that the readers of this edited collection will be involved in their own revolutionary activities across the world, both quiet and loud, and I hope that all will join us in celebrating the life and work of this extraordinary man.

Kira Hall
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1

INEQUALITY IN AMERICA: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND REACTION

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In honor of Ved Prakash Vatuk

The following hitherto unpublished essay comprises the M. N. Srinivas Memorial Lecture that was sponsored by the Department of Sociology, University of Delhi, and delivered there on November 30, 2000, the first anniversary of his death.¹ I wish to dedicate the publication of this lecture to my good friend and guru, Ved Prakash Vatuk. Dr. Vatuk is an honored and widely published poet in both Hindi and English, a Sanskritist, linguist, folklorist, anthropologist, professor, and courageous social/political activist in the causes of peace, justice, and equality—a truly multicultural Renaissance Man. I am pleased to have this opportunity to link the names of these two men whom I have long regarded with fondness, admiration, and deep respect, and for many of the same reasons.

THE M. N. SRINIVAS MEMORIAL LECTURE

Prefatory remarks

My thanks to Professor André Béteille—one can recognize from the tenor of his introduction that he is a good friend! Thanks also to Professor Virginius Xaxa, head of this department, and all members

of his faculty, for inviting me to give this lecture in memory of the founder, and for many years the Head, of this distinguished department, Professor M. N. Srinivas—known to so many, familiarly and affectionately, as Chamu. I am humbled by the honor, and intimidated by the responsibility, to try to do justice in tribute to this towering intellectual figure, and such a warm and witty man.

On a personal note, let me mention that I first met Professor Srinivas some thirty-five years ago when I attended a seminar he and Professor Arvind Shah gave at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University.

Recently—December 1995, to be exact—he and I participated in a symposium in the Platinum Jubilee Celebration of the founding of the Department of Sociology of his *alma mater*, Bombay University. There I benefited from his incisive contributions to the proceedings. I especially recall the final and unscheduled event of the Jubilee, a stimulating and rather tipsy evening that my wife, Dr. Keiko Yamanaka, and I spent with Professor and Mrs. Srinivas and a few others in a crowded bay-side bar reputed to be frequented by Mumbai literati and journalists. There, Chamu held forth in high spirits, entertaining and enlightening all in our circle.

By happy coincidence we subsequently encountered the Srinivases and their two daughters on a drafty Washington, D.C. street corner during the American Anthropological Association meetings of November 1997. There we enjoyed a lively conversation with them. Most recently, I am gratified to have received a warm letter from Chamu, dated exactly three months before his death. I offer this lecture in his memory, together with my profound condolences to his wife and daughters, as well as to his colleagues, students, friends, and other admirers.

It would be virtually impossible to write or speak on the subject of social inequality without citing his path-breaking work—not only on caste in South Asia, but on social stratification and mobility in general, on social change, and on ethnographic research and writing, as exemplified by his unswerving advocacy and practice of the ‘field view’—as contrasted with the ‘book view’—of social research and analysis.

I will not presume to attempt a weighty prolegomenon, nor will I view with alarm or approval the past, present, or future of the

discipline Professor Srinivas served so well. Least of all will I lecture this audience on caste in India—a topic that was of central interest to Chamu, as it is to many of us here.

But the comparative study of social inequality *is* my primary research interest, and America is my primary experiential venue and my secondary—after South Asia—research area. I have therefore chosen to talk about social inequality in America, focusing on an empirical account of a recently and currently major issue: the American policy of Affirmative Action and responses to it. (As I am sure most of you know, that policy is roughly equivalent to India's Reservation System.) I believe the topic is appropriate to honoring Professor Srinivas [and Dr. Vatak], in view of his [their] lifelong commitment[s] to social justice and to the analysis and mitigation of its betrayal in the form of social and economic inequality.

A PERSONAL, CONTEXTUAL INTRODUCTION

I will begin by providing some essential experiential and historical context. As a young adult I lived for two years (1953-55) in America's deep south, Montgomery, Alabama, serving the required two years of military service in the Air Force at Montgomery's Maxwell Field in a social science research unit attached to the Air University. As a married junior officer I lived not on the base, but in the city. The city and the base were both almost equally divided between Blacks and Whites, but the chasm between them was enormous. The base supported over a thousand White officers and no more than five Black officers. By dint of considerable effort I was able to make friends of an anti-segregationist bent, both Black and White, on the base and in the city, several of whom I regard as heroic anti-racists. The Lieutenant assigned to orient me to my duties upon my arrival was Alfonso Pinkney, a young Black sociologist who was repeatedly harassed by the local military hierarchy for his unbending racial militance. But he weathered those storms, and upon completing his term of service, he moved to Cornell University, where he earned his Ph.D., and went on to become a prominent professor of sociology at New York's Hunter College and the University of Chicago, and author of many books on issues of race, racism, and racial activism.

During this period, most of Montgomery's White citizens took pride in—and Blacks deplored—the fact that, in 1861, the southern states had withdrawn from the United States and established the Confederate States of America in order to secure the right of individual states to choose their own policies; specifically to continue the institution of Black slavery. Montgomery had been chosen as its capitol. After four years of devastating civil war the Confederacy was defeated. It had failed in its efforts to secede from the United States and to continue enslaving Blacks—many of whom had escaped and fought bravely against their former masters.

During my residence there a century later, the notoriously violent, racist White Citizens' Councils were founded in nearby Selma. Montgomery and virtually the entire south remained 'racially' segregated (with the exception of the federally mandated integration of military personnel and their families on their bases). Schools, churches, hospitals, restaurants, theaters, parks, public transportation, drinking fountains, even bus stops—all were segregated or off limits to 'Negroes' (at that time the least disrespectful, and therefore infrequently used, term for people with any trace or reputation of African ancestry). Few were employed in any but menial, degrading, low-paying jobs. Any Black person who failed to defer to Whites did so at their peril. Lynching was the not infrequent punishment for any who defied the unstated rules. The Democratic Party's ballots for election to the Presidency and the Congress of the United States bore the party's symbol, a white rooster above a banner bearing the motto "White Supremacy." As a result of intimidation, illiteracy, fraud, feelings of futility, and absence of true alternatives, few Blacks registered to vote.

There were, however, indications throughout the South that change was on the horizon. Many in the Black population of Montgomery were employed at Maxwell Air Force Base and another, smaller military base that, as federal institutions, were by then officially racially integrated. Although there continued to be racism in interpersonal relations, discrimination in personnel matters, and segregation in such settings as barbershops and commissary restrooms, the bases were havens of relative equality for Black civilians when compared to the city. As a result, base employees were relatively well-informed on local issues and accustomed to dealing with Whites in other than servile roles.

Neither race could fail to notice the pairs of Black, or Black and White, military police with 45-caliber pistols and hand-cuffs on their belts, patrolling the city and its many liquor bars to control misbehaving Air Force personnel—a sobering sight for Southerners in the 1950s. Blacks had become increasingly prepared to respond to racism by mobilizing political and economic action against it. For example, in a Montgomery election for sheriff, a virulent White racist was expected to win handily against his more moderate opponent. Alarmed Blacks undertook an unprecedented voter registration drive that mustered enough new Black voters to comprise the margin of victory for the less ominous candidate. I believe that this event generated an enhanced level of political confidence in the Black community.

At about the same time, midway during the two years of my residence there, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racially segregated schools are by definition unequal and hence unconstitutional. Although compliance was slow—most remained segregated for years in violation of the nation’s Constitution—an irreversible precedent had been set. The first schools to integrate in the region were those operated by institutions that had been integrated under authoritarian governance, and that themselves functioned in authoritarian fashion: military bases and the Catholic Church. Air Force personnel had little choice: send their children to integrated schools on the integrated base, or face possible court martial. Catholics fared similarly: send their children to integrated Catholic schools or face possible excommunication from the church.

Shortly after I left the military and Montgomery for New York in order to enroll for post-graduate work in anthropology at Cornell, Rosa Parks, a middle-aged Black seamstress, was arrested in Montgomery when she refused to give up her seat on a city bus to a White person and move to one near the back to which Blacks were relegated. This was the last straw for the city’s Black community. It responded immediately by mobilizing an amazingly successful city-wide boycott of the buses, substituting an *ad hoc* system of taxis and private automobiles organized via public telephones. Because Blacks were most of the city’s bus passengers, this non-violent movement drove the bus company into bankruptcy from which it

never recovered. This, in turn, is said to have been a trigger to the nationwide Civil Rights movement toward emancipation of Blacks.

There followed an era of heroism, tragedy, atrocity, and victory through such processes as Negro voter registration drives and the adoption of militant Gandhian challenges to segregation practices. Youthful “Freedom Riders” from the North, both Black and White, ‘invaded’ the South together in public buses, and joined their southern compatriots in systematic nonviolent defiance despite violent opposition by racist police and vigilantes. They entered segregated restaurants together and when denied service simply refused to leave. In northern cities, where racism was often rampant as well, non-violent Blacks and like-minded Whites also faced off against racists and racism. At that time some militant urban northern Black activists abandoned the Gandhian approach and organized the paramilitary “Black Panthers” who, incidentally, were a stimulus for India’s “*Dalit* Panthers.” The process was slow and often violent, but major advances toward achievement of civil rights for all were made. Much remains to be made.

In the midst of all of this, I was influenced by the American Civil Rights Movement and the worldwide anti-colonial and Gandhian non-violent direct action ideologies and efforts in pursuit of social justice. In preparation for post-graduate work, I had read Oliver Cromwell Cox’s (1945) article “Race and Caste: A Distinction” and his subsequent (1948) book. Cox wrote authoritatively, on the basis of his experience and research as a Black sociologist, that American Blacks characteristically resent, resist, and in so far as possible evade, the birth-ascribed discrimination, exclusion, and vulnerability forced upon them by Whites. He observed that these racist attitudes and actions are in such flagrant violation of the nation’s widely touted Constitutional guarantee of “equality for all” that they add insult to injury and thus provoke increased resistance. My experience led me to agree entirely with him on that score. But he then proceeded to claim, without first-hand knowledge, that India’s Sanskritic ideology of *samsara* (reincarnation), coupled with *karma* (fate determined by actions in previous lives), convinces *achut* (untouchable) castes that they deserve their sorry fate and they therefore accept it without objection or opposition. This seemed to me incredible on the face of it. I wanted to know whether the contrast between the responses to

oppression by Blacks and 'untouchables' that he described could possibly be accurate, and if so, how and why people could be made to be so complicit in their own degradation.

This curiosity, together with my experiences of racism in Alabama, and fueled by my attention to India's freedom struggle and Gandhi's commitment to the elimination of inequalities of caste and class, colonizer and colonized, led to my decision to focus my graduate research on issues of social inequality, and on South Asia as its venue. Following two years of study and a year's fieldwork in a Himalayan hill village and its region, my first publication on India was a comparison of the situations and responses of the 'untouchables' I had come to know in India (by then often known as Dalits), and the Blacks I knew in Alabama and elsewhere (see Berreman 1960). That article described what I believe to be the essential similarity of the experiences and dynamics of 'casteism' and 'racism,' and the falsity of Cox's description of low caste responses to their status. In a year's research in Dehra Dun's Paltan Bazar (1968-69), I confirmed observations I had made and incorporated in my dissertation a decade earlier in Himalayan hill villages that Dalits are as bitterly resentful of their status and as dissident of its legitimacy as are American Blacks (see Berreman 1963, 1972).

'RACE' AND OTHER BIRTH ASCRIBED INEQUALITIES IN AMERICA

Today I will discuss a major expression of social inequality in America, one which comprises a social problem, a violation of human rights, and a moral atrocity—namely discrimination for and against entire categories of people on the basis of one or more of three socially constructed categories: 'race' (which I see as analogous to caste), i.e., social ranking according to shared ancestry, 'ethnicity,' i.e., social ranking according to shared culture, and 'gender,' i.e., social ranking according to shared sex. Despite the fact that all three of these bases for ranking are social constructions, in the public mind they are generally imbued with the inevitability and rigidity of natural law.

I will focus on the most disadvantaged—even oppressed—end of the continuum of statuses of inequality (from high to low), while recognizing that what comprises disadvantage for the low status,

vulnerable social categories, entails for the high-status categories privilege acquired and maintained at the expense of the others. Beyond that, I will focus primarily on the American preoccupation with ‘race’ and its most egregious victims, people with a degree (*any* degree) of African descent who, especially in the South, are often referred to, and even addressed, in starkly derogatory terms, but for whom there have been three acceptable terms: in temporal sequence of their usage, *Negroes*, *Blacks*, and *African Americans*. (As you will have noticed, I am here employing *Blacks* as the most convenient and widely accepted term of the three, albeit now somewhat dated.) But first, I must address four matters of context.

(1) The term *race*, when used here, will refer to *sociological* race, i.e., a social construction (as in ‘racism’) that comprises the use of ancestry—at the two extremes, stigmatized and valorized—as the basis for discrimination. Here it will not refer to alleged biological characteristics. In the last twenty years or so, anthropologists and others have established that the concept of biological or genetic ‘race’ has no empirical basis whatsoever. There are only phenotypic (and perhaps genotypic) clines of variation along continuums. Thus, people native to Cairo at the mouth of the Nile, who are often referred to as being of “Mediterranean race,” are very distinct in appearance from those at its headwaters, often referred to as of “Negroid race.” But if one traverses the Nile from its mouth to its source, there is no point at which there is a boundary—the changes are subtle and continuous, like colors of the rainbow. The same is true if one were to traverse from Norway to China. However, the *belief* that there are biologically distinct ‘races’ can have devastating consequences, as in the case of many American Whites’ allegations of inferiority of Blacks. As W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki long ago famously observed, “if people believe situations are real, they are real in their consequences” (1927).

(2) In the context of sociological comparison between the United States and India, I believe that, collectively, Blacks and Whites in the United States are more nearly analogous to disadvantaged and privileged *varnas*—“caste categories” (to use Professor Srinivas’s term)—than to similarly positioned Indian *jatis* or castes. Like *varnas*, they comprise categories rather than corporate groups. The structural and cultural similarities between

these social structures in the two societies are many and in many respects detailed. The circumstances of Indian Dalits and American Blacks are strikingly similar. Both comprise stigmatized categories of people, ascribed by birth to occupy the most vulnerable, exploited, despised and disadvantaged stratum of the societies' respective social hierarchies. I hasten to add that I am aware that the *achut* (untouchable) Hindu castes are regarded as so polluted as to be excluded from the *varna* system altogether according to Sanskritic doctrine—and even from Hinduism altogether in the eyes of many—but *sociologically* they *do* comprise a fifth *varna*. As a matter of fact, their religious beliefs and social practices are within the range of variation among members and castes of the acknowledged Hindu *varnas*. That they are denied *varna* status altogether only further magnifies their degradation, and rationalizes their oppression and exploitation.

(3) In America, people of known or alleged African ancestry, no matter how remote, are conventionally described and treated as comprising a biologically, genetically distinct 'race' whereas in fact, their distinct identity is a product of social definition. They are collectively ascribed distinctive, allegedly 'innate'—often disvalued, stigmatizing—characteristics. They also share depressed, disadvantaged social status together with impairment or denial of access to respect, rewards, and rights granted to others in the society. As a result they have long been (and commonly continue to be) segregated, disparaged, disadvantaged, and exploited. It is worthwhile to take a few minutes to supplement these generalizations with some concrete examples of the consequences of American racism.

Today, although the incomes of employed Blacks have recently come to approach those of Whites, a far smaller proportion of Blacks are employed, and those employed are most often relegated to low-income jobs. Even more striking and more damaging is the fact that the average 'net economic worth' of Black households (i.e., equity in a home, a bank account, life insurance, investments, etc.) is only one tenth that of Whites. A large proportion of Blacks live in *de facto* residentially segregated ghettos: Harlem in New York, South Chicago in Illinois, Watts in Los Angeles, Hunters Point in San Francisco, and the list goes on. These ethnic neighborhoods are a consequence of discriminatory

federal home loan policies and private real estate practices including, until the 1960s, “restrictive covenants” excluding Blacks (and Jews, Asians, Mexicans, etc.) from living in the more desirable areas, or more accurately, consigning them to undesirable areas—‘across the railroad tracks’ from the rest of the town or city.

In the University of California, Berkeley, a public institution whose students are overwhelmingly White and of upper-middle class, the average income of parents of White students is twice that of Black students. Infant mortality rates in the above-listed ghettos are comparable to those of Bangladesh, while in White neighborhoods they are comparable to those of other ‘developed’ nations. In the ghettos schools are under-funded, with decrepit and overcrowded buildings, lacking books and other teaching supplies, and are assigned the least experienced teachers, all in stark contrast to most White schools. Poor health is endemic, medical care is lacking or unaffordable, as are life insurance and medical insurance and pension plans. Unemployment is high, poverty and hopelessness are pervasive, and crime (its victims most often within the ghetto) is rampant. Statewide in California, one in five Black males is in prison (often for offenses for which Whites are given lighter sentences, if any), and Black male youths are reported to have a greater statistical chance of being murdered than of attending a university.

(4) These social pathologies are largely attributable to discrimination based on people’s presumed ancestry, that is, based on allegedly discernible birth-ascribed characteristics. Skin color, eye/nose conformation, and hair form are common and convenient criteria for such ‘racial’ assignment as Black, but empirically these characteristics prove *not* to be the ultimate criteria. A person known or believed to have African ancestry, for example, even one who looks White, is nevertheless defined and treated as Black. This is the infamous “one drop” rule: that “one drop of Black blood”—i.e., one ‘Black’ ancestor, no matter how remote or upon what ‘evidence’—defines one as Black, and therefore subject to all of the racist disabilities and treatments that comprise “Jim Crow” (discriminatory laws, rules, and practices inflicted on Blacks). In Alabama, I was occasionally assumed to be ‘Black’ solely because of my association with Blacks, and was situationally treated as such despite my white skin and blue eyes. Conversely, ‘Black’ friends

who ‘looked White’ would sometimes ‘pass’ as ‘*being* White’—but usually only in brief or anonymous circumstances, and at considerable risk of ‘discovery.’

Sadly enough, the United States and India are not the only societies in which some people are categorized by putative ancestry as being inferior to others, or contaminated, and who experience similar oppressive treatment. Other examples include Rwanda’s *Hutu* and *Twa*, Tibet’s *Ragyappa*, and Korea’s *Paekchong* and *Chiain*. But perhaps the best documented are Japan’s despised and mistreated *Burakumin*, who have been described as its “invisible race” because their situation is similar to that of American Blacks, although they are physically indistinguishable from other Japanese (de Vos and Wagatsuma 1967). Incidentally, despite stereotypic mythology to the contrary, India’s ‘untouchables’ are also physically indistinguishable. I recall that during my research in Dehra Dun city’s Paltan Bazar (1967-68), people of Dalit castes from the Garhwal hills frequently emigrated to the city in search of work. They sometimes secured employment in restaurants as cooks and waiters despite their grievous ritual ‘untouchability’ by passing themselves off as Brahmins. As they told me with some glee, “We leave the village as *Doms* [‘untouchables’] and arrive in Dehra Dun as Brahmins!” This was possible because their employers and patrons were not sufficiently familiar with Garhwali culture to recognize their dissimulation—or the Garhwali Dalits were clever enough to deceive them. The same was true for Muslims, many of whom were able to mimic Hindu identity in circumstances that made it necessary or advantageous to do so (see Berreman 1972 and 1973).

It is important to note that there are criteria other than stigmatized ancestry that are rigid bases for assigning stigmatized identity, i.e., that are regarded as innate in individuals, intrinsic to entire categories of people, and are invoked to confer differential—privileged or impaired—access to socially valued things, conditions, and experiences. In many societies, including America, ethnicity—the distinctive characteristics of shared early socialization—is widely perceived as being immutable and is accordingly employed to confer or withhold societal rewards. In such instances, like the cases of race, caste, and sex, individual exemption does not occur except in cases of dissimulation (passing). Its pernicious

consequences can be seen in many regions of America where, for example, 'ethnic' Latinos of all social classes and occupations are likely to be routinely suspected of ('innately') mischievous, illegal, or even criminal behavior or intent, just as are 'racially' defined Blacks. This is called "racial (or ethnic) profiling" as, for example, when automobile drivers are stopped by highway police for interrogation or search simply because they appear to be of those minority groups and are therefore suspected of being engaged, or likely to engage, in unlawful activity. This is at this very moment a major issue in California, whose Governor has reluctantly signed into law a bill to prohibit such 'profiling' by officers of the law. In schools, students belonging to minority ethnic or racial groups often experience similar profiling wherein, regardless of their interests and aptitudes, they are routinely directed to courses in the so-called 'manual arts,' the academically least challenging and least rewarding courses of study (Cicourel and Kitsuse 1963). A similar fate befalls girls, who are directed away from academic courses thought to be inappropriate to their sex (e.g., mathematics, science) to courses in 'home economics,' in anticipation of their roles as dependent housewives, or preparatory for such 'nurturant' feminine roles as nurses, teachers, and secretaries.

This leads me to sex/gender as the final criterion for social ranking to be discussed here. In most societies, including America, *gender*—a term that includes, but is not limited to, biological sex—is a rigid, caste-like criterion for assigning inequalities. Though, like 'race,' caste, and ethnicity, gender is defined culturally, it too is widely regarded as innate and immutable and is often, but not always, a basis for social ranking. It is invoked as justification for differential (preferential and discriminatory) treatment in all large scale, complex, industrial and agricultural societies. And, like the other birth-ascribed bases for social ranking, sex/gender discrimination has evoked resentment and resistance. America has a history of militant movements for female emancipation and gender emancipation that, in general, parallel those of other birth-ascribed minorities, though in the case of females they are a socially defined 'minority' that is a statistical majority. These movements (for property rights, the right to vote and hold public office, rights over one's own body, equal pay for equal work, etc.) have often been confronted by formidable opposition from governments and popular

sentiment, but with the rise of feminist militance, women have made substantial progress toward overcoming these inequities.

Before concluding this topic, it is imperative that we not overlook the exceptional (but no doubt prehistorically the universal) case of sex and gender in the few remaining and recent hunter-gatherer societies. They are exceptions to the rule among more complex societies that gender is routinely a basis for differential access to societies' rewards. Among these small-scale societies, sex roles are different but often unranked, free of the institutionalized sexual inequalities that plague complex societies, whereby the sexes are programmed not only to be different, but to be differentially deserving and rewarded as well (Lee and Daly 1999).

Neither can we overlook the wide variety of cultural constructions of gender that complement and supplement the universal two, and the wide range of consequent privileges, curtailments, and unique roles they entail. While I do not have time to do justice to these lesser-known genders, I must at least call attention to a few examples. Some are widely recognized in America and elsewhere today—gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transvestites, and transgenders—while others are culturally specific. Known to everyone in this audience are the *hijra* (*tiisree jat*) of India and analogously the Middle East. Known to all anthropologists through ethnographic literature on tribes of America's Great Plains are the *berdache* (womanly men) and their converse, "manly hearted women." Perhaps less widely known are the *fa'a fafani* (in the manner of women) of Polynesia. Other genders—"third" and even "fourth" genders—are to be found in other societies and at other times—and no doubt even today in America.

Wherever there has been discrimination in America, it has generated resistance—both on the part of those who are its victims, and on the part of those who champion equality and social justice for everyone. I will turn now to America's major effort toward erasing or at least mitigating the country's most egregious social inequalities.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION: THE AMERICAN 'REMEDY'

The injustices and inhumanities that people in stigmatized, disadvantaged social categories have suffered are injustices imposed collectively, on entire populations. And because the injustices are applied collectively, it is obvious that their remedies must also be applied collectively. The injustices cannot be overcome by reliance on remedies applied individually. Accordingly, those remedies that show any realistic promise are now being undertaken collectively through policies described as "Affirmative Action." In India, as you well know, they are being sought through the "Reservation System," sometimes described as a policy of "protective discrimination." The American and Indian policies are equivalent means toward achieving social and economic justice for all by enhancing opportunities for disadvantaged, excluded, and oppressed segments of their societies.

Affirmative Action is so designated because, when implemented, it requires that positive (hence 'affirmative') action be taken to counteract the disadvantages imposed upon designated underrepresented minorities—Blacks, Mexican-Americans, American Indians, women, etc.—disadvantages that have been a result of many generations of systematic discrimination. It does so by taking into account the conditions and experiences of disadvantage and exclusion that the minorities have suffered—and continue to suffer—when seeking public employment, government financed bank loans, access to public or private housing, admission to universities, candidacy for elective or appointive office, and the like.

Note that Affirmative Action is advocated and legislated with the goal of bringing about equality of *opportunity* in the society. Neither the individual states nor the U.S. Supreme Court is inclined to address the issue of equality of *condition* (and neither, I am sure, is the Mandal Commission). Its unacknowledged corollary is that some will continue to succeed and others fail; that there will continue to be rich and poor rather than sufficiency for all. I happen to regret this, for I believe that equality of opportunity is hollow without the realistic goal of equality of condition. But, one step at a time.

Affirmative Action policies were first enacted into law in the 1950s, at the level of individual states. Soon thereafter they were initiated at the national level by executive order of President Kennedy, and became federal law when, in 1964, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act. That Act remains in effect today, although it applies only to those agencies, institutions, and activities that receive federal funding.

Initially, some of the state programs included quotas that required appointment, employment, or admission of numbers of minority applicants in proportion to their numbers in the population or in the pool of qualified applicants. In the mid-1980s, however, the federal Supreme Court ruled such *quotas* in Affirmative Action unconstitutional, while ruling application of the *principle* of affirmative action to be mandatory in all federally subsidized selection processes. That is, Affirmative Action policies are no longer allowed to benefit specified numbers or proportions of qualified applicants. They are however required, in the case of qualified applicants, to *take into account* factors of disadvantage that are likely to have prevented the applicant from achieving at the same level as privileged applicants—factors such as poverty, disadvantaged minority status, disadvantaged gender status, physical handicap, low standard of preparatory schools, etc. But note that this applies *only* to applicants who, though disadvantaged, have overcome their disadvantage to become (in the case of students, for example) academically *qualified*. Affirmative Action, so defined, remained the policy of all public institutions in California (and many other states) until 1996 when, following its abolition at the University of California by action of its Board of Regents, voters passed the hotly contested and deceptively titled “California Civil Rights Initiative” (Proposition 209), which abolished Affirmative Action in all State-supported institutions, employment, housing, etc. Opponents dubbed the Initiative the “California Civil Wrongs Initiative.” Subsequent research demonstrated that the deceptive wording of the proposition was a key factor in its passage. Respondents reported that they were simultaneously in support of the “California Civil Rights Initiative,” and in support of “special consideration for disadvantaged minorities in applications and employment”!

It is no coincidence that Proposition 209 came in the wake of the precipitous abolition of Affirmative Action at the University of California, in a divided vote by its Board of Regents—a Board composed largely of wealthy White businessmen. This was done over virtually unanimous opposition within the University. It was opposed by the student governments of all eight of the University’s campuses, the faculties of all eight, the Chancellors of all eight (equivalent to Vice-Chancellors in India), the President of the entire University of California system, and—surprisingly—the generally conservative Alumni Association of the University.

Thereafter Ward Connerly, the University Regent who vehemently advocated abolition of Affirmative Action, went nationwide with the goal of reversing the federal Civil Rights Act. Characterizing Affirmative Action as “reverse racism,” he played on populist fears that minorities and immigrants are taking jobs from White Americans and are therefore discriminating against them. In fact, of course, job losses are attributable primarily to employers who relocate their operations to labor-cheap overseas venues in Central America, South and Southeast Asia, and elsewhere. Interestingly, Regent Connerly is Black and a wealthy construction contractor, who is one of a very few, but widely publicized, ethnic minority members who share his views that minorities can and should stop complaining and simply draw themselves up by their own bootstraps to compete with Whites.

It must be emphasized again that Affirmative Action comprises policies whereby qualified members of groups identified as severely disadvantaged as a result of long-standing patterns of collective exclusion, exploitation, and discrimination are provided enhanced access to the rights and privileges enjoyed, and heretofore taken for granted by and largely reserved for, those in the advantaged mainstream. Contrary to the charges leveled by many of their critics, these policies are not designed to punish the privileged (Whites) for the misdeeds of their ancestors, nor are they intended to compensate minorities for past atrocities they have suffered. Affirmative action’s goal is to achieve an equal footing for all in the competition for America’s scarce social and economic resources.

Cynthia Tucker, editorial page editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* newspaper, put it succinctly in a 1996 editorial replying to opponents of the program:

Affirmative action, after all, is not a thinly disguised effort to shove deserving whites aside in favor of undeserving people of color ... Affirmative action is simply the name given to a wide variety of programs designed to boost the opportunities for people who still face discrimination. (Tucker 1996)

The key phrase in that quotation is “... *people who still face discrimination.*” The unstated premise of most opponents of affirmative action, including Ward Connerly, is that racial/ethnic/gender discrimination no longer exists in America (if it ever did) so affirmative action is unnecessary and unfair because it confers preference in this truly egalitarian society. This, however, reveals either incredible blindness to, or denial of, social reality analogous to the claim that by taking ‘race’ into account, affirmative action creates White-Black (or male-female, etc.) tensions—as if racism and sexism were not *already* rampant.²

The obvious and repeatedly documented facts of the matter are that in America, interpersonal and institutional discrimination against the beneficiaries of affirmative action—at both individual and collective levels—has had devastating effect on the lives (and early deaths) of many millions of people, and on the economy and social stability of the nation.

RESPONSES TO AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

I will now bring briefly together some of the most frequent objections and criticisms that have been leveled at Affirmative Action in America. Each such statement will be followed by my brief rebuttal. Most of these are addressed or alluded to elsewhere in this lecture, but I want to bring them concisely together, and numbered, for clarity and emphasis:

1) “Affirmative Action is inherently unjust. People should be rewarded on the basis of merit, and merit alone.”

But: ‘Merit’ is defined by people of privilege and is transmitted via elite socialization, thus excluding those who are beyond the pale from attaining it.

2) “Affirmative action is no longer needed because racism and discrimination no longer exist in America.”

But: Anyone who believes that racism and discrimination no longer exist in America is either totally out of touch, or in denial. A large proportion of sociological research in America documents this.

3) “Giving advantage to minorities for jobs, university admissions, etc., comprises discrimination against Whites. This ‘reverse discrimination’ is just as unfair as any other discrimination.”

But: Discrimination by Whites against minorities over the centuries has been so cruel and pervasive as to be far beyond simple repair or adequate compensation. In sociologist Troy Duster’s understated words, “to even *begin* to achieve fairness would take a lot more than affirmative action.” Yet every effort must be made.

4) “Giving advantages to minorities creates resentment among Whites, which exacerbates White racism.”

But: White racism and discrimination are already so pervasive that any increment would scarcely be noticed. It would in any case be far outweighed by the benefits of Affirmative Action for *everyone*.

5) “Affirmative action creates an elite class of minority Affirmative Action beneficiaries, thus dividing minority groups on the basis of class.”

But: Why should minority groups be excluded from America’s stratified social structure? Elites serve their people as leaders, role models, benefactors, etc., and as educated people they serve the larger society regardless of ‘race,’ ethnicity, or gender.

6) “Affirmative action should give compensatory advantage on the basis of individual economic disadvantage rather than on the basis

of ‘race,’ ethnicity, or gender. This would benefit disadvantaged people of all races, ethnicities, and genders.”

But: It would then do nothing to counteract the devastating collective and cumulative impacts that are unique to victims of birth ascribed pariah status in the form of racism, sexism, and the like.

We must note as well, of course, that many, many people and institutions understand, approve, advocate, and strongly support Affirmative Action.

In recent years, public responses to the plight of America’s historically disadvantaged populations has been at first—especially in times of relative prosperity and low unemployment—to support, or at least tolerate, remedial, emancipatory programs for disenfranchised segments of the population in the interest of social justice and stability; programs such as Affirmative Action. Later—especially under conditions of economic distress and high unemployment—public and political opinion has shifted to self-righteous opposition to such collective measures, in favor of individual rights with rewards based on ‘objectively’ judged and deserved ‘merit.’ The *Newsletter* of the American Federation of Teachers recently put the matter of merit and privilege with consummate irony:

Meritocracy is blind:
To race (if you’re White),
To sex (if you’re male),
To age (if you’re young),
To disability (if you’re able),
To class (if you can pay).

The most succinct and telling response I know to the advocacy of ‘merit’ as the sole or primary criterion for bestowing competitive benefits and privileges is that by the Mandal Commission in its report on the Reservation System (1981). It is so eloquent and unambiguous, and its source so authoritative, that it bears quoting in summary of this discussion:

To those who complain of merit being subordinated, the Commission's answer is that 'merit' itself is largely a product of privileges. (Mandal Commission 1981)

Objections to Affirmative Action (and to the Reservation System) are primarily majority groups' objections to the prospect of having to share what were formerly their exclusive privileges with those they regard as less deserving than themselves—as inferiors and interlopers. Those who are privileged in any social system tend to see their privileges as natural and deserved. In other words, they are considered not as privileges but as entitlements. Thus, White men have not seen it as problematic that they have a history of virtually exclusive access to elite education, preferred employment, high incomes, low taxes, preferential or exclusive access to low interest loans, exemption from military service or access to low-risk roles therein, freedom from housework, child and elder care, absence of police harassment, etc. All of this is taken for granted.

When confronted with the fact or possibility of competition for these privileges by formerly excluded populations, the privileged understandably feel threatened, fearing that their entitlements may not only be called into question, but may even be withdrawn. Troy Duster comments this way:

White men have ruled the universities for centuries; did anyone think they would give up without a fight? [I would add: "Does anyone think *any* elite would give up its privileges without a fight?"] (Duster 1992)

At present, Affirmative Action is a significant locus of the fight for privilege in America. The question has been frequently asked rhetorically: "Hasn't Affirmative Action created a 'backlash' of resentment among Whites in response to the privileges—the jobs, the university admissions—usurped by minorities via Affirmative Action?" My answer is, "No, it's a 'front-lash'." Racism already permeates White society, and has for hundreds of years. The opposition to Affirmative Action is simply a knee-jerk reaction to retain the privileges of the *status quo*.

I have tended to give short shrift in this lecture to disparities of social class, to which I now feel obliged to turn at least briefly. Class refers, of course, to acquired ('achieved') statuses: economic status (wealth, poverty), life styles (bohemian, straight, vegan, country), as distinguished from the kinds of ascribed ('assigned' or inherited) statuses that I have addressed heretofore ('race,' ethnicity, minority, sex/gender). It is frequently proposed that Affirmative Action, which responds to birth-ascribed statuses, should be replaced by a program that responds exclusively to economic circumstances, i.e., to social/economic class as the criterion for access to the benefits of Affirmative Action. The argument is often phrased as a question: "Aren't poverty and its consequences the real problem—and isn't poverty free of the 'special interests' of race, ethnicity, and sex?" The answer is, of course: "Yes, poverty is a basic problem, but *no*, it is not independent of race, ethnicity, and sex." In fact, poverty is a major concomitant and consequence of minority status—of disadvantaged 'races,' ethnicities, genders, etc. These identities and the statuses that accompany them are assigned collectively and rigidly. They are not acquired individually as is putatively, and in many contexts actually, the case with class. The hugely disproportionate number of Blacks living in poverty, for example, is primarily a result of categorically ('racially') applied discrimination over the centuries. The same is true for American Indians, Mexican Americans, and analogously for Southeast Asian immigrants, and for many women (especially those unattached to White males). In short, racism and sexism are expressions of birth-ascribed, socially defined stigma and discrimination. They comprise a dimension that is fundamentally different from class—a feature of the same structures of inequality and oppression, but a different dimension. Let me illustrate with two quotations. The first is from Charles Silberman's modern classic, *Crisis in Black And White*:

... There is a special quality to the despair of the Negro slum [poverty stricken ghetto] that distinguishes it from any other. For the youngster growing up in Harlem or any other Negro slum, the gates of life clang shut at a terrifyingly early age. For one thing, the children become aware almost

from infancy of the opprobrium Americans attach to color ['race']. They feel it in their parents' voices as they are warned to behave when they stray beyond the ghetto's wall. They become aware of it as they begin to watch television, or go to the movies, or read the mass-circulation magazines; beauty, success, and status all wear a white skin. (Silberman 1964:49)

Compare that with the following, from Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb's *The Hidden Injuries of Class*:

The [White] working people of Boston [the subject of their book] have been denied the *presumption*, rather than the *possibility*, of societal respect. (Sennett and Cobb 1972:248)

Therein lies the difference: categories of people stigmatized by birth (e.g., Blacks) are collectively *denied* the possibility of societal respect and equal opportunity, whereas poverty stricken Whites *have* the possibility of respect and opportunity, even though, as a result of their poverty, they cannot *assume* that they will receive respect and opportunity.

Thus, the situation of Boston's White working class is not without its injuries, as Sennett and Cobb demonstrate, but theirs are very different injuries, less damaging, less inevitable, and less irrevocable than those of the "Negro slum" described by Silberman. More importantly, in the context of Affirmative Action, is the fact that the injuries that accompany life in the Negro slum are not amenable to the remedies that are a result of individual 'merit' because, as the Mandal Commission pointed out, the conditions that produce 'merit' are denied the disadvantaged, and have been throughout history.

Affirmative action is one step in the direction of overcoming the grievous and devastating effects of birth ascribed inequality. Its privileged opponents have perhaps recognized that the lid of oppression that has been placed over the disvalued populations in their midst is dangerously vulnerable to the pressures of the boiling discontent within. The resistance to change that social, political, and

economic elites have exhibited has been steadfast and ruthless as they assert tradition, nationalism, divine providence, capitalism, genetics, and ‘merit’ as justification for their thinly veiled, but often ruthless, efforts to preserve the advantages they derive from the *status quo*.

BENEFITS OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

With little doubt, the most persuasive recent evidence and argument for the positive effect of Affirmative Action in education—and the most devastating to its critics—is to be found in the book, *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions* (1998), by William Bowen and Derek Bok, the former presidents of Princeton and Harvard universities, respectively. The book is based on data from 30,000 students in twenty-eight of America’s best-known colleges and universities that practice what the authors call “race sensitive” admissions policies (i.e., Affirmative Action and similar programs). All of them include among their criteria for admission not only test scores and grades, but also socially defined ‘race,’ region of origin, economic circumstances, and other criteria relevant for assessing academic promise and opportunities for achievement. Their research, which primarily compares White and Black students’ performance, confirms the powerful positive contribution that such policies make to the levels of achievement of Blacks and to the overall education of both ‘racial’ groups. The book is massively and meticulously documented, with facts and figures as well as qualitative data, that cumulatively serve to devastate most of the conventional wisdom (i.e., ignorance) that has fueled arguments against Affirmative Action. It is worth quoting from two of scores of summary paragraphs from the book:

... Race-sensitive admissions policies have accomplished much. Compared with college graduates of every race, black graduates of [these] schools are not only more likely to be employed, they are much more highly represented in professions such as law and medicine; they are also earning more within whatever sector of

employment or occupation they have chosen. The earnings premiums enjoyed by [these] black graduates ... are very substantial—even larger than the premiums enjoyed by their white classmates. (Bowen and Bok 1998:152-53)

... Taking account of race helps [these affirmative action] institutions achieve three objectives central to their mission: identifying individuals of high potential, permitting students to benefit educationally from diversity on campus, and addressing long-term societal needs. (Bowen and Bok 1998:278)

DIVERSITY AS ENRICHMENT

I want now to cite the enormously beneficial potential that social and ethnic diversity hold—not just for educational institutions and their graduates, but in all contemporary societies and institutions—if only their members have the understanding, the energy, and the will to tap it. The first step is, I think, to act on the knowledge that social difference need not be burdened with the weight of inequality. Diversity need not be translated negatively as inequality, with the stress and conflict that inequality carries with it. It can better be translated positively as an invigorating source of cultural enrichment and inter-ethnic empathy.

Those of us in educational settings are especially acutely aware of these facts. Students are increasingly confronted with diversity among their classmates and faculty, while faculty face a diversity of students. The University of California, Berkeley, where I have taught for nearly forty years, was formerly overwhelmingly White (European-American) in its student body as well as its faculty. But while enrollments change rapidly, recent figures indicate that the student body comprises over 32% Asian and Asian-American, followed by 30% White, 20% Chicano/Latino (Mexican/Latin American), about 12% Black (African American), around 1.3% Native American (American Indian, Aleut and Inuit/Eskimo), with the remaining 4.7% other or no response. Over the next few years

the distribution of ethnicities is likely to show rapidly increasing proportions of Asian and Mexican-Americans. This is greater diversity than is found in most American universities and colleges, but it reflects a nationwide trend (Institute for the Study of Social Change 1991).

In 1989-90 I participated in the project, directed by Troy Duster, that produced those figures. We found that students of all ethnicities, 'races,' and both sexes believed they had benefited from the diversity of this student body—diversity that had been made possible by implementation of Affirmative Action in admission procedures. They benefited, they said, because of the opportunity to know one another through stereotype-reducing, task-oriented, face-to-face interaction in and out of the classroom. They felt thereby better prepared to deal constructively with the realities of ethnic diversity in the larger society in which they would soon be employed, vote, participate in community activities and organizations, and raise their children.

The presence of such diversity had brought to students and faculty alike valuable and unique perspectives, traditions, talents, experiences, and funds of knowledge that will inevitably enrich their lives and the society at large. Corporate and other large-scale employers in the United States, unlike most governmental agencies at all levels, have often been enthusiastic advocates of Affirmative Action. They have found that diversity of employees makes good business sense in dealing with the diversity of their customers. An ethnically diverse population of professionals—from physicians to lawyers and from social workers to teachers—has been demonstrated to better serve a diverse community of clients than an ethnically homogeneous population, for the obvious reason that people generally feel more comfortable and confident being served by people who know their language and are familiar with their cultures and experiences than by those who do not.

CONCLUSION

A society that ignores, denies, or discriminates against its minority cultures and peoples not only generates resentment and anger, but also fails to benefit from the unique cultural capital that each ethnicity and gender has to offer. It also loses touch with the

nations, regions, peoples, and histories that comprise the roots of those ethnicities worldwide. It becomes stultified and ossified as it isolates itself in ignorance, from global systems of economy, politics, society and culture, and the understanding that is necessary for effective, not to say congenial, international relations. A society unable to benefit from the experience of others will fail not only in dealing with the issues that accompany modernity and globalization, but will at the same time risk losing the confidence of its own people.

In closing, I want to focus the relevance I hope this lecture will have had to both diversity in education and to social policy worldwide, with another brief quotation from sociologist Troy Duster:

... The future will reward those who master the art of coming together across ethnic, cultural, and racial lines. Suddenly, affirmative action admissions [to universities] are not a debt ... but rather a way of enriching the student culture—and career hopes. (Duster 1991:33)

And what they learn may make a difference not just for their personal futures, but for a world struggling with issues of nationalism, race, and ethnicity. [And, I would add, with issues of sex and gender inequalities.] (Duster 1991:64)

I am grateful to everyone here, hosts, and audience for allowing me the privilege of sharing with you this occasion to remember and honor Professor Srinivas, and the intellectual, social, and personal contributions that will be his lasting legacy.

Finally, I am extremely pleased to have had this opportunity, in print, to honor you, Ved Vatak, and to thank you for your friendship and intellectual stimulation over the years.

NOTES

¹ When delivered, the lecture was abbreviated; here it is in its complete form.

² Connerly, later and no longer a Regent, went to the extreme of putting an initiative on the California ballot that would have prohibited the collection of *any* racial data whatsoever—data without which there would be no way to identify discrimination when it occurred. This was a proposal to solve the problem by denying it. By then, however, Californians were wise to him and the initiative was defeated. As Supreme Court Justice Blackmun had written in the 1978 *Bakke* civil rights case, “[i]n order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race.”

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2

THE SCHEDULED CASTES IN THE SIKH COMMUNITY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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The Punjab is a Sikh majority state. After its reorganization in 1966, when Hindi-speaking areas were separated to constitute the new state of Haryana and some of the hill areas were transferred to Himachal Pradesh, the religious composition of the state was radically altered. Sikhs constitute 63% of the state's population at present. Their share in the rural population is even higher and is estimated at 72%. Dalits, formerly called "untouchables" and later designated as "Scheduled Castes" in the Indian Constitution, also have a high proportion of the state's population: by 2001, the 1991 figure of 28.3% had increased to over 30%, constituting the highest percentage of Dalits among all the states in India. Because over 80% of Dalits live in rural areas, Punjab's villages are predominantly Sikh and Dalit. An understanding of the status of Scheduled Castes in the Sikh community, as well as the impact of Sikhism on Dalits in the Punjab more generally, should help us not only appreciate the regional specificity of the status and conditions of life for Scheduled Castes in the state, but also question the way in which caste has been conceptualized in scholarship.

Sikhism appears to have exercised a significant liberating influence on Dalits in the Punjab. The teachings of the Sikh Gurus, the religious institutions of *sangat* and *langar*, the absence of a caste-based priesthood, and respect for manual labor have all aimed

to create a community in which distinctions of caste, creed, and status are not relevant. When the Singh Sabha leadership chose to assert a separate and distinct identity to underscore their boundary demarcation from the Hindus at the beginning of the twentieth century (a movement characterized by the rallying cry *Ham Hindu Nahin* 'We are not Hindus'), the key differentiating factor they referenced was the rejection of *varnashram* (the hierarchical four-caste system of Hinduism) and the purity-pollution syndrome. Members of untouchable castes in the region converted to the Sikh religion in large numbers with the goal of improving their status. Although their gain was not small, there was a wide gap between religious teachings and actual social practice.

The evolution of the Sikh community proceeded through a complex dynamic of interaction between religious principles and the tribal cultural patterns of the dominant caste of Jats and their power interests. This resulted in the evolution of a Sikh caste hierarchy, distinct from yet parallel to that of the Hindu caste system. It is important to understand the form in which casteism has continued to survive in the Sikh community and the reasons thereof. Two episodes may be of particular relevance in this context. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the most outstanding leader of the 'untouchables', had in 1936 seriously considered *en masse* conversion of the so-called "Depressed Classes" to Sikhism with a view to liberate them from the shackles of the *manuvadi* caste system. It remains to be adequately explored how and why this project came to be dropped, for Ambedkar was later persuaded to lead his people to convert to Buddhism instead, after a period of 20 years. The second episode relates to the Sikh political struggle for constitutional recognition of the Sikh Scheduled Castes after the independence of India. This struggle sought the same constitutional status and special safeguards for the Sikh Scheduled Castes as were provided for the Hindu Scheduled Castes. This chapter explores the trade off between the doctrinal principles of the Sikh religion and the ruling social and political interests forged through societal and economic change in Punjab.

CASTE AS COLONIAL CONSTRUCTION

After the annexation of the Punjab in 1849, when anthropologists and British administrators started looking closely at social hierarchy in the province, they discovered that the Punjab represented “a notable exception” to the caste system in India. It appeared that the continual influx of foreign people of diverse stocks made the people of this region extraordinarily mixed. Buddha Prakash depicts the region’s special quality when he describes it as “the socio-cultural panmixia of Punjab” (Buddha Prakash 1976:8). He also notes that the region was “practically abandoned” by the orthodoxy (Brahmins), most of whom had moved quite early on to the Indo-Gangetic region (Buddha Prakash 1976:8). Even British administrators in the nineteenth century noticed that the Punjab “is more Muhammedan than Hindu” and that “Islam in the Punjab is, as a rule, free from fanaticism” (Government of India 1908:50). Indeed, in the western part of Punjab, where there was a larger concentration of Muslims and society was organized on a tribal basis, it was found that “caste hardly exists” (Government of India 1908:48). This characterization of Muslim social life can be attributed in part to Sufi influence, which was brought from Persia by “the early Sultans of Ghor” (Government of India 1908:50). Historians noticed a significant mobilization among the artisan castes/classes during the period of Turkish rule. The teachings of the Bhakti poets, particularly the ridicule of the Brahmin by Kabir and Ravidas, were perhaps as much evidence of a challenge to the structure of social deference as they were a reflection of a shifting structure of social hierarchy. However, in central Punjab, which is broadly the area of present Punjab, it was the emergence of the Sikh Panth that was believed to have made a definitive influence with respect to caste. J. S. Grewal refers to Arnold J. Toynbee’s observation that by the time of the Turkish invasions, Hindu society had started to break down under “the morbid social growth” of the caste system, resulting in revolts of the proletariat led by Kabir and Nanak: “Toynbee sees the rise of Sikhism, thus, as an act of secession on the part of the internal proletariat of the Hindu Society in its disintegrating stage” (Grewal 1972:141).

The rejection of the caste system by Guru Nanak, the first Guru of the Sikhs, appeared categorical. The following two

compositions—the first of which is one of the most widely quoted of his sabads—demonstrate this position:

Fakar jati phakar nau, Sabhana jia ika chhau
 Worthless is caste and worthless an exalted name;
 For all mankind there is but a single refuge.

Neechan andar neech jati, Neechi hun ati neech
Nanak tin ke sang sath, Vadian siyon kya rees
Jithe neech sanmalian, Tithe nadr teri bakhshish

I am the lowest of the low castes, low, absolutely low;
 I am with the lowest in companionship,
 not with the so-called high.
 The blessing of God is where the lowly are cared for.

Guru Nanak's primary quest is for salvation, for union with God. Before God, caste is irrelevant; God bestows greatness irrespective of caste. Association with or pride in one's caste is thus an obstacle to be overcome, for "there is no caste in the next world." Guru Nanak's rejection of caste, like his conception of equality, is apparently based on religious criteria. As Grewal explains, "Guru Nanak does not conceive of equality in social and economic terms" (Grewal 1972:8). However, the social implications of Nanak's rejection of caste were evident: "Just as every human being was equal before God so every individual who accepted the path of Guru Nanak was equal before the Guru and all his followers were equal before one another" (Grewal 1972:8)

A major impact in this regard was made through the institutions of *sangat*, equality in religious gatherings, and *langar*, the eating of food together. Another innovation was the practice by which anyone, including members of low castes, could offer *karah prasad*. The holy prasad was deposited in a single dish, out of which portions were distributed to everyone in the gathering. According to W. H. McLeod, this custom was observed as early as the time of the fifth Guru (Guru Arjan): "This ensures that high castes consume food received in effect from the hands of the lower castes or even outcastes and that they do so from a common dish" (McLeod 1975:87). By the time the tenth Guru (Guru Gobind

Singh) established the Khalsa Brotherhood in 1699, a distinct ceremony of baptism was in place that ridiculed caste distinctions. Three of the first five baptized Sikhs (the *Panj Piare*, or 'the five beloved ones') came from the lower castes, though none of them were from the outcastes. All the candidates were required to drink from a common bowl of *amrit* (sweetened sacred water). These rituals delivered a striking blow to the notion of ritual purity, in contrast to the ritual rigidity associated with Hindu religious places. Although violations were not ruled out, the holy injunctions and intentions were clear: there was religious support neither for caste-based distinctions nor for caste- or birth-based priesthood. Caste also made no difference with respect to the wearing of arms.

The holy book containing the Word of the Gurus, known as the *Guru Granth Sahib*, also rejects caste hierarchy. The tenth Guru commanded that after his death there was to be no living guru; instead, Sikhs should acknowledge the holy book as his successor: "Ye whose hearts are pure, seek Him in the Word." The Granth includes compositions from a number of saints such as Sheikh Farid and the Bhagats. Among these saints are Kabir, a *Julaha* (weaver), and Ravidas, a *Chamar* (leather worker), both of whom are considered to be from the outcastes. These compositions appear to be even more radical in the condemnation and rejection of caste. Their sayings, as part of the holy scripture of the Sikh Panth, seem to have given outcastes a welcome feeling of affinity with and honor in belonging to the new religion.

More fundamental, however, is the question of how caste continued to survive in the Sikh community. The answer to this question lies in the kinds of treatment that members of the lower castes and outcastes entering the Sikh Panth received at the hands of the dominant section of people composing the Panth. All ten Gurus came from Khatri families. In the early years, the Khatri were prominent among followers and exercised influence on the Panth. One who entered the Panth entered with his caste intact; he was neither required nor expected to discard caste-belonging. All of the Gurus married their sons and daughters into Khatri families. Followers were not expected to deviate from the customary practice of endogamy; they were considered equal in several respects and yet were separate in kinship. There is no evidence that outcastes in general ceased to be outcastes after joining the Panth.

The large-scale entry of the Jats by the time of the sixth Guru (Guru Hargobind) tended to alter the caste equation in the Panth. The Jats constituted the rural elite who dominated rural Punjab. By the eighteenth century, the Jat constituency was preponderant among constituent groups in the Panth (McLeod 1975). The precise proportion became clear only when the British conducted the 1881 Census (Ibbetson 1987[1916]), which took stock of the caste variable. At that time, it was found that among 1,706,909 persons who reported themselves as Sikh, about 64% were Jats. This proportion has more or less remained in the range of 60% to 66%.

The Jats were the sturdy owners and cultivators of land. Their pride in manual labor—embodied in the popular phrase *dabb ke vaah, te rajj ke khah* (till the land deep and eat to your fill)—often erased the distinction between non-manual and manual labor that was a significant marker of the high-pure and the low-polluting in the Hindu caste system. In the varna order, the Jats, as cultivators, would have been classed as *Shudra* (the laboring class). Guru Nanak, when settling at Kartarpur after returning from his *udasis* (travels), is known to have taken to the cultivation of land. In his teachings, God came to be conceptualized as *Sacha Wud Kirsan* (The True Great Cultivator) (M-1, Sri, 13[19]). The second Guru (Guru Angad) is believed to have earned his living by making ropes through twisting dry grass. Indeed, the phrase *Kirat Karo*, translated as ‘do labor’, is part of the three-fold holy injunction: *Kirat Karo, Vand Chhako, Naam Japo* (Do labor, eat by sharing, and recite God’s name).

The Indian historian Irfan Habib (1976) traced the Jats to the pastoral people living in Punjab during the seventh to ninth centuries and suggested that they may have been attracted to the Gurus because of their inherited egalitarian traditions. The Jats were known for their indifference to Brahminical social stratification, and the Gurus “willingly raised Jats to positions of high authority in the New Panth” (McLeod 1975:11). “The inevitable result was development along lines dictated by the influence of Jat cultural patterns” (McLeod 1975:10). Although the Hindu varna order was altered, it did not end caste distinction. More significantly, the change did not seem to affect the attitude and treatment toward outcastes. The burden of tradition appears to have been heavy among the rising number of followers of the Sikh faith. The Sikh

Misals (militias), for instance, were organized along caste lines (Marenco 1976). We do not know the number of outcastes who entered the Panth at that stage. It is clear, however, that their number was small until a large-scale conversion to Sikhism began towards the end of the nineteenth century.

During the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1799-1839), the Sikh Jats emerged as a major part of the nobility or ruling class. In the overall population of Ranjit Singh's vast kingdom, Sikhs formed 6% to 7% of the total population, Muslims about 70%, and Hindus 24%. But in the districts of Lahore and Amritsar, areas with the greatest Sikh concentration, Sikhs formed around one third of the population (Grewal 1994). The Sikh Jats constituted a major part of Ranjit Singh's army; they made up nearly 30% of the total nobility and were the major recipients of *jagirs* (land grants). The largest share of religious grants went to the Sikhs (Sagar 1993:9). Social status was determined by the size of one's landholding. Ideologically, as Grewal notes, the doctrine of Guru-Panth had given way to that of Guru-Granth in recognition of the prevalent social inequality: "Every Sikh was equal in the presence of the Granth Sahib, in the Sangat and the Langar, but in the life outside, social differences were legitimized" (Grewal 1994:118). S. S. Sagar shows that contemporary literature also noted a wide gap between Sikh nobility and common Sikhs. Poverty was prevalent in society, as was slavery: "Poor parents used to sell their children. At times grown up girls were sold" (Sagar 1993:95). Some British observers even noted that the difference between Sikh nobles and the Sikh poor was greater than the difference between comparable groups elsewhere in India (Grewal 1994:116). According to Giani Pratap Singh (1933), former Jathedar of Akal Takht, an uninhibited prevalence of caste hierarchy and discrimination against untouchables was reflected in the denial of access to villages, public wells, and Gurdwaras (temples of worship). Religious morality was not known to be safe in the context of power and wealth: "With the rise of Sikh power, the Panth exhausted its dynamic character" (Sagar 1993:118-119).

CREATING MERIT AND COMPLEXITY

The “British colonial embrace” following the annexation of Punjab in 1849 had an overriding significance in the shaping of a new kind of Sikhism and in changing the social structure and caste relations in the Sikh community. Understanding that men of substance would hold hatred for their new rulers, the administrators of “Punjab Tradition” went about constituting “natural leaders” who would be loyal to the British while holding sway over the peasantry. After disbanding the Sikh soldiery, confiscating the estates of the most prominent chiefs, and “lowering and crushing” the priestly class of Sodhis and Bedis, they reconstituted both the Sikh aristocracy and the Army. By the end of this ‘mutiny’, Sikhs constituted 28% of the army in Punjab. The strategic social engineering had paid dividends to the British during the Indian rebellion of 1857. The British administration in Punjab understood that those who stood firmly loyal and served as “breakwaters of the storm”—the so-called “natural leaders” of the community—“deserved support and encouragement” (Narang 1998:16-24).

The course taken in pursuit of British objectives included not only a construction of Sikh as Singh but also a new construction of caste for a civil order based on privilege and exclusion. This construction flowed from the lessons the British chose to learn from the Great Rebellion of 1857. Nicholas Dirks, in his recent work *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, indicates how caste emerged through a colonial ethnology and “colonization of the archive” as the dominant trope used by the British to make sense of India and how it should be ruled. Caste had become “a specifically colonial form of (that is, substitute for) civil society that both justified and maintained an Orientalist vision” (Dirks 2002:60).

The reorganization of the British Indian Army after 1858 was based on a theory of “martial races.” Dirks cites from the recruiting handbooks of the Indian Army that the so-called martial races were distinguished by loyalty, military fidelity, and “manly independence” in contrast to other groups (races) that were positioned as effeminate, cowardly, or inclined to crime (Dirks 2002:179). George MacMunn, who became a quartermaster general in the Indian army in 1920, noted in his book *The Martial Races of*

India that it was only in India that “we speak of the martial races as a thing apart ... because the mass of the people have neither martial aptitude nor physical courage” (MacMunn 1979[1933]:1-8, cited in Dirks 2002:180). MacMunn presented the ruling idea among British administrators that the martial races were “largely the product of the original white (Aryan) races” who invented the caste system. Specifically, administrators believed that early white invaders started the caste system as “protection” for racial purity “against the devastating effect on morals and ethics” that was caused by the mixing of blood with aboriginal peoples (MacMunn 1933:9-10, cited in Dirks 2002:180). Like H. H. Risley earlier and Louis Dumont later, MacMunn stressed the need to appreciate caste rigidity as a primary source for keeping Indian society intact against forces of disintegration for a thousand years under Muslim invaders. Accordingly, caste was upheld as a “regulatory form of civil society appropriate for India under the circumstances of its limited political and social development” (Dirks 2002:180).

The Sikhs were recognized as one of the most prominent martial races of India for their loyal support of a section of the elite in suppressing the rebellion. However, though Sikhism was noted to have drawn its adherents from all classes, it was the Jats who carried such weight in the formation of the “(Sikh) national character,” such that the Sikh, “whatever his origin, may now be considered as practically identical with” the Punjabi Jat (Bingley 1985[1916]:112). It was recognized that in the matter of caste, the Sikh, like the orthodox Hindu, “holds aloof from the unclean classes, and even the Mazhabi Sikhs are excluded from the religious shrines and are left to the religious administration of Granthies of their own caste” (Bingley 1985[1916]:72). Recognition of that regulatory form of hierarchy as crucial for ruling India, not tinkering with it, became a part of colonial wisdom and statecraft.

One of the significant instances of that regulatory principle as the basis of policy related to the development of the nine canal colonies during 1885-1940, which involved the allocation of over 4,000,000 acres of freshly developed virgin lands for ownership and cultivation. Given its commitment to the “sound principle”—“not to upset the existing social and economic order”—the British government ensured that “tenants, laborers and other landless men should not, as a rule, be chosen” (Ali 1989:95). The land was thus

allocated to “dominant castes,” as per the scale of already existing landholding status. In the customary scheme, outcastes such as Mazhabis (Churah Sikh), Balmikis and Ramdasias (Chamar Sikh), and Ravidasias were not allowed to own land. In fact, even access to village commons—*shamlaat* land—could be shared only among hereditary landowning communities. “Consequently,” as Dr. B. R. Ambedkar told the Rajya Sabha in 1954, “the ‘untouchables’ or kamins were not entitled to build their houses in a ‘pucca’ form on the land on which they stayed. They are always afraid lest the zamindars of Punjab may, at any time, turn them out” (Ambedkar 1954, cited in Moon 1997:927). Another instance, more significant in its importance, was the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1901. According to this law, which was enacted primarily to save indebted farmers from the rapacious money-lenders of the Khatri, Arora, and Brahmin castes, agricultural land could be purchased or acquired only by people belonging to the defined “agricultural castes.” All those belonging to the lower castes that were not included among the “agricultural tribes” were barred from owning land, even when they had the means to purchase land for cultivation. (It was only after independence that Ambedkar, as the Law Minister, moved to repeal the Act in 1952 to remove the invidious disability.) This extraordinary privileging of Jat agriculturalists, 80% of whom had turned to Sikhism in central Punjab districts by 1921, contributed further to the Jat’s caste domination and arrogance of privilege.

On the other hand, a difference was made to the status of the Mazhabis when their recruitment was opened to separate regiments of the Imperial Army. They were first raised as a 12,000 member Mazhabi Corps for the siege of Delhi during the 1857 revolt against the British East India Company. In 1911 there were 1,626 Mazhabi Sikh soldiers out of a total of 10,866 Sikhs in the Imperial Army (they had in fact been reduced to 16% of their number in 1857), with the number of Jats being 6,626 (Marenco 1976:260). Since the Mazhabis had earlier raised their status by discarding traditional occupations like scavenging and sweeping, they were apparently considered suitable enough for recruitment as soldiers: “They (Mazhabis) make capital soldiers”; “Some of our Pioneer regiments are wholly composed of Mazhabis” (Rose 1970[1911]:75). A. H. Bingley recorded that “a Mazhabi Sikh, despised as chuhra or sweeper, at once becomes a valiant and valued soldier, and, imbued

with the spirit of his martial faith, loses all memory of his former degrading calling” (Bingley 1985[1916]:117). The latter part was an overstatement: Mazhabis constituted exclusively Mazhabi regiments—for example, the Sikh Pioneers 23, 32, and 34, later named the Sikh Light Infantry—which were separate and distinguished from the exclusively Jat Sikh regiments. No Sikh, Jat or any other caste man could be recruited into the Sikh Light Infantry. Conversely, as an old retired Brigadier explained to the author, “not even a Labana Sikh could be recruited to the Sikh Regiments.” The fear of pollution of the high castes could compromise their loyalty. Yet association with the Army nevertheless gave a boost to the Mazhabi’s sense of dignity, marking them in distinction to other untouchable castes.

However, the collateral gain from some of the developmental measures undertaken in the Punjab promoted noticeable change in the status and living conditions of the then untouchable castes through occupational and social mobility. One of these was the large-scale migration for labor during the development of the canal colonies, which prompted change from traditional occupations. After Jats and Arains, Chuhras and Chamars constituted the largest groups of migrants to the colonies. Among total migrants to the Chenab Colony, for example, there were 41,944 Chuhras and 26,934 Chamars alongside 1,502 Mazhabis (Marenco 1976:261). Migrations to these irrigation projects were based on corporate decisions by the caste *panchayats* (village councils) and became the basis for corporate caste mobility and a rise in status.

A small number of Mazhabi retired soldiers were also allotted land in two Mazhabi settlements. It was found that more than half of these allottees became landowners and tenants while another 13% worked as landless laborers. In a few selected areas, such Mazhabis came to be classed among the ‘agricultural castes.’ Their recruitment as soldiers in the Imperial Army had already helped in their corporate rise in status, as against Hindu Chuhras. It was believed that “for the most part, their advance in Sikh society was due to the special favor they held with the British, on whose side they had fought during the Sepoy Mutiny” (Marenco 1976:285).

Among the immigrant Chamars, only 26% continued with their traditional occupation; others worked as field laborers, weavers, and agricultural tenants. The number of “General Labour” required for

work on the canals was 371,940 in 1891 and increased to 832,689 in 1901. Most of these workers came from the outcastes. The findings of H. A. Rose show that “[i]n 1901 the Chuhras and Chamars in Punjab were quite often working as general labourers rather than as sweepers or scavengers or leatherworkers” (Rose 1970[1911]:254).

Establishment of these colonies and trade centers also contributed to the development of new towns and *mandis* (trading centers) in adjoining towns. A section of outcastes, largely Chamars, moved to towns, working in mandis or in the municipal service. As against corporate mobility, individual members of untouchable castes moved to cities and towns in pursuit of earning cash: they changed their occupations, became skilled workers, and in some cases graduated to professional classes. In such cases, upward social mobility was a result of individual choice and initiative (Rose 1970[1911]). The introduction of the market economy and wages in cash for labor in urban areas made a tremendous difference to standard of living and self-perception. There were improvements in provisions for education along with new opportunities for jobs in government service positions. The establishment of factories provided opportunities for skilled and unskilled labor as well as managerial jobs for untouchable castes. The 1911 Census recorded 13,200 Chamar Sikhs and 2,150 Chuhra Sikhs working in traditional industries like leather manufacturing (Joginder Singh 1997:40). The social dynamics of economic change thus promoted both corporate and individual mobilization, occupational change, and change in the material conditions of caste relations in the Sikh community.

Ethne Marenco (1976) believed that British rulers deplored the caste system in general and looked upon socioeconomic change as an instrument for weakening the edifice of caste oppression. One may agree that these changes, to use Andre Beteille’s picturesque phrase, “loosened the soil in which caste had been rooted for centuries” (Beteille 2002:10). However, in the “contradictory bequest” of colonial rule in Punjab, the British underwriting of the centrality of caste to both continuity and change had a far-reaching impact. One may refer to a note recorded by L. Middleton and S. M. Jacob in the 1921 Census Report for Punjab and Delhi:

These castes have been largely manufactured and almost entirely preserved as separate castes by the British Government. Our land records and official documents have added iron bands to the old rigidity of caste. We pigeonholed everyone by castes, and if we could not find a true caste for them, we labelled them with the name of the hereditary occupation. We deplore the caste system and its effects on social and economic problems, but we are largely responsible for the system we deplore. (cited in Pratap Singh 1933:178-179)

Perhaps even more far-reaching in impact was the underwriting of a new conceptualization of 'merit' attached to the class/caste ownership of large landed property. Specifically, merit came to be seen as belonging to the military (or martial races) on account of their 'pride' at demonstrating unflinching loyalty to the British. For instance, in most of the pleas for privileges or share in representation made to the British government by leading sections of the Sikh community, the conceptualization of merit was broadly spelled out in the following manner:

We own a very large portion of land in the province and pay more than one third of the revenue of the state. The record of our military services is unparalleled in the history of British India. Our claim, therefore, for special consideration, is justified by our stake in the country, by our solidarity and sacrifices which we have made for the state. (Narang 1998:119)

In another memorandum written in reaction to the Communal Award, Chief Khalsa Diwan argued that:

Establishment of Muslim majority may lead to transferring the large interests of the landowning classes to their tenants (*Kamins*) and others who have no stake and pay no direct taxes. (Narang 1998:125)

Such internalization of special merit tended to underscore the well-deserved and natural social domination of the Jat Zamindar in their relations with lower castes in local village situations. It was this logic that the British appreciated and institutionalized.

Paradoxically, this conceptualization of merit also involved a perversion of Sikhism. Early Sikhism was a faith of the poor and the low castes. These were the groups that had a stake in such a faith and fellowship, in which distinctions of caste had been rejected. As S. S. Hans observed: “Sikh religion was an enterprise of raising up the lowly” (Hans 1986:6). Kabir’s *bani* (sayings) in the *Adi Granth* ridiculed the knowledge of Brahmins over and against that of the so-called low caste Julaha.

Tu bahman main kasi ka julaha, Bujhhu mera gyana
Tum tau jache bhupat raje, hari sion mor dhiana
 How could those who were concerned chiefly about power
 and closeness to the rulers for begging and material benefit
 expect to gain knowledge or be close to God?
 (Kabir, cited in Hans 1986:13-15).

CONSOLIDATION OF CASTE POWER

When the Singh Sabha movement—the most powerful movement for reform in the Sikh community—was launched during the 1880s, one of the “classic” expositions was made by Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha in his publication *Ham Hindu Nahin* (We [Sikhs] are not Hindus). One of his major arguments, as referenced above, was the total rejection of caste in the Sikh religion, a position he explained “with references from the Sikh religious-books” (Nabha 1981[1897]:13). Concurrent with the publication of Bhai Khan Singh Nabha’s book, Giani Ditt Singh was in the process of becoming one of the most prominent ideologues of the Lahore Singh Sabha. Ditt Singh came from an untouchable caste and had become a baptized Sikh, changing his name from Ditt Ram to Ditt Singh. Influenced by the *Arya Samaj*, a Hindu religious and social reform movement that had launched a vigorous campaign for the end of untouchability in the Hindu community of Punjab, he later joined the Singh Sabha. Having had intimate experience with the

reality of Sikh village life, he was distressed that a baptized *amritdhari* Sikh was identified primarily by his caste and treated accordingly. In his book *Naqli Sikh Prabodh*, he castigated the so-called high caste Sikhs as *naqli* (counterfeit) Sikhs. "Caste, at that time, was a dominant feature of social life in Sikh society. Those baptised as Singhs from low castes were treated as untouchables. Every individual was spoken of by his caste" (Badungar 2002:11). However, it was the political logic of *Ham Hindu Nahin* that swayed the minds of the Sikh political class. Paramjit Singh Judge points to the dialectics of how Sikhism became a key factor in the elevation of Jats to a higher-caste status while the social and political domination of Jats in the Sikh community contributed to the consolidation and expansion of Sikhism. "Each reinforced the other. It is this dialectics of social change that significantly contributed to the emergence of communalism in Punjab" (Judge 2002a:179).

The social universe of the Sikhs at that time was defined by what was described as the "Sanatan Sikh tradition," which was primarily a priestly religion. Giani Pratap Singh (1933), later the Head Priest at the Golden Temple, noted that the Mazhabis were forbidden to enter the Golden Temple for worship; their offering of *karah prasad* was not accepted and the Sikhs denied them access to public wells and other utilities. When a group of Rahtia Sikhs tried to enter the Temple in the summer of the year 1900, "the manager of the sacred establishment, Sardar Jawala Singh, ordered their arrest. The reformist Sikhs who accompanied them were abused and finally beaten up ... because one of the defining characteristics of a sacred precinct, in the eyes of the Sanatan Sikhs, was its ritual purity" (Oberoi 1994:107).

Harjot Oberoi cites from an "authoritative manual," the *Khalsa Dharam Sastra* of 1914, which laid down that "the members of untouchable groups [like the Mazhabi, Rahtia, and Ramdasia Sikhs] did not have the right to go beyond the fourth step in the Golden Temple and the members of the fourfold varnas including Nai, chippe [sic], and Jhivar [Shudra subcastes] were instructed not to mix with persons belonging to untouchable castes. Those who were guilty of breaking caste rules were classified as *patit* and shunned by civil society" (Oberoi 1994:106-107). The organization known as the Khalsa Brotherhood was very active in converting

untouchable castes to Sikhism through ritual baptism. Matters came to a head when a group of newly baptized Sikhs from the low castes went to the Golden Temple to make their offering of *karah prasad* at the beginning of the Gurdwara Reform Movement in 1920. According to Pratap Singh, thousands of enthusiasts, including professors and students of Khalsa College Amritsar, joined in a clash with the *pujaris* (priests) who had refused to accept the offering, forcing the priests to flee. However, this event did not seem to bring any noticeable change. Overall, the Singh Sabha Movement devoted more attention to bringing higher numbers of low castes into the Khalsa Sikh fold and opening schools and colleges: "... removal of untouchability was also a part of this movement, but the amount of attention which was paid to the opening of schools and colleges was not given to this aspect" (Pratap Singh 1933:145). Thereafter, engagements relating to the Akali struggle for the liberation of Gurdwaras from 1920 to 1925 "did not leave the time for removal of untouchability" (Pratap Singh 1933:151). This was not surprising. For the Jats, who composed 70% of the Akalis, and for other high castes, caste equality or removal of untouchability was contrary to their disposition for social domination and hierarchy.

After the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) was constituted in 1926, care was taken to co-opt three members from low caste communities. By 1933 there were over 200 persons belonging to the low castes who were recruited as religious priests, pathis, ragis, and sewadars. Giani Pratap Singh cited a number of *gurmata*s (resolutions) adopted by the SGPC from 1926 to 1933, expressing "shock" and "regret" over the prevalence of discrimination against amritdhari low castes and instructing upper-caste Sikhs not to deny lower-caste Sikhs access to temples and wells. Notice was taken of reports of concerted obstruction in the recruitment of Mazhabis to the army, and instructions were issued against such obstruction. However, as Giani Pratap Singh wrote with regret, "because of the foolishness of common people and the activism of some selfish people, this [practice of untouchability] is present until the present" (Pratap Singh 1933:178).

The growth of communal competition and politics in Punjab since the beginning of the twentieth century made the removal of untouchability through conversion or reconversion (*Shuddhi*)

politically significant to the classes of each religious community. It facilitated a phenomenal and fast rise in the population of the Sikh community as well as an assertion of a distinct identity. However, this became a masked struggle for protecting and strengthening the domination of the high castes, both within the community and in the domain of political power in the province (Judge 2002b).

A PARALLEL CASTE HIERARCHY

Sikhism led neither to the creation of an egalitarian community nor to the end of caste hierarchy and discrimination. But it adopted a different caste hierarchy. Several scholars have pointed to the construction of a Sikh caste hierarchy that parallels that of the Hindu caste hierarchy. Prominent among these scholars are McLeod (1975), Marenco (1976), and Indera Pal Singh (1977). The emergent comparative picture may be described as follows:

(1) In the Hindu caste system, the hierarchy of the actually functioning *jatis* (castes) is ordered with reference to varnashram, the traditional four-caste order, attributable to scriptural sanction. As Ambedkar underscored in one of his exchanges with Gandhi, in Hinduism it is not the practice that invites disapproval, but the ideals. In Sikhism, on the other hand, there is no scriptural sanction for caste distinctions. The emphasis has been on the brotherhood of all under one God and on equality for all human beings. The problem is thus with the practice, not the ideals.

(2) Brahmins are at the top of the Hindu caste hierarchy. Among the Sikhs, on the other hand, it is the Jats who are at the top of the hierarchy, after graduating to the position of a ruling class under the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Generally speaking, Jats are followed by Khatri, Aroras, and Labanas. These are followed by the artisan castes, among whom Ramgarhias (the Sikh carpenter caste) enjoy higher status than Ahluwalias (*kalals*). The menial or untouchable castes are at the bottom, just as among the Hindus. However, the perception regarding which caste is placed second, third, and fourth varies both by village and caste.

(3) The structure of caste discrimination in the Sikh community is considerably liberated from the purity-pollution frame of relations, as compared to the Hindu community in which this consideration is relatively more prominent.

(4) Sikhism altered the principle that knowledge is acquired and produced only by the priestly class, or Brahmins. There is no permanent class of priests or producers of religious knowledge in Sikhism. Even the initial advantage enjoyed by the Bedis and Sodhis on that score was obliterated after the Gurdwara Reform Movement. Priests, *ragis* (religious singers), and *sewadars* (as employees) now largely come from the lower castes, including a noticeable number from the Scheduled Castes; only a small number come from the Jat caste. Jat Sikhs would rather control the SGPC.

(5) Castes are endogamous in both Hindu and Sikh caste systems. But going by the field studies outlined below, endogamy is slightly weaker and hypergamy slightly stronger among the Sikhs.

AMBEDKAR'S MOVE FOR *EN MASSE* CONVERSION OF THE DEPRESSED CLASSES TO SIKHISM

It has not entirely been clear why Ambedkar's resolution for the conversion of India's Scheduled Castes to Sikhism in 1936 was quietly dropped. Sikhism was considered to be the best of the available options for moving the lower castes out of the oppressive stranglehold of Hinduism. In order to make sense of the position of the people belonging to the lowest castes in the Sikh community, it is necessary to understand the reasons behind Ambedkar's rejection of this option and his conversion to Buddhism instead twenty years later. A part of the suggested explanation comes from Ambedkar's biographers Dhananjay Keer (1971), M. S. Gore (1993), and Lahori Ram Bally (1997). Another significant part of the explanation lies in a disclosure made by Bhai Sahib Sardar Kapur Singh (1979) in his *Saachi Sakhi*.

On October 13, 1935, Ambedkar made a solemn statement at the Yeola Conference of Depressed Classes that even though he was unfortunately born a Hindu untouchable, "I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu." This statement was rightly described as

“a thunderbolt,” for it rocked political parties and social institutions in India. It was not simply a question of Ambedkar’s personal choice because of spiritual or religious reasons. He exhorted his followers to change their religion *en masse*—“you have nothing to lose except your chains and everything to gain by changing your religion”—thus making conversion a political question. The leading figures from all other religions approached Ambedkar separately, inviting him to convert to their religion and promising different rewards.

After serious thinking and consulting with a large number of people, Ambedkar had decided by June of the following year to embrace Sikhism along with his followers. This decision was approved by the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha as well as Shankracharya Dr. Kurtakoti. Conversion to Sikhism was, as Ambedkar argued, the best choice from the standpoint of Hindus (Keer 1971). After participating in the Sikh Missionary Conference at Amritsar in April, Ambedkar sent his son, Yashwant Rao, and a nephew to the Golden Temple in May, where they stayed for one and a half months to observe the situation and meet with leaders of the community. On September 18, 1936, a group of thirteen followers departed to Amritsar to meet the Sikh Mission. There was already an understanding that the Sikh Mission was going to start a college in Bombay in the interest of those Depressed Classes who would convert to Sikhism.

One of the reasons for the change in Ambedkar’s program may have related to his anxiety about the “chinks in the untouchable unity.” According to M. S. Gore, “Ambedkar had always been conscious of the Mang community’s coolness towards his movement. Ambedkar responded by leaving the final decision on conversion to the future” (Gore 1993:145). Keer (1971) suggests that the reason for postponing the idea of conversion related to Ambedkar’s anxiety about the fate of the Depressed Classes’ share in political power after conversion to Sikhism. Bally (1997), who has been a leading Ambedkarite activist, writer, and editor of *Bhim Patrika*, provided another explanation. According to him, the untouchables of Punjab had conveyed to Dr. Ambedkar their suffering of atrocities at the hands of the dominant community of Jat Sikhs and appealed to him to ensure that the untouchables never became Sikhs (see also Ahir 1992).

However, part of the reason why they failed to reach a consensus may well be related to an opposition to the move among the Sikh political class. It was inevitable that leading men would consider the fate of their leadership and position in the SGPC and Gurdwaras if six crore (60 million) of untouchables were to become Sikhs. Such is the evidence offered by Sardar Kapur Singh (1979) in his well known but controversial book *Saachi Sakhi*. According to him, there was an apprehension that once the leader Ambedkar became a Sikh, together with all of his followers, existing leaders like Baldev Singh would no longer be nominated to the Viceroy's Executive Council as representatives of the Sikh community. The supporters of Master Tara Singh, the most prominent leader of the Sikh community, had to consider the position of leaders in the Sikh community, as well as their control of the Shiromani Akali Dal, the SGPC, and the Gurdwaras. Kapur Singh recounts a story told by Sardar Inder Singh Karwal, an Advocate and Akali leader, to a small gathering of advocates in the Bar Room of the Punjab High Court at Chandigarh in September 1964. Sardar Inder Singh stated that when the six crore untouchables publicly dropped the idea of adopting the Sikh religion because of differences between Akali leaders and Dr. Ambedkar, he asked his neighbor in Lahore, Sardar Harnam Singh Jhalla (Judge of the High Court and at that time a prominent Akali Leader), the real reason for this "tragedy." Sardar Harnam Singh replied, "Oh you don't have an understanding of these matters. By making 6 crore of untouchables Sikhs, should we hand over the Darbar Sahib to Chuhras?" "This way," writes Kapur Singh, "6 crores of *Rangretas*, *Guru Ka Betas*, who had come to the door of the Guru were pushed out; the same way as Guru Tegh Bahadur was not allowed to enter Harimandir Sahib (Golden Temple)" (Kapur Singh 1979:72n). Yet according to Kapur Singh, the actual truth of the matter is even "more crude and despicable." His argument is that when the "Akali Party" understood the full implications of six crore of untouchables entering the Sikh community, they unanimously devised a strategy to deal with this "emergency": "they unanimously decided that Dr. Ambedkar and his follower untouchables must be dissuaded and stopped from becoming Sikhs for all time." Master Tara Singh, whose leadership of the Sikh community was threatened by Ambedkar's entry, sent Sardar Sujjan Singh to Bombay "with specific instructions" to tell

Dr. Ambedkar “clearly” the mind of the Akali leaders so that he would drop the idea (Kapur Singh 1979:72-75). Kapur Singh’s *Saachi Sakhi* is a polemical writing and not well regarded as a credible source. It is cited here mainly because of the plausibility of this explanation. The logic of power and the personal political interest of leaders are often more decisive factors than ideology.

STRUGGLE FOR LEGAL RECOGNITION OF SIKH SCHEDULED CASTES

After the independence of India, one of the major demands unanimously put forward by all twenty-two Sikh members of the East Punjab Legislative Assembly in 1948 related to securing for the former untouchable castes who had converted to Sikhism the same recognition and rights as would have been available to them had they not become Sikhs. In the Memorandum given to the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities, etc. of the Constituent Assembly of India (see Rao 1965:594-597), it was requested that those lower castes in the Sikh community who suffered the same disabilities as members of the (Hindu) Scheduled Castes—namely, Mazhabis, Ramdasias, Kabirpanthis, Baurias, Sareras, and Sikligars—be included in the list of Scheduled Castes. Moving the report of the committee in the Constituent Assembly, its Chairman Vallabhbhai Patel explained:

Really as a matter of fact, these converts are not Scheduled Castes or ought not to be Scheduled Castes; because, in Sikh religion there is no such thing as untouchability or any classification or difference of classes ... And so when these proposals were brought to us, in fact, I urged upon them strongly not to lower their religion to such a pitch as to really fall to a level where for a mess of pottage you really give up the substance of religion. But they did not agree. (Patel, cited in Rao 1965:604-605)

The committee recommended accepting the plea made by the leaders of the Sikh community so as to include Mazhabis,

Ramdasiyas, Bazigars, and Sikligars in the list of Scheduled Castes. Patel further explained:

I concede that this is a concession. It is not a good thing in the interest of the Sikhs themselves. But till the Sikhs are convinced that this is wrong, I would allow them the latitude (Patel, cited in Rao 1965:605).

In 1953, after the demand for Punjabi Suba (the Punjabi language state) had been raised, Master Tara Singh and Shiromani Akali Dal asked for all of the untouchable castes that had converted to Sikhism to be included in the list of Scheduled Castes. Observers viewed it as “a part of larger political game” (Nayar 1966:239-240). That only four major castes (covering 85% of all Sikh untouchable/backward classes) were included in the list was condemned as highly discriminatory—“a conspiracy to crush our religion.” Master Tara Singh threatened to go on a fast unto death if all the “Acchuts who had become Sikhs were not given the same rights as were given to Hindu Achhuts” (Jaswant Singh 1972:243). He led a march of twenty-five Sikhs to Delhi on October 1, 1953. The government conceded the demand and Master Tara Singh hailed the victory: *morcha fateh ho gaya* (the battle was won) (Jaswant Singh 1972:253). It was no problem that the Sikhs who were distinguished from Hindus (*Ham Hindu Nahin*) largely because they did not believe in the Hindu caste system now considered that this kind of distinction between the two religious communities was itself a discrimination against the Sikhs. The Sikh leaders “promoted constitutional provisions for the Sikh society which were an insult to Guru Nanak’s egalitarian principles ... It may sound ironical, but this was the main contribution of the Akali leaders to the framing of India’s constitution: Reverting the Sikhs to the caste hierarchy of Hindu society by giving up the first principle that sets them apart as a distinct religious community” (Kumar 1997:410,412).

RESERVATION FOR SCHEDULED CASTES IN MANAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS SHRINES

The “practical consideration” for reservation of the Sikh Scheduled Castes was not confined to the secular domain. Through an amendment made in 1953 to the (Punjab) Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925, a provision was made for reservation of 20 seats for the Scheduled Caste Sikhs out of a total of 140 elected seats in the SGPC. Additionally, a convention was adopted by which the Junior Vice-President in the Executive Committee of the SGPC would be chosen from the Scheduled Castes. In the case of Notified Sikh Gurdwaras who were not managed directly by the SGPC Board, it was decided that one member of each of the five-member local Managing Committees would be chosen from the Scheduled Castes (Kashmir Singh 1989). Representation of the Scheduled Castes in the management of Sikh shrines appears to have followed an affirmative action principle. It also institutionalized the recognition of lower castes in the Sikh religion and in the management of the religious affairs of the Sikh community. Paramjit Singh Judge, who is at the time of this writing undertaking a detailed study of the tape-recorded speeches delivered by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, brings to light one of the Sant’s important observations: “All castes are present among the Sikhs. This makes the Sikhs a separate religion/nation” (Judge 2002a:189-190).

PRESENT STATUS OF DALITS IN THE SIKH COMMUNITY

The Green Revolution added to the economic and political clout of the landowning class in general while further widening social inequality. Things could have improved had the land reforms been allowed, but the political influence of the richer landowning Jat Sikhs ensured that the policy was squarely defeated. The Jat control of the leadership in Shiromani Akali Dal since 1962 added to fear and apprehension among lower caste Sikhs. While Dalit political assertion, social welfare measures, and the spread of education have created visible change, they have also led to more tension and conflict. For instance, the sexual exploitation of Dalit women, which was considered more or less common until ten years ago, is now challenged much more frequently.

A number of field studies (Indera Pal Singh 1977; Abbi and Kesar Singh 1997; Jodhka 2000; Judge 2004; Singh and Jammu 1995; McMullen 1989) as well as surveys and interviews conducted by the author (Puri 2003a) broadly corroborate some of these observations relating to the present status and conditions of Scheduled Castes in the Sikh community.

Indera Pal Singh, in the first anthropological study of a Sikh village, found that “most of the Sikh values are Jat values and the Jats assert that they occupy the highest position among the Sikh castes” (Indera Pal Singh 1977:70). Ownership of land is, according to him, the chief criterion for determining the status of various people in Indian villages; indeed, “it becomes more important in Sikh villages as most of its adherents are agriculturalists” (Indera Pal Singh 1977:70). This is reflected at the village level in various ways. Dalits may view Jats as the exploiter class. Even the communists in Punjab, most of whom were Sikh Jat by caste, came to be regarded as such. A Chamar respondent gave a very simple explanation for lack of support for the communists among the low castes: “[The communists] are our class enemies” (Juergensmeyer 1982:198). The Communist Party is regarded as a party of Jat Sikhs (Juergensmeyer 1982:198). One of the most frequently encountered expressions among Dalits is “When someone says ‘I am a Jat,’ his chest expands. But when we say ‘Chamar,’ we contract to nothing” (Jodhka 2000:381).

Markedly different from the practice in Hindu religious temples, there is a noticeable number of Mazhabi and Ramdasi *granthies* (priests or professional readers of the holy scripture) among the Sikhs. Such a transformation started quite early, as Giani Pratap Singh referenced this practice in 1933. There is no overt restriction on the entry of members of the lowest castes to the Gurdwaras. However, whereas 80% to 90% of the Sikhs generally believe that there is no discrimination, at least 30% to 35% of Scheduled Caste Sikhs feel a sense of humiliation, believing that upper-caste Sikhs do not like their presence in their Gurdwaras. Respondents among the Scheduled Castes cited many instances of contempt or ridicule: they were instructed to sit at the end of the row, to come for *langar* only at the end of the service, and to refrain from the service of cooking or serving food at the *langar*. Occasionally, they were not allowed to carry the Granth Sahib from

the Jat Gurdwara to a Dalit home for Akhand Path, etc. Ajit Singh Poohla, the chief of Taruna Dal of the Nihangs, most of whose adherents came from the lower castes, illuminated these practices in a recent interview when he explained:

There is no [caste] discrimination. Mazhabis and Chamars performed *sewa* of looking after the horses and milch cattle. “Of course, you understand, they do not work in the kitchen or serve food in langar. ... It is part of *duniadari*. Nihangs are no exception.” (Poohla, cited in Judge and Sekhon 2001)

In this explanation, Poohla suggests that one cannot ignore the sentiments of the *Sangat*.

A more significant marker that Scheduled Caste Sikhs are resisting discrimination is the large-scale construction of separate Gurdwaras by the Mazhabis, Ravidasias, Kabirpanthis, and other caste groups, parallel to those controlled by the Jats. In our survey of 116 villages in one Tehsil district of Amritsar during 2001, 68 villages had separate Gurdwaras for Dalits and 72 villages had separate cremation grounds. Jodhka, in his study of 51 villages spread over all three regions, reported that Dalits had separate Gurdwaras in as many as 41 villages and “nearly two-thirds of the villages had separate cremation grounds for upper castes and Dalits” (Jodhka 2002:1818,1819). This kind of divide has been sensitively voiced by a famous Dalit Punjabi poet Lal Singh Dil:

Mainun pyar kardiye , parjat kuriye
Saade sakey, murde vee ik thaan te nahin jalaunde
Oh loving me girl of the other caste, (remember)
our kinsmen don't even cremate their dead at one
place.
(Dil 1997[1971]:47)

The construction of separate Gurdwaras is such a normative practice that Jodhka concludes that “such constructions have never been met with resistance either from the dominant castes in the village or from the religious establishment of the Sikh community” (Jodhka

2002:1818). This contention may, however, be qualified. A number of cases of resistance and conflict have been reported from Punjab's villages during the last few years. The construction of a separate Gurdwara was invariably symbolic of the assertion of Dalit communities, which became a cause for resentment among Jat *zamindars* (landlords/landowners) and the SGPC. For example, the Mazhabis of Heran village in the Ludhiana district, who had constructed a separate Gurdwara in collaboration with the Ramdasias of the village in 1994, resolved in 2002 to construct another Gurdwara that was exclusively their own. They were reportedly incensed over incidents of humiliation in which Ramdasia women had threatened Mazhabi women with violence if they entered their Gurdwara. The practice of untouchability by upper-caste women against Dalit women has been found to be higher in every respect (Jodhka 2002), but in this case, it is the division of high-low among Dalit castes that was at issue. The inspectors sent by the SGPC to dissuade the Mazhabis from constructing their own Gurdwara failed. Reacting to resistance from other groups and pressure from the SGPC, the Mazhabis warned that, "if not allowed to construct our own Gurdwara, we would convert to Islam." Inspectors relented (Bhatia 2002). Only one of several similar cases, this is perhaps an indication of the mobility of Mazhabis, as Kirpal Singh Badungar, the chief of the SGPC, warned in a press statement:

The trend of constructing separate Gurdwaras by Jat and Mazhabi Singhs in villages of Punjab has witnessed a sharp increase in the recent years, thus creating a rift among the Sikhs which could have far reaching social implications in times to come.
(*Times of India*, December 9, 2002)

In some cases, a Ravidasi temple had installed a statue or picture of "Guru Ravidas" and occasionally also a picture of Babasaheb Ambedkar within the precincts. The presence of an idol of "Guru Ravidas" close to the Guru Granth Sahib was considered equivalent to blasphemy by orthodox Sikhs. This became a cause for Jat-Dalit tension in Basti Jodhewal of Ludhiana (*The Indian Express*, November 11, 2001).

Another significant dimension of the Dalit search for alternative cultural spaces so as to overcome the experience of indignity and humiliation is reflected in the large-scale movement of Sikh Dalits towards a large number of *Deras* (places of religious personages) and sects such as Radhasoami, Sacha Sauda, Dera Wadbhag Singh, Piara Singh Bhanjarawala, or to the *dargahs* (hospices) of Muslim Pirs. This is highly resented by the SGPC and other Sikh organizations. The rise of a Dalit holy man, Baba Bhanjara, as the head of a Dera and the alleged publication of his own separate holy book for worship, which led to violent clashes, reflects an urge to reject conventional religious spaces. Observers attribute this rebellion of the weak to the Jats' arrogant and crude behavior toward members of lower castes (Ajmer Singh 2003:292-97). However, a radical Dalit Sikh observed the following in the *Dalit Voice*:

But all these Deras, spread all over Punjab areas are controlled by the Jats and other upper castes ... Everywhere these Sikhs (SC/BC followers) are mere worshippers, high and low *sewadars*. Every religious sphere is managed and manipulated on caste basis.
(Muktsar 1999)

This process has been described as the "Slow Death of Sikhism."

A rising incidence of atrocities perpetrated on the Dalits in Sikh villages reveals another dimension of the caste divide within the community. A survey of press reports on violence against Dalits in the Punjab between 1997 and 2003 brought up over a dozen cases of rape, gang rape, and stripping naked (Puri 2003a). In order to punish Dalits for the non-payment of loans taken by male members and to avenge insult, Dalit women were sometimes stripped and forced to walk in front of Jat Zamindars in the village, invariably with covert support from policemen. The underlying purpose, whether stated or unstated, comes down to beliefs about "teaching Dalits a lesson." Social boycotts of Dalits in villages is another method which has, of late, been reported more frequently than in the past, leading inevitably to intervention by district administration for *razinama* (compromise). In a period of just five years (1999 to

2003), six serious cases of that kind were reported. Despite the very stringent provisions delineated under “The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) 1989” and directions given to state governments and police, convictions are rare.

The details of the public nature of these caste atrocities are illustrative. One such case involving local power dynamics, reported by *The Indian Express* in 2000, may well be relevant:

On January 4, 2000, the Jat Zamindars of the village Bhail, near Taran Tarn, Amritsar did not allow a Mazhabi Sikh Hazara Singh to cremate his 22 year old daughter in the village. The helpless 60 year old father was forced to lug the dead body on a trolley and dump it inside the river 3 miles away.

The Provocation, as reported, was that in Bhail, a “Jat-ruled village” near the Beas 24 km. from Tarn Taran, 1000 strong Mazhabi Sikh community decided to take out a Gurburb procession despite ‘prohibition’ by the Jats. This year the lowly Sikhs mustered Rs. 10000 for the holy purpose. “This seemed to be an open challenge to the Jat supremacy.”

Retaliation was swift. Armed with sticks, a party of Jat Sikhs encircled the village for three days and prevented the Mazhabis from entering their fields even for daily Gurburb procession in the village against the wishes of the ruling community.

A farmer Kartar Singh declared with contempt, “It is all their mistake. We are superior to them.” A Jat Sikh woman adds, “The Mazhabis never had enough money to organise such a function. I don’t know how they did it this time.”

The police intervened to effect a *razinama* (compromise). No complaint was lodged because the police viewed it as *paartibazi* (groupism). The

Mazhbis say they were forced by the police: “We are oppressed by both the police and the Zamindars, both are one.”

More than a month thereafter, when one Mazhbi Sikh woman Pritam Kaur died, her son was prohibited from cremating her at the village cremation ground.

According to the latest report the Mazhbis have been asked to create their separate site for cremation. (Bal 2000)

Harinder Singh Khalsa, a member of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, observed, evidently with some pain, that “Punjab has no untouchability, probably because of Sikhism, but I am ashamed to say that in committing atrocities on Dalits, we do not lag behind” (Bal 2000).

CONCLUSIONS

An understanding of the distinctive pattern of caste hierarchy in Sikhism, which is characterized by the development of competing hierarchies that parallel that of Hindus, calls for deeper insight into the dynamics of political power and economic relations, both at the local and regional levels. Without looking closely at social reality on the ground level, scholars may be left with the impression that the Sikh community represents homogeneity of caste rather than division (see, e.g., Gurharpal Singh 2000:85). On the other hand, research that notices these divisions, particularly when rooted in the primacy of ideology or culture (e.g. “it is very clear and open truth that the Sikh society is as casteist and racist as the Hindu society”), often regards the survival of casteism as a consequence of the incomplete liberation of Sikhism from the stranglehold of Brahminism, emphasizing differences between Sikhs and Hindus (Muktsar 1999). Interactions with Dalits in the Punjab, however, reveal a pervasive tendency to view the interests of economic and political domination as the primary force behind caste-based humiliation, rather than ideology. Yet this cannot be adequately

explained within the orthodox Marxian framework of class conflict. The solidarity and resistance against social oppression outlined in this chapter is rooted in a discreet caste category. There is thus a pressing need to interrogate caste further in a variety of religious and regional settings.

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3

CAN THERE BE A CATEGORY CALLED DALIT MUSLIMS?

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On the face of it, the expression *Dalit Muslims* would appear to be a contradiction in terms. It is commonly held that Islam is an egalitarian religion and that there are no status differences among Muslims. As such, untouchability is not a possibility and a category of Dalit Muslims cannot be said to exist. This is the standard line that is handed down whenever any reference to the existence of Dalit Muslims is made.

This would be a perfectly understandable position to take were it not for the fact that considerable evidence exists to suggest that a category of Dalit Muslims does in fact exist in India. On the basis of evidence from the decennial censuses, for instance, Ghaus Ansari (1960) argues in a pioneering publication that Muslims in India are divided into three broad categories, which he calls *ashraf* (noble born), *ajlaf* (mean and lowly), and *arzal* (excluded). He further divides each of these categories into a number of groups that he designates as castes, following the practice of the decennial censuses. Since Ansari relied on evidence supplied by the censuses, he was unable to examine the potential of mutual interaction among these groups. He generally suggests that these three broad categories constitute a hierarchy in which castes are ranked in order of social precedence. How this hierarchy is constituted and on what basis the rank order is settled are questions that Ansari could not discuss on account of the limitations of the data he used.

More focused research on social stratification among Muslims

conducted in the 1970s relies upon actual day-to-day interactions among Muslim communities (e.g., Ahmad 1973). This research succeeds in providing a more grounded picture of the situation of those groups whom Ansari calls *arzal*, and demonstrates that in terms of everyday social interaction, *arzal* exist on the margins of society. Even so, the range of dimensions of interaction that this research explores is restricted to areas of commensality, endogamy, and sociality.¹ It shows that *arzal* engage in the lowly occupation of scavenging, confine their marriages within the group, and are segregated into separate residential quarters in villages as well as in towns. This research also notes the existence of a system of internal government and social control among *arzal* communities: in addition to settling domestic or intra-group disputes, a hereditary official regulates the life of group members and punishes any transgressions of group norms. Yet much of this early research on what Ansari designates as *arzal* and *ajlaf* focuses on local communities, villages, and towns, and the range of information on such communities remains limited. For example, research is silent on the question of the exclusion of *arzal* communities from ritual and religious spheres, as well as on whether the religious specialists who cater to the *ashraf* and *ajlaf* communities also minister to them.²

One question raised by this research revolves around how to explain the existence of groups that Ansari designates as *arzal*. Should they be seen in strictly occupational terms as practitioners of a distinct occupation, which in their case happens to be lowly and demeaning? Or should they be seen as arising from more fundamental and intrinsic considerations that require the evaluation of groups into a ranked social order? Opinions on this significant point are substantially determined by how one views the position of Islam in relation to social stratification. Scholars who take the position that Islam assumes the inherent equality of all human beings and therefore opposes any social stratification tend to represent the presence of *arzal* communities as merely an occupational division without any status implications. From their point of view, the disadvantages and exclusions characterizing *arzal* communities apply to individuals and are relevant only in the occupational realm; if their members were to move outside the occupational realm, they would be on par with everyone else.³

Other scholars do not flatly take the position that Islam is against social stratification. They view the existence of *arzal* communities as reflecting a system in which groups are ranked as superior and inferior. Individuals thus carry the burden of their group status by having to suffer disadvantages and exclusions as members of the group.

The most elaborate expression of a system of social stratification wherein groups are ranked as superior or inferior and individuals are forced to carry the burden of their group status is found in the caste system, and thus one way of characterizing the presence of *arzal* communities could be in terms of caste. However, since Islam is seen in popular imagination as being opposed to social inequality, such characterization is open to contestation on ideological grounds. This is precisely what has been happening with respect to sociological research on *arzal* communities. At the behavioral level, sociologists are willing to concede that there are elements of caste in Indo-Muslim society. However, as soon as the discussion shifts from behavior to ideology, they recoil from their position, seeking to add caveats or hedge the issue by explaining that when they apply the term in the context of a Muslim group, they are using it in a loose sense. Writings by Nadeem Hasnain (2007) and Pervaiz Nazir (1993) exemplify this tendency most eloquently.

Hasnain locates his discussion in the context of the following question: can the concept of caste be applied to systems of social stratification associated with communities professing a faith other than Hinduism (cf. Puri, this volume)? His conclusion is bald and simple: "It is true that the egalitarian social order of Islam stands in sharp contrast with the ideology of caste, yet the 'Indian Islam' and 'Hindu Caste System' have been able to achieve a substantial compatibility" (Hasnain 2007:33). He then goes on to offer several explanations as to why this should be the case:

Hutton sounds convincing when he says that when Muslims and Christians came to India, caste was in the air and the followers of even these egalitarian ideologies could not escape the infection of caste. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of the Indian Muslim population comes from the lower

Hindu castes who have been coming into the fold of Islam to escape from social persecution and the oppressive socio-economic disabilities. They were also attracted and lured by the social egalitarianism of Islam but the search for equality proved a mirage. In many cases there were improvements in their socio-economic condition yet the goal of social equality remained illusive. Moreover, in most of the cases the people embracing Islam gave up their religious faith but not the caste that was brought forward even to a new socio-religious milieu. Thus, it would be apt to say that while Islam may not be having castes or caste-like groupings, the Indian Muslims do have. (Hasnain 2007:33)

Yet as soon as Hasnain makes this sociological formulation, he appears to become uncomfortable. Perhaps fearing that he might have committed an almost sacrilegious act by declaring that there is indeed caste among Indian Muslims, he recoils from his earlier claim:

But in the present paper an attempt is being made to stay clear of the issue whether the model of social stratification among the Indian Muslims is the replica of the Hindu caste system or not. The author, in this paper, shall be using the term caste and caste system among the Indian Muslims in a conveniently loose manner. It is undisputed that there are groups of people among the Muslims who are organised more or less like the Hindu castes, but this is also true: that many of them are less rigid because Islam, theoretically at least, permits marriage between different classes of believers. (Hasnain 2007:33-34)

Hasnain then looks for crutches that would enable him to perform this verbal somersault. He finds one in the following statement of Nazir, whom he quotes approvingly:

It is necessary to make a distinction between a caste system and caste labels: the former refers to a local system of hierarchically ordered corporate groupings involving division of labour, occupational specialisation, unequal dependence, and recruitment by birth only; the latter refers to a set of non-local, non-corporate named groups which provide a ranking hierarchy, and which do not involve occupational specialisation, unequal dependence, and recruitment by birth only (Nazir 1993:2898, cited by Hasnain 2005:34).

“Perhaps,” concludes Hasnain, “the ‘caste system’ and ‘caste like groupings’ among the Indian Muslims with all its fluidity may be better analyzed and better understood through this observation” (Hasnain 2005:34).

Nazir’s statement assumes that while Hindus live under “the caste system,” Muslims merely use caste labels. Several theoretical and empirical questions are raised by this assumption. First, how is this assumption made? Is it made on the basis of empirical research? Or is it made on entirely *a priori* grounds? As far as I am aware, there is to date no empirical research that can be said to have definitively established that Muslims do not live under a caste system and only use caste labels. Indeed, if such empirical research did exist, the dilemma that these and other authors face over how to characterize Muslim social stratification in India would not exist. On the contrary, available empirical research demonstrates that the social stratification of Muslim communities in India and beyond is indeed marked by features of the caste system. It is therefore clear that the assumption is made on *a priori* grounds. As believing Muslims committed to upholding the widely proclaimed Islamic egalitarianism as axiomatic, such scholars cannot face up to the behavioral reality that Muslims live under a caste system. They not only assume a distinction between “the caste system” and “caste labels,” they also go on to suggest that this distinction constitutes a viable framework for analyzing and understanding Muslim social stratification in India. In other words, they use this distinction as a

smokescreen to avoid facing the harsh behavioral reality of caste among Muslims in India.

Second, is there an empirical basis to Nazir's assertion that Muslim social organization in India is "a set of non-local, non-corporate named groups which provide a ranking hierarchy, and which do not involve occupational specialisation, unequal dependence, and recruitment by birth only"? Nazir does not make explicit the level at which he is directing his comments. If the broad categories of *ashraf*, *ajlaf*, and *arzal* are his point of reference, then his characterization of Muslim social organization as a set of non-local, non-corporate groups can be said to have some validity. However, the distinction he makes between "the caste system" and "caste labels" would no longer be accurate since similar broad divisions exist in the form of *varna* categories in "the caste system." Ansari (1960) uses the three broad categories of *ashraf*, *ajlaf*, and *arzal* in the collective sense, but clearly recognizes that these categories are themselves divided into smaller named groups that are distinguished from one another by occupation, endogamy, and sociability. Thus, if Nazir's reference is to the groups at this higher level, then his description of Muslim groups is wholly erroneous. Let us look closely at the empirical evidence in order to determine whether the distinction Nazir posits between "the caste system" and "caste labels," and by implication between Hindu and Muslim modes of social organization, is confirmed by available studies.

Sociological research on Muslims in India, as opposed to lay and impressionistic writings, continues to be thin. But evidence brought together by myself (Ahmad 1973) and subsequent researchers has demonstrated that those Muslim groups often referenced as *biradari* or *zat* are indeed local and corporate entities. Even *biradaris* or *zats* such as Saiyyid, Sheikh, and Ansaris, which are dispersed widely and found in different parts of a district, state, or county, are identified by their affiliation to a particular territory and restrict their marriages to members within that territory. Of course, how that territory is distinguished varies widely. For Sayyids, Sheikhs, and Pathans, who resent being characterized as *biradaris* and prefer to be described as *zats*, the association to territory is expressed through appending the name of the territory. Thus, one hears of Sayyids of Satrikh, Sheikhs of Allahabad, Kidwais of Baragaon or Kasauli, and Pathans of Malihabad. In the

case of *biradaris* that have an internal organization of government and social control (called *biradari* or *zat panchayat*), territorial association is defined by the jurisdiction of the *biradari panchayat*. The Ansaris in Rasulpur, where I carried out my fieldwork, were divided into concentric circles of three and thirteen villages. They confined their marriages to thirteen villages though Ansaris existed in neighboring areas as well.

Considerable evidence exists to show that *biradaris* and *zats* are associated with particular occupations, are interdependent (tied into patron-client relationships of the *jajmani* type), and are endogamous. This does not mean that all members of a *biradari* or *zat* necessarily practice the occupation with which their group is traditionally associated. There has been much variation throughout history among *biradaris* and *zats*, as indeed there has been within castes, in the extent to which members remain tied to the practice of traditional occupation. *Biradaris* and *zats* who are higher up in the social hierarchy, for instance, did not usually have a traditional occupation, so these groups were not closely associated with a particular livelihood. On the other hand, *biradaris* and *zats* further down the social ladder did have traditional occupations and their association with those forms of work was strong. This was not significantly different from the picture of groups in what Nazir would characterize as "the caste system." Herbert H. Risley's (1902) observation in the 1902 Census of India makes this explicit:

In theory each caste has a distinctive occupation, but it does not follow that this traditional occupation is practiced by its members. ... The traditional occupation of the Brahmans is the priesthood, but in practice they follow all manner of pursuits. Many are clerks or cooks, while some are soldiers, lawyers, shop-keepers and even day-labourers, but they remain Brahmans all the same. The Chamars of Bihar are workers in skin, but in Orissa they are toddy-drawers. In Orissa and the south of Gaya the Dhobi is often a hewer or splitter of wood. In Bihar and Bengal the Dom is a scavenger or basket maker, but in the Orissa states he is a drummer or basket maker and has nothing

to do with the removal of nightsoil: in Chittagong and Assam he is a fisherman, in Cashmere a cultivator and in Kumaon a stone mason. (Risley 1902:350-51)

Moreover, Muslim *biradaris* and *zats*, just like the groups in what Nazir would call “the caste system,” are also based on recruitment by birth only. There is no process by which one can become a Saiyyid, Sheikh, or Julaha except by birth. It is for this reason that when someone marries into another *biradari* or *zat*, he is not integrated into another *biradari* or *zat* but retains his or her original *biradari* or *zat* association. There exists a possibility in the case of *biradaris* and *zats* to attempt social mobility and end up becoming a Sayyid, Sheikh, or Pathan in course of time through inventing a rationale and a genealogy. Yet where such social mobility occurs, the basis of recruitment to the *biradari* or *zat* does not change. The *biradari* or *zat* just ends up becoming another *biradari* or *zat* and comes to be known by another name, to which recruitment continues to be based on the principle of birth. This is again not significantly different from the situation in “the caste system,” where castes have the possibility of changing their antecedents and name through the process of social mobility. Thus, the point that both *biradaris* and *zats* are “less rigid, because Islam, theoretically at least, permits marriage between different classes of believers” (Hasnain 2007:34) is not empirically established.

This raises a number of fundamental questions. Why are Hasnain and Nazir, as well as a host of other researchers who have worked on the sensitive question of the existence of caste among Muslims, so strongly persuaded to posit that there are significant differences between “the caste system” and the system of *biradaris* and *zats*? Is it that these differences actually exist but empirical research has so far failed to unearth them? Or is it that these scholars, in spite of empirical evidence, are persuaded into asserting these differences out of extraneous considerations? Is it that they are prone to emphasizing these differences because as believing Muslims they are familiar with the Islamic discourse that asserts that Islam preaches social equality and are afraid to take a contrary position? Or is it that asserting these differences is a defense mechanism whereby they can simultaneously adhere to their

disciplinary obligation as social scientists as well as their religious obligation to uphold what is commonly considered the Islamic view on social stratification? My own view has been that the tendency to emphasize differences between “the caste system” and the system of *biradaris* and *zats* does indeed arise from some such considerations, but I want to refrain from making this point here. Instead, I want to explore whether the starting point for these scholars—that Islam is an egalitarian religion and preaches social equality—is theologically and sociologically valid. This is central to understanding their standpoint.

We need to ask three different questions of the Islamic text if we are to understand Islam’s position with respect to social stratification and social equality. First, is Islam opposed to social stratification as such or is it merely opposed to social inequality? Second, what is the true Islamic attitude towards the social inequality that existed in the society in which Islam evolved and took root? And finally, is the social equality that Islam proclaims, and to which reference is always made when it is suggested that Islam is an egalitarian religion, a description of an existing state of affairs in society or merely an ideal that is given to humankind as a direction in which it should strive? It is necessary to address these questions in order to understand the nature of the emphasis on egalitarianism and social equality in Islam.

Basic to these questions is the sociological dictum that no society beyond the most primitive—in the sense of lacking any kind of economic surplus—can be truly egalitarian. This was the point at the heart of Thorstein Veblen’s (1899) *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, wherein he argued that as societies generated economic surplus there almost always developed some form of social stratification. Of course, Veblen’s concern was with the lifestyle and consumption pattern of the class that controlled the economic surplus and the symbolic and behavioral expressions of its privileged position. Even so, the substantive theoretical point of his analysis was that once a society starts generating economic surplus, some form of social stratification is bound to emerge. Pitirim Sorokin (1959) articulated this point as a general statement:

Any organised social group is always a stratified social body. There has not been and does not exist

any permanent social group which is “flat,” and in which all members are equal. Unstratified society, with a real equality of its members, is a myth which has never been realised in the history of mankind. This statement may sound paradoxical and yet it is accurate. The forms and proportions of stratification vary, but its essence is permanent, as far as any permanent and organised social group is concerned. (Sorokin 1959:13-14)

On even the most casual reading of the Islamic scriptural text, one is struck that quite irrespective of the emphasis it places on equality of human beings, Islam’s orientation is remarkably hierarchical. This orientation surfaces in a wide variety of fields. First, the relationship of the believer (*dhimmi*) to the non-believer (*kafir*) is conceived in hierarchical terms. Second, the relationship of Allah to the believer is conceived in hierarchical terms. The relationship is one of subordination and subservience, so much so that the individual believer must prostrate himself before Allah in daily prayers and must at the same time see himself as utterly powerless in relation to Him. Any number of passages exist in the Islamic scriptural text that endorse the relatively lowly standing of the believers—whether as individuals or as a collective entity—in relation to Allah. Third, the relationship of a wife to her husband is clearly conceived in hierarchical terms, even if the text does not distinguish between the two roles in terms of the religious duties enjoined upon them. The latter textual observation is sometimes cited by Muslim feminists and Muslim modernists to argue that Islam guarantees equality of gender and does not place a Muslim woman in any inferior position to a man. However, in reality a woman is subordinate to a man, and the relationship between them is seen as constituting a hierarchy. The woman stands in relation to a man in the same position as the individual stands in relation to the community and the community stands in relation to Allah. Fatima Mernissi (1986) uses the concept of *nushuz* to characterize this orientation of Islam with respect to women, a term that implies an unequal relationship. Islam makes a distinction between the wives of the Prophet and other women, and the responsibilities placed on them are also distinctly varied. Indeed, the Quranic verse that

orthodoxy used at a later stage in the development of Islam to impose the custom of veiling for Muslim women originally related to the wives of the Prophet. Finally, the relationship between the master and slave is conceived in clearly hierarchical terms, even if the master is called upon to treat the slave with kindness and merit is assigned to those who free their slaves. Thus, it is clear that the framework of Islamic thinking is deeply imbued with the notion of hierarchy and social stratification.

It is true that the Arab society in which Islam evolved did not possess great differences of wealth, but economic differentiation between ordinary Bedouins and the trading classes did exist. One can easily imagine that these groups would have differed with respect to wealth, material possessions, and lifestyles, and Islam could not have brushed these differences under the carpet. Islam would have been required to deal with these differences, in that they would have been reflected in group behavior and mutual attitudes. As far as the Islamic scriptural text is concerned, it clearly recognizes such distinctions in society and prescribes appropriate forms of behavior for each. For instance, it asks those deprived in social and economic terms to be content and to live according to their means. It is repeatedly stated in the text that Allah is all-seeing and will reward the poor for their poverty on the day of judgment. At the same time, the wealthy and rich, while allowed to live in their riches and to spend according to their economic standing, are warned not to be too proud of their material possessions. Moreover, they are asked to show kindness to those who are deprived and poor and to give a portion of their wealth and income to them. Even the poor are conceived in hierarchical terms: first come the near ones, followed by orphans, and then the destitute and the deprived. If some kind of social stratification had not existed in society, Islamic scriptural text would not have referred to those differences nor indicated appropriate forms of behavior for them. It would also not have sought to devise an economic framework for the redistribution of wealth so that the poor would be able to make ends meet. It is thus clear that the emphasis that Islamic scriptural text places on social equality does not describe an existing state of affairs.

If the worldview of the Islamic scriptural text is hierarchical and admits that there are social and economic differences in society, then how should we interpret its emphasis upon social equality?

One way to interpret this can be to ignore that Islamic orientation is hierarchical and to argue that it stands for egalitarianism as an absolute value. I would argue that those who maintain that Islam contemplates no social stratification are interpreting Islam in precisely this way. Even when they encounter social differentiation and stratification, they glibly ignore it and flash the proclaimed egalitarianism of Islam as a social reality. The other way of interpretation is to recognize a fundamental difference between society as it exists and society as it ought to exist. This view maintains that the Islamic proclamation in favor of social equality is more in the nature of an ideal for the future than a description of an existing state of affairs. My own position is that drawing this distinction is important in any consideration of the question of the presence or absence of caste and caste-based social stratification in Indo-Muslim society. It enables us to see that a distinction has to be made between the society that exists—and in which caste or class-based distinctions may exist—and a future state of society where such distinctions are expected to disappear and give rise to an egalitarian society. This distinction applies to Islam as much as to any other ideological system that proclaims social equality as an ideal.

This distinction should not be entirely unfamiliar to us in India. As is well known, India has been a most unequal society, with social inequality institutionalized in the caste system. India's constitution went on to declare the country to be a casteless and classless society. In so doing, the constitution was not proclaiming that social inequalities of the past had entirely disappeared and that the society was egalitarian from the time the document was promulgated. Rather, the constitution was simply providing the ideal of egalitarianism, even though social inequalities continued to persist (see J. Sharma, this volume). This is also true of Islam. It proclaims social equality to be an ideal, but recognizes that social inequalities exist in society. By this token, there is no contradiction between Islamic support for an egalitarian society as a future goal and the presence of caste or class differences as a social reality.

Social realities have a way of prevailing over sociological and theological formulations. Contrary to the argument of some sociologists and theologians that caste does not exist among Muslims and untouchability is disallowed in Islam, the expression

Dalit Muslims has been finding increasing mention in the discourse of traditionally 'backward' Muslim communities in recent years. However, there does not yet exist any clear understanding of what this expression actually means or which castes or groups it is supposed to denote. On the one hand, the term has been used to denote a whole range of Muslim castes that are currently included in the category of Other Backward Classes. On the other hand, it has been used to denote those Muslim castes or groups that either converted from the untouchable Hindu castes or are so severely stigmatized and subjected to such extreme forms of social exclusion that their situation is in many ways comparable to that of the Scheduled Castes.

The Mandal Commission compounded and reinforced this confusion. As is already well known, the Commission's task was to identify Other Backward Castes and to determine whether they should be eligible for reservation along the lines of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. There was no difficulty in this with respect to Hindu castes because administrative policy clearly recognized a distinction between Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Castes. Because the presidential order of 1950 clearly and arbitrarily laid down that "No person who professes a religion different from the Hindu religion shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste," the Mandal Commission lumped the severely stigmatized and extremely excluded among the Muslims with Muslim Other Backward Castes for purposes of affirmative action. Therefore, when the urge for equality and social justice seized the imagination of the lowest social groups in other religious traditions and the word *Dalit* came to be seen as a shorthand carrier of that aspiration, the expression *Dalit Muslims* came to be used for a wide variety of groups other than those severely stigmatized and excluded and on that ground comparable to Hindu 'ex-untouchable' castes for whom the term *Scheduled Castes* was reserved.

One can arrive at an assessment of the extent of the present confusion over the expression *Dalit Muslims* by reading between the lines in the statements of those claiming to speak on their behalf as well as by considering the castes that they have been tempted to include under that category. N. Jamal Ansari (2004) argues:

[I]t is an established fact that the Indian Muslim community is divided into castes and has a large deprived section. ... Before discussing constitutional provisions with respect to Dalits and the exclusion of all “Dalit Muslims” from those provisions, I think we must define *Dalit Muslims*. *Dalit* means downtrodden, oppressed, suppressed, and backward. Also, *Dalit* stands for untouchable and depressed classes. The term *Dalit* applies to members of those menial castes that have been graded lowly, which they have inherited by accident of birth.

Likewise, Ali Anwar (2005) uses the words *pasmanda* (meaning downtrodden and backward) and *Dalit* interchangeably, and includes under Dalit Muslims castes like Bhatiyara, Tikyafarosh, Itafarosh, Halalkhor, Khakrob, Mogalzada, and Chirimar, only some of which can be said to be severely stigmatized and excluded. In all such statements and lists, as their reading suggests, the expression *Dalit Muslims* has been used as a generic term to denote all Muslim castes that are educationally and socially backward.

Clearly, there is need to define *Dalit Muslims* in more precise terms. Ansari (1960) suggests in his early work that the relationship between *ashraf* and *ajlaf* on the one hand and *arzal* on the other are shaped by considerations of social distance, taking on the characteristics of untouchability. He mentions that members of the category he calls *arzal* are excluded both physically and socially. From a physical point of view, they tend to inhabit excluded localities and do not mix with members of the other two categories. When it comes to social intercourse, their relationship is characterized by strict maintenance of social distance and deference so that members of *arzal* communities have minimal and limited interaction with members of other communities. The expression should be restricted to refer to these castes alone. Because the term *Dalit* has come to acquire pejorative connotations (even though it was originally used by the Dalit Panthers Movement as a shorthand way of referring to extremely deprived and excluded castes; cf. Berreman this volume), many Muslims may not like the expression to be used in the context of Muslim castes. Even so, it must be

recognized that the castes that we have here referred to as *Dalit Muslims* do form a class separate from other categories of Muslim castes and should be distinguished on account of the extreme degree of stigmatization and exclusion they have suffered.

There is a need for rich and focused ethnographic research on such castes. This research should seek to understand the attitudes of non-*arzal* castes and groups toward members of the *arzal* category and to gauge the extent and intensity of discrimination that they suffer today. It is possible that with the introduction of sanitary toilets and other technological changes, *arzal* castes no longer engage in the demeaning and defiling occupation of scavenging, yet other groups nevertheless continue to maintain social distance from them. It is also possible that the discrimination and stigmatization practiced against *arzal* castes still exists but has taken other forms. Only focused social research can indicate the current situation of *arzal* castes in contemporary Muslim society.

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NOTES

¹ From my observations of growing up in a Muslim family, I am able to recall a number of instances of both open and silent discrimination practiced against these castes. We had a Lalbegi woman come to clean the toilets in our house. She was on the best of terms with my mother and would sit for hours gossiping with her. Whenever my mother would offer her *pan*, however, she would wrap her hand with her *dupatta* to receive it. My mother used to drop the *pan* in her hand, making sure that her hand did not touch the Lalbegi woman's hand. On occasions of marriage, the Lalbegi woman's family would come and sit in a corner and wait until all guests had eaten and left. They would then be given food in vessels that they had brought with them. They did not eat the food there, but

instead took it with them to eat at home. On sacrificial Eid, the family was not given any portion of the meat; they were instead given the intestines, which were kept aside for them. It is possible that some of these forms of discrimination have changed, but there is no evidence to show that they have disappeared.

² Some evidence exists to show that there is discrimination against these Muslim castes in the religious spheres. During fieldwork in eastern Uttar Pradesh, I found that members of these castes generally did not go to the mosque for prayers, and if they did go, they had to stand in the back rows. It has been mentioned by many observers that such groups often have their own mosques. N. Jamal Ansari (2004) notes that “in certain areas of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar there are separate mosques and burial grounds” for these castes. Establishment of their own mosque would call for a level of prosperity for the groups as a whole. Whether they have attained such levels of prosperity is something for which very little information exists.

³ It is open to serious question whether or not the lowly status of the so-called *arzal* is merely a function of occupational difference without status considerations. It is not entirely true that their status has no implications for the interactions they have with other groups. My personal observations, as well as stray observations in the work of others, clearly show that members of these communities would be admitted into the house of a higher-status person only for the performance of their services. They were required to ensure that they would not touch members of the household or other objects that carried the risk of becoming polluted or rendered impure by their touch. Although they were asked to be present at social functions and festivals on occasions such as marriages or life cycle rituals, this was not by virtue of any social right; rather, it was by way of recompense for the service they rendered throughout the year. On all such occasions, they sat some distance away from the main entrance for the guests and waited until everyone had been entertained before they were given food, which they were expected to put into containers that they had brought with them and eat at home.

⁴ Charles Lindholm (1965) has argued that many of the features found in Muslim society are similar to those found among Muslims in other parts of South Asia. On that basis, he asserts that the Muslim social stratification found in India is an extension of the

system found elsewhere. Many Muslims are themselves inclined to take a similar line of argument. This argument would be tenable if Islamic scriptural sources provided a blue-print of an Islamic social stratification system. This not being the case, the argument fails to sustain itself. It is plausible that Islam did modify certain social practices, including that of caste. While practices existing in India that were not sanctified by Islam were attenuated, those that were in conformity with the Islamic ethos became more rigid. Thus, *purdah* practices, which already existed even in India, were rendered more rigid and strict, while caste principles were relaxed or made less restrictive.

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4

IN PURSUIT OF EQUALITY

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In this chapter, I offer two related but independent discussions as contributions to the volume's theme of injustice and social inequality: first, a necessarily brief history of some important antecedents to contemporary understandings of equality; and second, a more personal account of my own involvement in helping to bring equality to my village in Uttar Pradesh in north India and to my college in the small town of Khurja in Bulandshahr District. This was a time when new forms of equality began to emerge in the villages and schools of my youth as India transitioned to independence during the 1940s and 1950s. The events that I narrate in the second part of the chapter create a strong bond between the recipient of this festschrift, Ved Prakash Vatuk, and myself, as our ideas regarding social equality and interest in social reform run parallel in many significant ways. Most critically, we share the experience of coming of age in northern India during a time of unprecedented optimism regarding the possibility of equality, believing that hierarchies of the past could give way to newer and fairer systems of social justice.

ANTECEDENTS OF EQUALITY

The idea of equality is, indeed, a very old one in history. Following Nicholas Capaldi (2002), I emphasize in this chapter the descriptive,

as opposed to normative, aspects of equality:

As a descriptive concept, equality is, by definition, an adjectival relation between entities that are identical in some specific respect. No two entities can be identical in all respects, for then they would not be two entities but the same entity. The equality may be one of quantity or quality. Equality may be predicated of things, persons, or social entities such as institutions, groups, and so on. (Calpadi 2002:1)

Inherent in Capaldi's definition is the key idea that equal entities must be the same in "some specific respect," whether quantity, measure, value, status, rights, or treatment. This chapter is concerned with the issue of equality for divergent castes in northern India, and in particular, with the successes and failures of its emergence since the early 1940s. The idea of equality precedes the settled farming communities and ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley in India. The so-called 'simple' societies that characterized the Pleistocene period gave application to the principle of equality in their daily lives. "Neo-evolutionary theory," according to archeologist Robert Paynter, "holds that equality is found in simple societies, those that achieved social integration with little differentiation" (Paynter 1989:369,373). Indeed, the principle of equality lies behind the very existence of city-states in the third millennium B.C. in Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley (see also Adams 1973; Stone 1997; Sharma 2002; Kenoyer 1997). Not only did Krishna speak about the equality and eternity of all souls in the *Bhagavada Gita*, but the idea of equality surfaces in the semantics of a variety of terms prominent throughout the *Rig Veda* and related Vedic literature: for example, *samana* 'same', 'identical'; *samaneha* 'alike', 'similar', 'equal' (in size, age, rank, sense, or meaning; equal or similar to); *guna* 'equality in quality'; *gotra* 'equal in family'; *grama* 'the same village'; *varna* 'of equal caste'; *jati* 'of equal caste'; *kala* 'of the same period'; *karaka* 'making all things equal'; *samana-ta* 'equality with community of kind'; *tejas* 'having equal splendor or glory', 'equal intelligence'; *adhikarana* 'grammatical agreement in case

with', 'common or same government'; *samani* 'to lead or conduct together', 'join', 'unite', 'collect or assemble together' (cf. Griffith 1896:V.87.4; Monier-Williams 1976:1160, columns 1,2,3). Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere (Sharma 1968), the concept of equality laid the foundation for the non-monarchical republican states in *Rig Vedic* India (c. 2000-1000 B.C.) and the later republics in ancient India to c. 500 B.C.

However, it was the Greeks and Romans who began to discuss, debate, and apply the principle of equality much more thoroughly in their various city-states and republics (cf. Fowler 1966[1893]; Sealey 1976). Of all the thinkers in ancient Greece, Socrates (469-399 B.C.) was the most vigorous and consistent supporter of this ideal, as demonstrated in his *Dialogues*:

... we and our citizens are brethren; the children all of one mother, and we do not think it right to be one another's masters and servants, but the natural equality of birth except in the reputation of virtue and wisdom. (Plato, translated by Jowett 1937:Vol. 2, 779)

Yet as many scholars have acknowledged, Socrates' views on equality were somewhat out of step with his Athenian contemporaries, a point made by Jasper Griffin (1999) when he suggests that Socrates must have been one of the most remarkable men who ever lived. Athens in the late fifth century B.C. was a democracy humming with artistic and intellectual activity, but it was also a highly elitist society. Not only did family connections and stylish behavior count for a great deal, but there was an extraordinarily high premium placed on personal appearance. According to Griffin, the good things of Athenian life included good health, good looks, and being rich "without cheating," all qualities that Socrates decisively lacked:

It was thus doubly amazing that an eccentric, a social nobody—the son of a stone cutter and a midwife—who also happened to be grotesquely ugly, should have become the darling of the most desirable society in Athens, and enjoyed both

intellectual and personal ascendancy over some of its liveliest minds. (Griffin 1999:41)

Socrates was himself followed by two Greek philosophers who were no great friends of equality: Aristotle and Plato. Plato was an unabashed monarchist, as Karl Potter notes when he explains that “egalitarianism was his arch-enemy” and that he advocated “political totalitarianism” (Potter 1937:93,146). Aristotle too, in Sir Bertrand Russell’s words, was “no believer in equality” (Russell 1972[1945]:189), even though “by nature, the Stoics held [that] all human beings are equal” (Russell 1972[1945]:270). Even Socrates had acknowledged that equality was necessarily an ideal as opposed to a reality when he argued that sensible things aim at an “absolute equality” of which they often fall short: “They must have acquired the knowledge of equality at some previous time before we were born” (Jowett 1937:Vol. 1, 459).

In more recent times, however, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau all advocated and supported the principle of equality in their own ways, while Condorcet went even further by arguing for “the equality of women” (Russell 1972[1945]:723). The idea of equality, then, though of ancient origin and practice, is generally understood to be of modern vintage (Scruton 1982:151). Many people now associate the idea of equality with the American Declaration of Rights (1776), which proclaims that “all men are created equal.” Even more so, however, the idea of equality is linked with the motto of the French Revolution (1789): “*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité.*” Whatever the association, since the late 1700s the idea of equality, like that of liberty, has been a driving force for men and women the world over. Although the meanings of abstract concepts such as these are of course dynamic and change over time and across contexts, the idea of equality has now become so powerful that no modern nation dare ignore it in its constitution. India, like other modern nations of the world, enshrined this principle in its own constitution in 1950 when it guaranteed equal rights to all of its citizens, without any regard for status, birth, class, caste, gender, or religion.

IN PURSUIT OF EQUALITY

I now narrate four vignettes that relate to experiences in my own village and in neighboring towns as India transitioned to independence in the 1940s and 1950s. These narratives, while highly personalized and localized, are intended to capture the experience of growing up in rural India during this exciting historical period, when Gandhi's views regarding equality and the abolition of caste hierarchy touched the lives of even the most remote villager.

Untouchable at the gates

I was hardly six or seven years old in the early 1940s when the reform-minded headmaster of our village school opened the sacred-thread ceremony to all students, no matter what caste they belonged to. We were all asked to be ready and to bring necessary items for the ceremony. This rite-of-passage ritual, known in Hinduism as Upanayana, marked the beginning of student life in Indian tradition, but it had always been reserved for members of the upper castes. I remember being pushed around on that day, caught in the rush and push and shove of lower-caste pupils who were participating in the ceremony for the first time, especially *Ahirs* (cowherders/farmers) and *Baniyas* (merchants). Though a Brahman myself, I did not go through the ceremony because it was traditionally restricted to members of the Brahman caste. But caste would soon be officially abolished and then everyone would be equal. The sacred-thread ceremony would no longer be necessary as a rite of passage for the upper castes. Every boy and girl would be able to attend school and have equal opportunity in a new and independent India.

But my village still had a long way to go before we attained this vision of equality. Untouchable children, for instance, also wanted to attend school but were regularly driven away from the school gate. Even as a third grader, I knew that India was on the doorstep of freedom and that the abolition of caste and untouchability was an integral part of Gandhi's program. Why, then, would my teachers not let *Chamar* (leather workers) and *Bhangis* (sweepers) enter the school?

During summer vacation, when other kids were playing cards and other games, I would sometimes sneak over to the untouchable area in my village to speak with the boys and girls there about their rights in a new free India. Like others who were inspired by Gandhi's teachings, I began to teach the children how to read and write in Hindi and urged them to start attending primary school. I explained that *Harijans*—the respectful term that Gandhi used for 'untouchables'—were also included in India's system of free and compulsory education. Fortunately, most of my school teachers were reform-minded Arya Samajis (followers of the nineteenth century social reformer Dayananda), and it was not long before my primary school began to admit untouchables. Eight years later when I returned to the village before leaving for London, a group of Harijan children, including many girls, had just completed primary school and became the first class to enter the village middle school.

When I went to school in the town of Khurja for the fourth and fifth grades, I found much more equality and cooperation among children from all castes, including Harijans and Muslims. It was a more modern and congenial environment. I returned to my village for the sixth and seventh grades of middle school. India gained its independence on August 15, 1947. I was thirteen years old at the time.

Caste dignity

In 1948 I attended high school in Daraura, my mother's village. The rich Brahman farmers of the area had started a new high school that admitted students from all castes. Villagers in the area seemed more tolerant and progressive in their attitudes. It was there that I came under the dynamic influence of my classroom teachers Ganesh Dutt Gaur and Suraj Bhan Sharma. They guided me in my academic and sport endeavors and helped give new direction to my life, showing me that we can shape our own life and ambition without having to follow the old path.

It was in high school that I first became exposed to many of the ideals that were to shape India's future. During this time, new concepts began to be discussed and debated frequently and openly in schools and colleges: *freedom, liberty, equality, democracy, elections, representative government, modernism, nationalism,*

liberation, equality for women and other groups in India, Gandhi and non-violence, social reform, removal of untouchability, economic development, five-year plans, Panchayati Raj, industrialization, the United Nations, world government, and so on. I was excited about all of these ideas and supported social reform with respect to each of them. But the concept of *equality*, which was so dominant in everyday discourses during this period, struck me as one of the best of modern ideas. Like many of my fellow students, I was inspired to work toward bringing it about in Indian society. Although equality was emphasized in the Indian constitution and untouchability had officially been abolished, Indian society remained acutely hierarchical and caste-ridden.

An event that took place in my village during 1951 illuminates some of the tensions surrounding caste that emerged in Indian village life during the early years of independence. After receiving my high school degree, I returned to my village to spend the summer. In our region of Chaubisa, a cluster of twenty-four villages, Ahirs constituted the majority of the population and owned most of the land. In my own village, Ahirs were the dominant caste followed by Chamars, who supplied most of the farm labor. But the Chamars of my village were treated harshly and cruelly. Soon after I arrived home, I ran into a Chamar whose children I had taught when I was young. I learned from him that his wife was seriously ill after suffering a life-threatening delivery in which her child had died. He had been up all night taking care of her and when he went to plough the fields the next day, his employer, an Ahir farmer, noticed that he had arrived late. Without a word, the farmer brought out his *paini* (a stick with leather strings used to beat and control bullocks) and started beating him mercilessly, not even allowing him to explain what had happened. "I can't even stand straight!" the Chamar man said to me, limping. "See how badly he bruised my back? One wouldn't do this even to a bullock. He beat me worse than an animal!" I was enraged at his account of the incident, and after giving him some food and tea, I told him that I would visit him later that evening.

When I went to his home, I passed by several elders, adult workers, and heads of families who were assembled at the *chaupal* (meeting place). I asked them if they knew what had been done to one of their fellow workers. "Yes," they said, with some

resignation, and they told me about other Ahir farmers on the other side of the village who had treated them no better. Yet none of them had been beaten so badly as this man, whose wife was sick and had suffered a miscarriage.

“I have a solution to the problem,” I said.

“What?” they asked.

“All these big farmers depend upon your labor yet pay you very little and treat you even worse than their animals.”

“You are absolutely right!” they shouted. “But we need to work in order to feed our families.”

“And they need your labor in order to grow and harvest wheat and sugarcane,” I replied. “They can’t farm without your help. Would you like to hear my idea?”

“Yes,” they said, falling silent.

“From tomorrow morning on, none of you will go to work for the Ahir farmers,” I suggested. “Nor will your women go and work at their houses, including those Bhangi women who sweep the houses, collect cow dung, and clean the toilets. No one from the Chamar and Bhangi communities, neither men nor women, will go to work for the Ahirs from tomorrow morning on.”

“So you are talking about a *hartal* (strike), just as Gandhiji is asking Indians not to cooperate with the *bilayati* (foreign government)!” they responded. They were all very excited. “We have never had a strike in the village. But it will create great chaos, and nothing will get done in their homes and farms.”

“That’s precisely the reason for doing this,” I replied. “We want to remind the Ahirs that they depend on you and your families in day-to-day life, and if they don’t treat you right and don’t pay you well enough, you simply won’t work for them anymore. You’ll leave the village and work in factories instead, you’ll drive *rickshaws* (bicycle taxis) in towns and cities, you’ll send your children to school.”

There was great silence and satisfaction among the people there. Then someone said, “What if they come here and beat us up? How will we defend ourselves against their weapons?”

It was quite late, around 10:00, on what must have been a Monday or Tuesday night. We continued the discussion. “If they come here to beat you, they’ll not come alone, especially if you haven’t been to work for four or five days. By Sunday, they’ll be

completely fed up with all of the trash in their houses and on their roads. An entire week will have passed in the height of harvest time with no work being done in the fields. Once they hear about our meeting, they will certainly call their own meeting in order to deal with the issue of labor and workers. And they may very well decide to take joint action and attack you here at your homes. Fortunately, there are only two openings to your area from where they can attack, one from the east and the other from the west, both on the main street. If they attack next Sunday, we have four days to prepare. Let us choose two main leaders who will lead the two main groups of defenders.”

Several hands went up. We chose two of the stronger and more mature men to lead the groups.

“But what will we defend ourselves with?” said a man in the crowd. “We have no *ballams* (spears) or *talwars* (swords). All we have are *lathis* (sticks) and *dandas* (short sticks). Can we defend ourselves with them alone?”

“You can easily defend yourselves with them. Remember that you are also fighting a symbolic war. You are fighting to show them that they have been mistreating you, paying you less than what you deserve, exploiting and raping your women, keeping you down. All we want is to defend ourselves, not to defeat them or harm them, but to show them that we are not afraid of them. Only when some of your young men and boys have been beaten and hurt will you attack them, in self-defense. No one will get killed. You’ll show them that when pushed you can resist and retaliate, for you are equal citizens of a free India. After this is over, they will not be able to face each other, let alone you or the police. Then we will be able to dictate the terms under which you’ll work for them in the future.” I left promising that I would be with them on the day of confrontation.

As we suspected, the Ahirs called a meeting of their own when they heard of our meeting. They decided to attack the Chamar *patti* (settlement) on Sunday. The Chamars were ready, according to plan. When I reached there between 8:30 and 9:00 that morning, they had already blocked the western entrance but let me pass through. I saw the same preparedness on the eastern front, where Ahirs were already assembling with their lathis and dandas. Luckily, I did not see any balhams in any of their hands, but some of the lathis had iron mounts at the bottom that could certainly

inflict heavy injuries. By 1:30 in the afternoon, a large crowd had formed on the eastern side, as most of the Ahirs lived in the center and eastern side of the village.

The Ahirs then started abusing the Chamars and attacking them. "You dare face us, you *derds* (term of abuse)!" They beat up a few of the men along with their sons. Yet the Chamars showed great control, attacking their attackers only when blood was spilled. When a rather large man who was an important Ahir landowner fell to the ground after the Chamars retaliated, the battle changed course. Ahirs ran in mass to the fallen man and carried him away so as to care for him and treat him with bandages. The untouchable women who were watching from the sidelines saw that the battle had been won, and they began to laugh and clap. All were joyous.

A few days later, Ahir leaders sent for the main Chamar leaders to talk terms. They also asked me to come along, after seeing me at the battle and realizing, to their surprise and annoyance, that I had instigated and helped the Chamar defenders. As we expected, the Ahirs had not reported the incident to the police; they had suffered too much humiliation at the hands of the Chamars. From that point on, they promised to treat the Chamars humanely and pay them a set daily wage, which we dictated. They also promised that they would no longer harass Chamar women. If anyone was beaten and mistreated, it would be referred to the police and we would be allowed to take the perpetrator to court. In this way, some measure of social justice and equality was established in my home village.

Tea and volleyball

Khurja, where I attended college, was a town of several hundred thousand residents, much larger than the two villages I had lived in previously. While the majority of residents were Hindus, there were diverse communities of significance: an influential number of Muslims, mostly Pathans and people of Persian origin; a sizable untouchable class; a rich and vibrant merchant community; a good number of Brahmans, most of whom were quite ordinary or even poor; and a growing number of Panjabi refugees who had also made Khurja their home. For the most part, Hindu merchants and Muslims dominated the town and its activities. Khurja merchants

had become famous in northern India for their cloth, grain, and ghee factories. Khurja was also the capital for ceramics in India, and most of these factories were owned and operated by Muslims.

India was now an independent nation largely influenced by Gandhian philosophy of non-violence and *swadeshi* ('home-grown' indigenous goods). The nation had chosen the path of a democratic secular socialist republic under Jawaharlal Nehru's premiership. As such, there was an idealistic flavor to activities regarding education, society, culture, and politics. There was less of a place in these activities for caste distinctions, untouchability, or the subordination of women. During this period, India advocated free and compulsory education to the end of primary school; some states even extended it to high school. In my own state of Uttar Pradesh, education was largely free and compulsory until the fourth grade, when it was thought that students would be literate.

NREC College, which locals called "Khurja College," was also quite large in comparison to previous institutions I had been associated with, enrolling more than 3,000 students. Among the college professors were a significant number of Brahmans and Vaishyas, some Kshatriyas, and a few Kayasthas. Although there were hardly any Muslim professors in any subject, there were a noticeable number of Muslim students, many of whom were quite outstanding in both academics and sports. There were also a significant number of Brahman, Vaishya, and Kayastha students, but this was not so surprising given that these castes had been in the business of education and professionalism for centuries, some for even thousands of years. Other students included a group of Kshatriyas who had come from neighboring villages as the sons and daughters of farmers, both big and small. Finally, there were a group of students who came from lower castes that were later designated as "Other Backward Castes" or "OBC": namely, lower Kshatriyas and clean service castes, such as *Nai* (barbers), *Julaha/Koli* (weavers), *Dhobis* (washermen), and other craftsmen. These students had managed to come to college when tuition fees were low and living expenses not so prohibitive.

During the last two years of my college education, I kept busy by studying and tutoring students to earn my keep. This didn't leave me much time to get involved in other kinds of activities, but I did manage to play a few sports, among them volleyball. Two hard-

working male servants came each day to take care of the sporting goods. They were both members of the Bhangi caste; their wives were employed to clean the hostel toilets and college grounds. After the end of an important match or especially good practice, my fellow players and I would always join the games and sports superintendent, Mr. B. R. Banerjee, for tea and samosas from the college canteen. Mr. Banerjee was a modern man, highly educated and accomplished, as well as a nationalist and social reformer. Unlike most men of his stature, for instance, he hired members of lower castes and untouchables to work as servants in his home.

One day I talked with him about the two Bhangi servants who had devoted their entire lives to serving students at the College. "Why should they not also have tea with us?" I asked. Most of my fellow volleyball players were villagers from landowning families and were not open to such notions of equality. But there was change afoot in the larger towns and colleges, where men like Mr. Banerjee treated untouchables in the same way that he treated people from the upper castes. He quickly agreed to let the untouchable servants drink tea from our own cups. The two Bhangis accepted our invitation, though not with much enthusiasm. But after this exchange, cross-caste moments like this came to be general practice at the college. It wasn't long before I found myself traveling to the Bhangi quarter in the town to have tea with these same two servants in their own homes, carrying boxes of *jalebis* (sweets) for their children. With small steps like these, our college community began to introduce a measure of equality.

England and Vatukji

I left for England to pursue higher education in November of 1955. After my college gave me a big send off, I went back to my village to say my final goodbyes and celebrate the festival of Diwali with my family. I had my small new tin trunk ready with a few pairs of kurta-pajamas, a couple of Western style shirts and trousers, and a suit and tie, all tailored in Khurja by an elderly Muslim darzi. My grandfather was the strongest supporter of my foreign education. At the Diwali celebration, he wished me good luck and even mentioned that since I had now finished college and was going to be twenty-one years of age, I was free to marry anyone I chose. Even if I

married an untouchable girl, he said, he would gladly accept her as my duly married wife. Everyone at the celebration was shocked to hear this, but my grandfather didn't care. He was fully convinced that he held the correct position. The world was changing and so was India. He let my mother walk with me to the village edge to meet the rest of my family and friends, who were waiting with the bullock cart. They drove me to Sikandrabad, a town about five miles away, where I caught the bus to Delhi. From Delhi, I traveled on the overnight train to Bombay, acutely aware of my village roots as I arrived in India's most modern and progressive city. A few weeks later, I joined 3,000 other passengers on the P&O ship S.S. Strathmore and departed for England.

I met Ved Prakash Vatuk—or Vatukji, as I prefer to call him—soon after I arrived in London in December of the same year. It was in the Students' Common Room at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, where my guruji, Mr. Ganesh Dutt Gaur, taught Hindi. Vatukji was working on his Ph.D. in Philosophy. Although I was living with Gaurji and doing his household chores, I was free to pursue my interests and decide upon a subject to study, as well as to meet and consult with various people. Vatukji was one such person with whom I discussed my interests. Almost two years senior to me, he came from Meerut, the district adjacent to my own. We quickly realized that we had much in common. We were both native Hindi speakers and had a village background. We were both from poor Brahman families and had numerous siblings. Both of our parents were small time farmers. We had both graduated from a college affiliated with Agra University, he from Meerut College and I from Khurja College, though Vatukji had in addition completed an M.A. in Sanskrit. Finally, we both lacked any kind of financial help from our families to support our studies in London. We had to work part time at petty jobs in order to earn a university education.

Vatukji was at heart first and foremost a poet. He wrote poetry everyday, usually under inspiration from what he was learning in his studies and experiencing at work. He would often recite his poems to us at request, without making any fuss. Soon he would translate the 120 stanzas of Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* (The Cloud Messenger) from Sanskrit into Hindi. But Vatukji was also a born social activist. He played a major role in the activities of the Indian

community in London through organizations like the India Majlis, a social and literary organization that held many gatherings and functions for people to get together. There he read his poetry in addition to participating in organizational activities and publicizing events. Perhaps because of his rural background and interest in folk culture, he was also naturally drawn towards folklore, a subject that in many ways captured the heart of post-independent India. Scholars had enthusiastically begun to collect and analyze folk texts from all of the Indian languages and especially Hindi, which had been chosen as India's national language. Vatukji's background in Indian linguistics, and more specifically the work of Panini, inspired him to take interest in and seriously study Russian and Japanese linguistics. It would be in these areas—poetry, social activism, folklore, and linguistics—that Ved Prakash Vatuk would make his major contributions after moving to America.

CONCLUSIONS

The idea and pursuit of equality is quite ancient. This ideal found expression in the life and activities of early hunters and gatherers, but suffered a setback in the settled communities and in some of the great authoritarian civilizations. However, it again appeared in the Mesopotamian and Indus Valley city-states of the fourth and third millenniums B.C., as well as in the hymns of the *Rig Veda* and in the *Bhagavada Gita* of the second and first millenniums B.C.

Equality has had both its supporters and its opponents. Philosophers such as Pericles and Socrates were its great admirers during the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., while Plato and Aristotle were its enemies. In more recent times, especially since the French Revolution of 1789, the idea has emerged as an essential element of modern democratic states. Yet in spite of their laws and constitutions, hierarchy and discrimination continue to exist in these societies and often seem to reconstitute and reinvigorate themselves under new social pressures.

When I returned to India with my American wife in 1965, ten years after my initial departure to study in England, I still found caste divisions in my village and in the surrounding areas. Although the Indian constitution was implemented on January 26, 1950, caste and untouchability continue to exist in India, even to this day in

2008. Things have not stood still, however; there were and have been many changes. Chamar leatherworkers no longer cart away dead animals nor engage in making shoes, activities that had marked them as untouchable. Bhangi sweepers no longer remain solely in their jobs as village scavengers, but have moved to towns and cities to be employed as construction workers and rickshaw drivers or in factories. Although caste distinctions still exist, along with the discrimination that accompanies these distinctions, the caste hierarchy has definitely weakened. Intercaste dining among friends and acquaintances in rural areas is not unknown. High-caste politicians in search of votes will not hesitate to sit among, or eat and drink with, low-caste voters. Changes such as increased overcrowding in villages, and especially the ability of a number of untouchables to purchase land, have led to some blurring of caste residential patterns. Instrumental to these changes has been the political mobilization of low and untouchable castes in forming their own parties and interest groups and in gaining political power. While the selection of Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister did not bring an end to the existence of women's inequality in India, there is certainly something striking about the ascendance of Mayawati Devi—a woman and an untouchable—to the position of Chief Minister in my home state of Uttar Pradesh. Although a full application of equality remains as elusive as ever, the struggle continues with the hope that one day all may be considered as equals.

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THE SOUNDS OF SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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My parents, both academics, always try to get me to visit people they think I should meet when I travel: “Oh, you’re going to Virginia? You *must* meet Carol. She remembers you from when you were a child and she’ll take you around the campus.” “On your visit to Los Angeles, be sure to call Dad’s old student, Monica. She’ll show you around and have you see Marlon Brando’s house.” When I moved to Oakland from Santa Barbara in my third year of graduate school in 1998, my father said to me over the phone: “Oh, you have to meet my old friend from my London days, Ved Vatak. He’s like a brother to me. I taught him how to iron!”

I used to groan, hear my parents out, and then come up with excuses for why I didn’t have the time—not to mention the desire—to call up and meet these old friends of my parents with whom I had nothing in common. This time, however, I yielded to my father’s increasing pressure to call “Uncle Vatak.” His stress on the “Uncle” part of Uncle Vatak didn’t mean anything to me. In Hawai’i, where I’m from, and in India, where my father is from, almost everyone is either a real or fictive “uncle” or “aunty.” When I eluded my father’s request for the first six months by employing new tactics of diversion (“Dad, my call waiting is beeping, I’ll call you right back!”), my dad responded with his own tactics of persuasion: “Tasha, have you called Uncle Vatak? We were in London together. Did I tell you about him? He is a wonderful cook. He still makes *rotis* with fresh *atta*.” He suddenly had my attention. There is no

cooking like homemade Indian cooking, especially when it comes to *rotis*. And Uncle Vatuk's whole wheat *rotis*, as I was soon to find out, were the best.

In the beginning I met regularly with Uncle Vatuk. I went to his apartment for lunch and we would sit in the sunny kitchen facing Dwight Street near the University of California campus in Berkeley, which I was attending. His kitchen reminded me of India. He would cook for me, treat me like a daughter, and then we would sit and talk as we still do when we happen to be in the same city. When I was in his home for the first time, Uncle Vatuk asked me about my work. I clumsily told him of my interest in second generation Indians, like myself, who identified with Blacks and who criticized Indians' anti-Black sentiments. My two-line pre-dissertation summary always sounded unsophisticated compared to his great stories and proverbs, which he relayed with great flair and humor. Our relationship thus began with a lot of time spent "talking story" and attending Indian events in the Bay Area. Uncle Vatuk couldn't drive and I couldn't cook very well, so we worked out a fair trade. He would cook for me and I would drive us to a variety of events: one sunny weekend we witnessed a mixed-race Punjabi wedding at El Sobrante Gurdwara north of Berkeley; another time we drove down to an engineer's condo in Silicon Valley where I met progressive South Asians who were fighting against communalism.

These field trips were certainly important for my budding career in anthropology, but more critically, they reminded me that the Indian diaspora includes many radical, progressive, and activist lineages represented by older and younger generations, both within the United States and elsewhere. In the beginning stages of my research, when I feared that I was perhaps overemphasizing or exaggerating Indians' anti-Black sentiments, Uncle Vatuk would be the person with whom I could verbalize my early findings. Responding with examples drawn from his own life as well as proverbs and poems, he demonstrated a loving and involved yet critical engagement with the South Asian community in the Bay Area and beyond. He relayed his sense of community dynamics based on years of accumulated interactions, and his thoughts always reminded me of the bigger fight for equality in which we were joined.

“Indians want to reach heaven without dying,” he told me early on. “Their children are hanging half-way between this world and the other.” We discussed the insular nature of Indian community formations in America and the strains of conservatism that ran through these various communities, expressed through an intergenerational focus on insularity, economic advancement, and anti-Black racism. He reminded me that Indians in the United States do have internal problems: they are too materialistic; they gossip; they watch their boundaries; and they allow little deviance from norms. Indian Americans, however, did not hold the monopoly on his disappointment for unfulfilled potentials. He had also held great expectations for the United States when he came to Harvard University in 1959, only to suffer eventual disappointment: “I was so innocent; isn’t innocence wonderful?” These lessons were compounded and paralleled by the fight of his brother, Sunder Lal, against British rule in India. A school teacher and revolutionary freedom fighter, Sunder Lal was later imprisoned in an Indian jail for working to liberate his motherland from colonial rule (see Vatuk 2005a). As Vatuk spent time in the United States, he quickly came to learn that the ideal of American equality is likewise distinct from the realities of persistent historical and structural inequality, particularly with respect to the subject of my own research: race relations.

RACIAL POLITICS IN SOUTH ASIAN AMERICA

Varied forms of structural inequality have long affected the plight of Indian immigrants in the United States, as Vatuk has himself exposed by translating and reprinting materials from the early days of the Gadar Party (see, e.g., Vatuk 1998a, 1998b). The Gadar Party was formed in 1913 by West Coast Sikh immigrants, students, and teachers who fought for a “double victory” against racism in the United States and colonialism in India (see Takaki 2000). Wanting to cultivate a sense of nationalism, these activists readied themselves for battle in armed rebellion against British rule in India. Although the history of the Gadar Party is unfamiliar to many, Vatuk and others have worked to tell the true story of the 6,000 or so Indians who left the Americas at the start of World War I in pursuit of equality and freedom for India. Vatuk draws upon the

Gadarites' resistance poetry to illustrate their dedication, conviction, and story. Many of the poems he has translated decry the racism and nativism faced by these early first wave Indian immigrants:

Some push us around, some curse us.
Where is your splendor and prestige today?
The whole world calls us black thieves,
The whole world calls us "coolie."
Why doesn't our flag fly anywhere?
Why do we feel low and humiliated?
Why is there no respect for us in the whole world?
(translated by Vatak 1969:71-72)

Perhaps inspired by these pioneer revolutionaries, Vatak has written his own resistance poetry to express a vision of equality that reaches across generational, religious, national, and racial boundaries.

Vatak's vision resonates with my own interest in understanding the formation of cross-racial alliances. As I pursued my graduate studies in the Bay Area on second generation Indians in the United States, I became increasingly intrigued by the ways in which Indian immigrants' constructions of community had to take into account America's ideologies of race and its nativist practices, which in turn shaped these immigrants' understanding of themselves and their communities in their adopted country. My research began to take shape around the issue of Indian anti-Black racism and was strengthened by ongoing conversation with Uncle Vatak. He pointed to a pattern whereby Indians would overlook, excuse, or deny the possibility of racism among whites while refusing to do the same for Blacks. He gave the example of an Indian couple who owned a gas station: "If 5% of their white customers are horrible and racist, the Indian owners will still say that whites are nevertheless good and nice people. But if 5% of their Black customers are horrible and racist, then the owners will view this as a reflection of the Black community." In his typical way of drawing on historical and international connections, Uncle Vatak pointed out that Indians regularly align themselves on the side of whites in times of revolution, as in South Africa when Indians supported apartheid.

It was through these discussions that I became interested in investigating coalitions between South Asian Americans and Blacks as they materialized in popular and youth cultures. Specifically, I developed an ethnographic project on the racial politics of desi youth (*desi* is a colloquial and widely adopted term for South Asians in the diaspora) who were also hip hop artists. I wanted to learn how this group of desis conceptualized their racial identity, and in particular, how they formed these ideas given the newness and middle-class status of the largest wave of South Asian migration formed as a result of the 1965 Immigration Act. I thus had to learn firsthand the politics—racial and otherwise—of the numerous and sizable South Asian communities in and around the Bay Area. When Uncle Vatuk introduced me to a diverse array of community contacts, I quickly came to realize that there is no single desi, or South Asian, community. Rather, there are many South Asian communities in the United States, crosscut by religion, caste, region, class, occupation, sexuality, politics, and generation, among other differences. Many of the people whom I was introduced to by Uncle Vatuk defied the “typical Indian father/mother/uncle/aunt” concept bandied about by desi youth. I was thus reminded of the full heterogeneous range of identities and identifications within the communities I was striving to understand, “define,” and become a part of.

Over the course of the next six years, I conducted fieldwork on South Asian Americans and desi hip hop artists based in the Bay Area, sometimes taking trips to meet artists in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York as well. The time that I spent with desi hip hop artists in homes, at shows, listening to music, and talking about life motivated me to continue with this project, despite what I perceived to be a lack of enthusiasm for my work from others academics. Much of what I heard from desis who were involved in producing hip hop echoed my own sentiments and worldview regarding our racialization as non-white in America and the denial of this racialization process within our communities. Although I was fearful of my research turning into what some anthropologists have labeled “me-search,” I was able to survive the long process of graduate school precisely because of my immediate investment in what I was studying. Vatuk’s focus on underrepresented peoples, among them South Asians, arises from this same commitment to

community formation, fostered through an unwavering dedication to the community as well as a belief in the importance of critique within the community.

My dissertation research confirmed much of what Uncle Vatak described to me in our conversations. In general, I found that Indian Americans tend to mobilize around identity politics, often defining themselves in cultural and professional terms. While this is especially true and understandable for the first generation that immigrated to the United States to provide their children with stable and optimally bright futures, and for whom the homeland was the place of political interest and identity, I questioned whether this was the case for their U.S.-born children as well. Anti-Black racism partially emerges as a result of “becoming American,” as many immigrants attempt to locate themselves in the American racial hierarchy that devalues Blackness. The English-educated and predominantly upper-caste and middle-class professionals who constituted the post-1965 wave of Indian migrants chose to distance themselves and their children from working-class and so-called “less successful” minorities in the United States. Indeed, as my research has revealed, professional South Asians often refuse to label experiences that suggest a glass ceiling at work as “discrimination.” If they were to do so, they would implicate themselves as minorities who share the same social status as Blacks and Latinos.

Upon gaining a better sense of the aspirations, sacrifices, ideas, and experiences of Indian immigrants more generally, I began to listen closely to U.S.-born South Asians in order to learn about the issues that were of special concern to them: for instance, how they understood their place in the United States, how they formed their identities, and what their lives were like. UC Berkeley, where I was taking classes and teaching in the Ethnic Studies Department, was an ideal place to begin these observations, particularly as it has one of the largest populations of South Asian students in the United States. Although I met a number of desis in the Hindi classes I took in the South Asian Studies Department over my six years there, I met few South Asians in the Asian American Studies classes that I was teaching. This observation later revealed itself as a primary research question: do South Asian Americans feel they belong in Asian America? Does the term *Asian America* include South

Asians? This aspect of South Asian American identity negotiation was further explored in the pioneering anthology *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America*. In their introduction to the volume, editors Lavina Shakar and Rajini Srikanth (1998) argue for a greater inclusion of South Asian American experiences within Asian American Studies, a stance underscored by Srikanth's position as President of the National Association of Asian American Studies. Of special concern to me was thus the question of whether *desi* students considered themselves to be "Asian American."

A number of factors have converged to lead *desi* students from multiple and multilayered backgrounds to share a general sense that "Asian American" is not a central aspect of their identity. The first of these has to do with the way that Asian American Studies materialized in American academia, particularly during the early 1990s. In the courses associated with this field of study, students would learn about the history of Asians in America with an emphasis on the experiences of East Asians, particularly the Chinese and Japanese. Students often took these "heritage courses" in order to understand the development and meaning of the Asian American category, sometimes embracing this identity as their own when stories associated with their particular ethnic group were illustrated and analyzed. A number of groups, however, including Southeast Asians, Filipinos, Pacific Islanders, and South Asians, still remain underrepresented in the content of these courses, despite having overlapping histories with the three waves of East Asian migration to the United States that have come to represent the common understanding of Asian America today.

Moreover, the term *Asian American* was itself developed by East Asian activists in the Asian American Movement of the 1960s as an empowered and politicized nomenclature to replace the derogatory label *oriental* (Omatsu 1994; Lee 1999), which in the United States continues to conjure images of East Asians. The history of Asian America has been taught primarily as a narrative about East Asian immigrant working-class male laborers—mostly Chinese, Japanese, and to a lesser extent, Korean—who faced exclusion at the hands of white nativists at the turn of the twentieth century. This master narrative claims that Chinese and Japanese immigrants arrived in the United States earlier than other Asian ethnic groups and in greater numbers, despite the presence of

Filipinos in the South in the 1700s and Indians in New England in the 1800s, leading to the subsequent phenotypically driven lumping of Korean and Southeast Asian refugees who arrived in the United States since the 1970s as “Asian.” The darker and phenotypically distinct Filipino/as and South Asians, on the other hand, are often misidentified as Latino. These developments, coupled with the tendency for many South Asian students to choose professional fields as their major course of study, have led to low desi participation in Asian American Studies programs across the United States. The development of Asian American Studies has thus been central to the rejection of an Asian American identity among many second-generation desis, the majority of whom attend college (United States Census Bureau 2000).

In addition, many desi students are raised with a profound sense of ethnic, regional, class, and religious distinctiveness, formed primarily by their parents’ own sense of identity as emerging from their South Asian origins. Parents often pass on these identifications to their children by involving them in organizations, social groups, and extra-curricular activities centered on instruction in religion, language, and dance. The generational transfer of this sense of diasporic identity is rightly lauded for providing immigrants with a multivalent sense of themselves in ways that challenge older assimilation models that treat the loss of one’s “ethnic baggage” as part of becoming American (Espiritu 1993; Portes 1996).

Yet this same multivalency has cultivated sharp hierarchies among divergent groups of South Asians in the United States through a process that reinforces Indian upper-caste middle-class Hindu hegemonic notions of South Asianness. While it may be understandable for a first generation of migrants whose sense of self is more fully rooted in India to embrace differences such as ‘Hindu vs. Muslim’ or ‘immigrants from India vs. Indo-Fijians’, what they pass down to their children is often a sense of difference that is evaluated in relation to ‘diluted,’ ‘pure,’ or more ‘authentic’ claims to Indianness. Events affecting South Asia, such as the continuing Hindu/Muslim tensions both within and across India’s borders, carry a specific meaning for first generation immigrants. As the population of South Asian Americans has increased and diversified, social divisions previously associated with South Asia have now

surfaced in the United States, sometimes becoming manifest through the worst forms of factionalism.

Second generation desis have different relationships to both their parents' homeland and their birthplace. As Americans who are fully enveloped within the racial politics of the United States, yet are often racialized as foreigners (and now seen as potential terrorists) by mainstream Americans, desis patch together their unique identities in heterogeneous ways. It is in college that these youth often come in contact for the first time with large numbers of desis who share their experiences as brown citizens of the United States. On campuses like UC Berkeley, South Asian students begin to embrace ideas of distinctiveness that are expressed and regulated through regional and religious cultural and social groupings. The "party-heavy Gujus" and the "aggressive and expressive Punjabis," for example, were two main social groups on the Berkeley campus. Less numerous South Indians either had to insert themselves into one or the other group or choose to develop social relationships on a basis other than ethnic and regional identity. Official organizations also mirrored religious differences. Muslim Indian students told me that they did not feel represented by the largest cultural group of "Indus," whose members were debating whether they should bill themselves as a "South Asian" instead of "Indian" cultural organization. The point to be made here is that while first generation Indian immigrants have a heightened sense of these kinds of identity distinctions due to ties with India, these distinctions do not disappear with the second generation despite their new context. In fact, U.S.-born desis learn their racialized value as non-Blacks and non-Whites in America while simultaneously learning their access and rights to 'authentic' Indianness through their parents. These factors manifest in real divisions among South Asian youth. Debates about authentic, inauthentic, and diluted desis not only take place, they also lead many youth to reject the narrow expectations placed upon them with regard to dress, dating, and even dietary practices.

These patterns of community and identity formation among second generation South Asians challenge assimilation models developed to describe the process of European migrants' settlement patterns; they also challenge our current understanding of multiculturalism. What first and second generation South Asian

immigrants seem to be saying and doing is expressing an understanding that all difference is *not* equal. South Asian Americans often teach their children a hierarchy of differentially valued groups led by their own group at the apex. For instance, wealthy North Indian Hindu families tend to value their class, regional, and religious peers over working-class, Muslim, South Indian, and non-Indian South Asians. Aware of this hierarchy, youth often explain that their own group is followed in descending order first by others of their religious, regional, and/or ethnic background, then Whites, Asians, Blacks, and finally, Muslims. Second generation desis frequently make comedic reference to this hierarchy of valued difference, while simultaneously reproducing and adhering to it in their own dating and social practices.

CROSS-RACIAL ALLIANCES BETWEEN DESI HIP HOP ARTISTS AND BLACKS IN AMERICA

Although there are certainly exceptions to broad generalizations about the conservative and insular nature of first and second generation South Asians, my research over the last decade has revealed the persistence of the patterns detailed above. Yet some second generation desis have challenged these constructions of desi identity, particularly if their worldview has been radicalized by their experiences with racism, sexism, and/or homophobia. For instance, Trikone, a Bay Area South Asian gay and lesbian organization, has consistently fought for representation within more mainstream expressions of desiness, as in local India Day Parades. Other activist desis have become heavily involved in fighting for workers rights—mobilizing, for instance, around the struggle fought by immigrant cab drivers for fair wages and police accountability (Das Gupta 2006). Moreover, many young desis in major cities interact with Blacks and Latinos on the basis of shared experience, popular culture, and other intersections. Desis who produce hip hop and interact daily with Blacks, such as the subjects of my own research, express a racialized identity as people of color that contrasts with the cultural and ethnic specificity held by mainstream desis. Although interaction across racial lines may not be read as progressive politics *per se*, when we look at the life and lyrical choices of some desi rappers, we see that the worldview they

express is anything but insular and anti-Black. Desi rappers often express explicitly politicized sentiments in their artwork. The themes in the lyrics of desi rappers converge around the desire to express what these rappers have witnessed and describe the futures they deem possible. In addition to making good music, flexing their skills, and having a good time, they express their understanding of the world, their place in it, and their desire to create social change through knowledge. Poetic expression is a particularly emotive and effective form of communication.

One of the experiences shared by many South Asians through hip hop is their reluctance to conform to hegemonic notions of desiness as expected by groups on college campuses. The artists in my study expressed disdain for the insular nature of campus socializing, offering anecdotes that criticized conformity among desi youth. During and since college, many of these artists have formed social groups based on a shared politics and love of art, as well as a desire to produce both. These relationships are not based along the ethnic lines that tend to restrict the social circles of other desis; rather, those South Asians who have become MCs, DJs, record label owners, music engineers, and music critics have developed bonds across color lines. Most share a desire to interact artistically, politically, and socially with Blacks, the group that perhaps bears the brunt of racial prejudice among many South Asians.

The politics and aesthetics of hip hop have provided a launching pad for the development and sustenance of these cross-racial relationships. Hip hop has been the glue that has kept these desis and their Black peers together as collaborators over the years. Through music and close personal interaction, these desi youth have learned that Blacks and South Asians actually have much in common, seeking to express these commonalities in the lyrics of desi rap. They draw on the parallels of colonialism experienced by Africans and Asians. For instance, they emphasize commonalities between the African experience of slavery and the Indian and Chinese experience of indentured servitude in places like the West Indies, where they were transported to supplant slave labor. These historical trajectories are brought together by the political ideas of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Mahatma Gandhi, leaders who strongly influenced the artists and whose voices pepper the

tracks of their CDs. These parallels, often ignored in American history textbooks, provide fodder for the lyrics of South Asian rappers, and unite South Asians and Blacks both historically and in the present moment as people of color in a color-conscious nation. Hip hop artists thus articulate new identities as race-conscious second-generation youth, challenging the orientation to *culture* rather than *race* as the central defining aspect of identity. They hail from communities not unlike those of mainstream desi cultures, which advocate economic success and ethnic insularity. Their decision to dedicate their professional lives to music and socialize regularly with non-desis must therefore be read as a form of everyday politics, especially when the groups that these individuals interact with are Black, the very group that many other desis often harbor animosity against.

The artists I interviewed also share a demand for representation in mainstream and hip hop America, both spheres in which they find themselves and their ethnic communities silenced. A few of them have attempted to insert themselves into the mainstream hip hop scene, which is predominantly White owned and Black performed. Not fitting into either identity category, and with lyrics, sounds, and styles that challenge conventional understandings and expectations of the music, some desi artists find it difficult to secure a proper place within this industry. As a result, some artists argue that it is critical to carve out a niche for both themselves and those they represent, so as to be able to tell their stories and have them heard. They are skeptical of the way in which the South Asian American experience has been either erased from mainstream depictions of American life or presented as stereotypical and comedic, as with the representation of cartoon characters like Apu in *The Simpsons* or cab drivers throughout mainstream media. They have accordingly developed innovative ways to produce, market, and perform their music—and politics—in the appropriate venues to reach their audiences. While some artists aim to express a specifically desi identity to college-age desi students, other artists approach the multiracial underground audience in a desire to be validated as credible, skillful, and ‘authentic’ artists, true to the early messages of resistance within hip hop culture.

THE SOUNDS OF SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The South Asian hip hop artists discussed in this chapter seek to excavate the historical processes of systematic oppression that create divisions and maintain the control of those in power. By critiquing the racial hierarchies that both oppress and inform South Asian communities in the United States, their music, like that within much of hip hop, provides what I have chosen as the title for this chapter: “the sounds of social consciousness.”

These same sounds characterize the life and work of the recipient of this festschrift, Ved Prakash Vatuk, whose poetry similarly seeks to expose varied forms of social injustice. To name but one example, when his older brother Sunder Lal was imprisoned for his involvement with the resistance movement of Gandhiji, Vatuk (2006[1977]) wrote a series of political poems that were later published in the volume *Kaidi Bhai, Bandi Desh* (Jailed Brother, Imprisoned Nation). Vatuk writes of his brother:

He fought for justice all his life and for that, even in independent India, he had to go to jail. The longest and the last was the eighteen month solitary confinement during Indira Gandhi’s Emergency Period (1975-77). He was almost seventy. Yet his spirit remained high and he had no trace of hatred towards Indira Gandhi either. During that time, when almost all intellectuals fell silent, he was the only one who wrote to me fearlessly and I in return wrote him inspiring poems. (Vatuk 2005a)

Just as South Asians have faced inequality and unfair treatment at the hands of both British and Indian governments, we have also faced nativism, exclusion, and discrimination from the nations to which we have migrated. The kinds of “sounds” that characterize the poetry of Vatuk and the lyrics of desi hip hop artists acknowledge these processes of inequality—whether faced by Sunder Lal in India, the Gadarites in the United States and Canada, or Indian immigrants and their diasporic children—and thus carry the potential to bring about new forms of social consciousness.

A further example comes from Vatak's (2002a) more recent poetic rendition of the story of Bahubali, one of the great Jain heroes for whom a fifty-seven foot tall statue was erected in Mysore, India. Vatak's epic delivers a passionate call against war, communalism, inequality, and greed. As he discusses in an interview with the *Siliconeer* (a South Asian American magazine published in northern California), *Bahubali* directs our attention away from violence to the "social inadequacies that afflict our societies and nations":

Briefly, what I want to say is this: Today, as man stands on the brink of global destruction, his hunger for power makes him refuse to face up to what he already knows. The tendency to resolve every conflict with brute force and violence, borrowed from an older, barbaric age, is still with us. The world's self-centered rulers still fail to realize that if they do not cease to use violent force to resolve every problem, one day they themselves will become the fuel in the *yagna* for power. ... The story of this poem at once echoes the rising people's protest against expansionist imperialism and is a historical document for the creation of a republic committed to egalitarian values. ... Let our wars not be violent efforts for power, but be waged against the many social inadequacies that afflict our societies and nations. Valor and heroism is not to be found in mass-slaughter with an aim for territorial expansion, but in protecting the innocent and promoting the well-being of each subject. (Vatak 2002b:55)

Bahubali warns us against the current imperialist wars taking place in the Middle East, exposing them not as products of a new generation but as repetitions of past histories. When I was conducting my dissertation research on desi youth shortly after September 11, 2001, I read the actions of certain Hindus through the same lens. A group of Hindus from a wealthy suburb in Fremont, California, had placed American flags on their doorsteps as proof of

the fact that they were not Muslim and therefore not the enemy. This stance was unfortunately reminiscent of an earlier divisive moment in Asian American history, when Koreans and other Asian ethnic groups sought to distinguish themselves from Japanese Americans, their former colonizers, during World War II.

I conclude this chapter with a poem from one of Vatak's (2005b) most recent publications, *Prem kavītāē: 31 Love Poems*. The poem not only reveals the generosity of spirit that Uncle Vatak shares with all those who are fortunate enough to befriend him, it also succinctly captures the cycle of give and take demanded by a politics of social justice:

nahī, maī nahī māgtā
 pyār kā ek saghan van
 sampūrṇ
 mujhe paryāpt hai tumhārā
 niṣkaluṣ kṣaṇ kā ek bīj
 hriday kī bhūmi mē ropkar
 jise maī dū
 bhāvnāō kā khād
 smritiyō kā pāvan jal
 ugāū prem kā
 harābharā upvan
 tumhē saūp dene ko!

No, I don't demand
 A whole dense forest of love
 Totally for myself
 To me, it is sufficient
 If you give me just
 A seed of stainless moment
 So I can sow it
 In the field of my heart
 And fertilize it
 With my lofty feelings
 Watering with holy streams of memories
 I will let it grow
 Into a flourishing green orchard
 And then

Present it to you.
(Vatuk 2005b:46-47)

Through the process of taking, growing, and then returning, Vatuk illustrates a cycle of knowledge production, love, and action that is also shared by many desi youth who are compelled by social justice. Many youth of my generation still feel limited when it comes to career choice, agreeing to pursue the professional paths that our parents have chosen for us so as to honor them for their sacrifices in migrating here. But we are becoming more skilled at juggling competing obligations. As with the hip hop artists discussed in this chapter, many of us are pursuing professional paths while simultaneously embarking on various forms of artistic expression and political activism. The full range of South Asian experience involves a spectrum of identities and politics, many of which I have only hinted at in this chapter. But by listening to the sounds of social consciousness, whether in the form of music, poetry, or even everyday conversation, we can begin to make sense of this diversity and reach across the multiple borders that divide us.

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6

MASCULINITY, FEMININITY, AND SERVITUDE: DOMESTIC WORKERS IN CALCUTTA IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Raka Ray
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In a memorable scene in *Aparajito*, the second film of Satyajit Ray's *Apu Trilogy*, the destitute Brahmin widow Sarbajaya watches her son learn to serve. She has recently obtained work as a cook in the household of a rich Brahmin, where her employers are considerate and inconsiderate in the manner of feudal lords. In this scene, she observes from the top of the stairs as the master of the house sends for her son Apu to light his pipe and tells him to pluck gray hairs from his head, rewarding him with a tip. In the next scene we see Sarbajaya and her son on a train, having left the job behind.

Sarbajaya's reaction is entirely different from that recorded by V. Tellis-Nayak in his study of Indian domestic servants, who reports primarily resignation and a surprising lack of stigma attached to the job (Tellis-Nayak 1983:67-74). Sarbajaya's face as she looks upon the scene makes it clear that nothing could be worse than watching one's son become a servant. I say "son" here deliberately because it is not clear that Sarbajaya's reaction would be quite as strong in the case of a daughter. Indeed, in the first film of the trilogy, *Pather Panchali*, the daughter Durga (who dies at the end of the film) is shown at the service of her little brother, looking after him, feeding him, and ultimately being responsible for his well-being. Durga was born to serve, in one way or another, but not

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Apu, the Brahmin son. The scene described above is as much a powerful comment on mother love and gender expectations as it is about the extreme and peculiarly gendered stigma attached to the identity “domestic servant” in India.

How do we understand the humanity of a group of people who get paid to do tasks that no one wants to do? This is a question that lies at the heart of scholarship on domestic servants. Some argue that the humanity of servants develops in a distorted way because of both the nature and the conditions of this work. Servants are reduced to a state of “perpetual infantilism,” which leads to extreme hopelessness, and to a corresponding lack of resistance (Rubbo and Taussig 1983:2-23). Others have written movingly about the everyday ways in which domestic workers resist degradation. Both sets of authors, however, see domestic workers primarily through the lens of the power and authority that inhere in relations between the employer and employee (e.g., Wrigley 1995; Dill 1994; Turbin 1995; Romero 1992; Rollins 1985; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos 1997).¹

In recent studies of the working class in India, several scholars have argued that ideologies and practices of gender, caste, and religion both shape the contours of the workplace and the trajectory of class identities (e.g., Chakrabarty 1989; Fernandes 1997; Sen 1999). As Gillian Hart (1991) and Karin Kapadia (1995) have argued elsewhere, an analysis of the meanings and relations of gender is necessary to better understand class consciousness. In this chapter, I explore not the social identities underlying worker identities but how work and the way work is constructed feed into gender identities. In other words, I argue that relations between worker and employer are refracted through the lens of gender and are used by the workers to build and reflect upon their gendered selves. My argument stems from the realization that the fulfillment of gendered expectations framed every conversation I had with domestic servants in Calcutta. This chapter, then, is about how domestic servants in India negotiate their identities as women and men and about how they evaluate their embodiment of those identities. It explores the way female and male servants imagine and articulate their lives as gendered beings, given that they perform, on a daily basis, the most undesirable tasks of society.

I turn first to the structure of paid domestic work in India and

then discuss notions of class, masculinity, and femininity in the city of Calcutta (where the research was conducted), situating these ideas within the distinctive caste and gendered class culture of Calcutta's middle, or *bhadralok*, classes. Thus, I explore the gendered ideology of those who employ servants in Calcutta. For this distinctive class, the *bhadralok*, hegemonic masculinity is defined by the absence of menial labor and the presence of education and cultural capital. There is in addition an idealized notion of independence, though few *bhadralok* achieve it.² Idealized femininity, on the other hand, involves being protected and staying at home. It is virtually impossible for those who do paid domestic work to achieve respected masculinity or femininity when their very definitions seemed designed to exclude them.

The final sections of the chapter explore how, under these conditions, domestic servants try to define their masculinity and femininity against their employers and how they accept, reject, embrace, and modify the way others see them as women and as men. I argue that female and male domestic workers seek, on the one hand, to appropriate *bhadralok* ideals and to deny their employers the monopoly of being *bhadralok*. On the other hand, they redefine what it means to be a good man or a good woman, bringing these definitions closer to the lives they lead. The study of both sides of the domestic work relationship allows me to explore the dialectic of employer and employee gender ideologies, to examine how employers build ideas of *bhadralok* femininity and masculinity precisely by excluding servants, as well as to show how servants fight that exclusion with varying degrees of success.

The data for this paper are drawn from a larger study of sixty interviews (thirty employers and thirty workers) conducted in 1998 and 1999. Fifteen of the workers lived in the homes of their employers. Because live-in work heightens the question of workers' femininity or masculinity, I focus my inquiry on them.³

PAID DOMESTIC WORK IN INDIA

Because paid domestic workers in the West, Latin America, and East Asia are primarily female, domestic service has appeared to be synonymous with women's work in most research (e.g., Gill 1994; Chaney and Castro 1989; Chin 1997).⁴ Yet precisely because the "domestic" is seen as a distinctively female realm, the presence of

men questions the taken-for-grantedness of the gendered separation of spheres.⁵ Domestic servants in India have historically been both female and male, but women and children have begun to dominate the ranks of this occupation in India, which reflects both the secular trend toward more female labor force employment and the worsening of economic inequality.⁶ The 1971 census showed that there were 675,878 domestic servants in India, of whom only 251,479 were women. A decade later, the picture was quite different, with the 1981 Census of India reporting that there were at least 807,410 people who worked as domestic workers in India, evenly divided between 402,387 men and 405,023 women (*Census of India* 1971 and 1981).⁷

This chapter focuses on Calcutta rather than on India as a whole. A focus on one region enables a more grounded reading of the practices of domestic servitude. Calcutta is an ideal site for the investigation of femininity and masculinity in domestic servants for several reasons. First, the region of West Bengal, in which Calcutta is situated, has a rich and elaborate feudal tradition. Second, the 1981 Census shows that the sheer numbers of domestic servants, at 149,100, are far greater in West Bengal than in other more populous states. Finally, the transition from primarily male to primarily female domestic workers has happened relatively recently in Calcutta, rendering the issue more salient in Calcutta than in other cities where male servants are increasingly invisible (*Census of India* 1981a, b, c, d).

According to economists, the increasing numbers of female servants in Calcutta are due to their expulsion from agriculture and organized sectors of industry (such as jute) and the partition of Bengal, which made refugees out of women who had not previously had to work outside the home. As employment alternatives closed for women, they expanded for men, so that the numbers of women domestic workers slowly increased, while the numbers of men decreased (N. Banerjee 1985; Bandopadhyay 1998). At the same time, the trend toward smaller apartments and families caused employers to think of women as safer servants around their daughters than men (Bhadra 1998). As in other dual-sex occupations, men have the higher status within the ranks of servants and command higher wages. These changes mean that female domestic servants are becoming the norm, with the more expensive

male workers being out of reach for most middle-class families today. Yet employers still think male servants are better, even though they no longer can afford nor perhaps would hire a male servant today. At the same time, as it becomes clear that many men have other options than domestic servitude, those who remain in this profession must explain it to themselves and to others.

BHADRALOK SOCIETY

The femininity and masculinity of servants is judged both by employers and the servants themselves against a complex backdrop of class deprivation, normative ideas of what it means to be female and male, and the actual practice of doing domestic work. Femininity and masculinity are not simply cultural ideal-types, but they are also created through practice; and it is through practice that they are weighed, judged, and transformed. Although there are many ways of being masculine, there is at every moment a masculinity of the powerful, which Robert W. Connell (1995) terms *hegemonic masculinity*. Hegemonic masculinity is historically, culturally, and materially specific, as are the masculinities of those excluded from the masterful configuration. Although Connell focuses on men of the metropole, how do we best understand hegemonic masculinity in Calcutta, especially the masculinity of men who have few cultural or economic resources? I examine first the particular construction of hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic gender ideology in Calcutta, before turning to the way employers and employees understand subaltern masculinities and femininities.

Bengali society today is dominated by the values of the *bhadralok* (which literally means respectable man or gentleman), most of whom belong to the three upper castes. As civil servants, teachers, doctors, lawyers, and descendants of absentee landlords, the *bhadralok*, who came into being in the late nineteenth century, were the first products of English education and the first to intellectually challenge British authority over Indians (Sarkar 1997). *Bhadralok* stand in opposition to both those who own the means of production (landlords and industrialists) and workers. They place a high value on men of letters, high culture, and the intellect. *Bhadralok* are opposed to either *chhotolok* or *gariblok*, who are poor or not 'civilized.' They do not do manual labor, although they

are associated with skilled and clerical work.⁸ Their values have exercised considerable influence on gender and class relations in contemporary Bengal, and they have done so, as Sumanta Banerjee (1989) has shown in his study of elite and popular culture in nineteenth century Calcutta, at the expense of lower-caste popular values.

The *bhadralok* are also defined by a distinctive masculinity.⁹ These men were not warriors and yet were instrumental in the creation of a nationalist project about the place of women and men in the world (Chatterjee 1989). Their gender ideology was primarily one of respectability. For the *bhadralok*—the gentle-man—this means not doing menial labor, being educated, having independence of means, and maintaining a genteel and cultured life. Hegemonic masculinity in Bengal has little to do with strength and virility.

For the *bhadramahila*—the gentle-woman—respectability is also defined by the absence of menial labor. In addition, a *bhadramahila* is protected, culturally refined, and responsible for the inner life of the family (Chatterjee 1989). The *bhadramahila*'s respectability comes not from independence but the luxury of its opposite. *Bhadramahila* have *lajja*—shame and modesty—attributes closely connected with virtue and respectability. As Himani Banerjee articulates it, “to be civilized is to have a sense of shame” (H. Banerjee 1995:81). It is the uncivilized woman (the poor woman or the low-caste woman) who does not have shame, is not protected, is sexually powerful and immoral, and is therefore a threat to the moral fabric of society.

Today's *bhadramahila* have to work outside the home (although women's labor force participation in Calcutta is exceedingly low, at 7.04%), but they are supposed to work in genteel professions such as teaching (*Census of India* 1991). Even when women do work, the assumption that the home is her real world is inviolable, as is the ideology of female dependence upon male kin (Standing 1984).

The employers of domestic workers with whom I spoke were all clearly *bhadralok*, while the employees, by definition, were not. Indeed, from the 1880s onwards, the ability to hire servants became a mark of *bhadralok* status (Standing 1984; Borthwick 1991).¹⁰ Given this society, how do we understand the relationship between hegemonic and subaltern femininities and masculinities?

EMPLOYERS ON THE MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD OF DOMESTICS

If you look at the skill content required in cooking—it is much higher than in, say, washing the dishes. Any old person can wash the dishes. The male psyche calls for a more skilled job. (Male employer, age 30)

I prefer male servants. But it's difficult to get them nowadays because they can get jobs elsewhere. You see, men, if they work for eight hours in a factory, they are free after that. If they work for me, they are not free. They are, after all, always at my beck and call. (Female employer, age 70)

In Calcutta, both women and men work as domestic servants, but they are not interchangeable. Men are the preferred workers but are increasingly hard to come by. In the imagination of employers, men are by nature less willing to do work that requires them to be at one's beck and call and are now discovering they don't have to be. Although this is considered an occupation with few skills, men are thought to possess more of the skills that the occupation requires. They are also thought to need skilled work more than women do. Their nature dictates that they be independent or *swadhin*, and social structure provides them more opportunities to be so.¹¹ Women, by contrast, are thought to be more accustomed to having to obey. They have access to fewer alternative opportunities, and although they are less desired, they are increasingly found in service jobs where they are on call for their employers and cannot return home at the end of the day.

The middle- and upper-middle-class employers we interviewed in Calcutta consistently revealed a preference for male servants, even though they were not quite as clear about their reasons for this preference.¹² Yet not all male servants were the same, and employers frequently contrasted the male servants of today with the male servants of yesterday. One spoke of the old family retainer who was fiercely protective of them. "He brought us up. He was our *ayah* and our nanny. He would not steal a penny. We knew he had a wife somewhere and some children, but he only visited them once a

year and never wanted to extend his visit. He was intensely loyal, and his life was with us. My brothers took the place of his children.” Visible here is a crucial attribute of the male servants of the past—unswerving loyalty and a willingness to put their employers’ families above their own. Today’s employees think only of their own families. A certain subservient loyalty, then, is the mark of ‘good’ subaltern masculinity.

Yet how do people reconcile male servant preference with a highly sex-segregated society like India’s? Male servants walk in and out of bedrooms, handle women’s clothes, and are present at intimate moments when other men could not be. We asked one elderly conservative woman, who preferred male servants, how she felt about men servants touching her clothes. Her response was immediate: “Doesn’t bother me; I’m perfectly happy. A servant isn’t really a man; a servant is a servant.” We asked her whether it struck her as odd that her male servant did work that her husband would never do or think it possible for men to do. She answered that “the male servant is doing this for money. My husband doesn’t think he has to do the work. He earns money and gives it to me—his wife. As far as he is concerned, either I will do the work or hire someone to do it. It’s up to me.” Although the male servant appears to embody a less valued masculinity by virtue of performing such menial and heavy labor, he is not always emasculated. Nobody wants a male servant in the house when there is a young daughter at home. In days past, male servants could serve employers with young daughters because women in the extended or joint families acted as guardians and buffers. In today’s nuclear families, however, the threat of the male servant is larger, precisely from the belief that he is not *bhadralok*. The fear of being alone in the house with a male servant, articulated by one widow, stems from her understanding of men of a lower class as having a brute strength, which employers otherwise want for heavy work.¹³ Thus the male servant is sometimes more than a man and often less. Ultimately, the masculinity of male servants coexists uneasily with the *bhadra* femininity and masculinity of his employers.

With smaller families and apartment living has grown an increased acceptance of and even preference for women servants. Male servants may be status enhancing, but women are cheaper and more trustworthy. Employers have complex emotions about hiring

women and girls. The fear of women's sexuality is such that there is an increasing drive to recruit young prepubescent girls from the village and to send them back when they reach puberty. Uppermost in all employers' minds when they hire a young woman is the risk of her potential sexuality, because unprotected women are perceived as sexually dangerous and therefore not respectable.

Issues of respectability and protection loom large in the hiring of women servants. In many families, the husbands rarely speak to the female servants, and the female servants seldom speak directly to them. The idea that women should be respected and respectable does not fit well with the hiring of female domestics. One man, who refuses to hire women servants, recalls a moment of extreme embarrassment in his youth when he was riding the bus. Calcutta buses have several seats reserved for "ladies." When there aren't enough women in the bus, those seats are occupied by men, who vacate the seat when a woman comes aboard. On one such occasion, this young man was sitting in the "ladies" seat and vacated the seat when a woman came on board, without glancing up at her face. After she sat down, they both realized to their mutual embarrassment that he had given up his seat for the servant of the house. Confusingly, the notice on the bus, "reserved for ladies," both does and does not apply to her.

No matter their present, often tentative, class location, the *bhadralok* have been weaned on feudal tales and have nostalgic fantasies of servants of the past.¹⁴ They consistently contrast today's male servants with male servants as they used to be—selfless and loyal, like fathers to them. Today's male servants are failures precisely because they have alternate aspirations and identities. They do women's work because they need the money, yet they are still men who do heavy work and are potential sexual predators. If male servants possessed *bhadralok* masculinity, they could not be good servants. It is precisely because they will serve and do menial work that the *bhadralok* can afford their masculinity.

Women servants are certainly women, but they are dangerous and endangered precisely because they are not protected, as a *bhadramahila* should be. Women servants complicate life for the *bhadralok*, for how is he to treat them? And yet, if female servants were not considered different, to whom would the *bhadralok* contrast his women? A female servant conscious of *bhadramahila* propriety would be of little use to her employers. Because she

cannot afford propriety and protection, the *bhadramahila* can.

SUBALTERN CONSCIOUSNESS

The women and men who work as domestic servants are constantly faced with expectations based on hegemonic *bhadralok* readings of their femininity or masculinity. My interviews with them consistently reveal that their work is the experiential world around which they construct gender. How does hegemony work in this context? Does it effectively reproduce social inequalities? Or does it fail to penetrate the daily culture of the dominated classes (Scott 1995)? Kapadia (1995) argues that ‘untouchable’ women do not accept upper-caste interpretations of their identity, while Kalpana Ram (1992) shows how Mukkuvar fishermen are able to use their relationship to the sea to carve out alternative identities for themselves. Paul Willis (1977), on the other hand, claims that social inequality reproduces itself despite and through resistance. I argue that female and male servants idealize and seek to attain some part of *bhadralok* gender ideology but not the whole of it. They modify it such that they can consider themselves to have achieved a desired femininity and masculinity, but they do not resist *bhadralok* gender ideology wholesale. *Bhadralok* constructions of domesticity and gender act as a powerful master discourse for these domestic servants.

Based on my interviews with servants, I isolate several core themes that servants articulate in evaluating their own gender identities. For male servants, the lack of *swadhinata*, or autonomy, underpins their sense of failure as men. Yet others counteract this sense of failure with their ability to sacrifice themselves in order to fulfill their responsibilities toward their families. For women, their inability to be protected marks their failure to be *bhadramahila*. Yet some assert their humanity and right to be loved and acknowledged in the face of this lack of protection. Although employers judge the masculinity of male servants in terms of their lack of *swadhinata* (which causes their servility) and their female servants because they are not protected, the servants instead foreground the concepts of male responsibility and female relationality as alternative ideologies which legitimate their masculinity or femininity.

In what follows, I present thematic stories from my

respondents, highlighting one life story for each theme in order to enable readers to understand each worker's choices and constraints in full context. This use of life histories provides depth and context to the interaction of individual agency and social structure which other methodologies do not illuminate as effectively (e.g., Passerini 1996; Laslett and Thorne 1997).

SUBALTERN FEMININITIES

As studies of working-class women in Bengal have shown, a woman who does not work in a genteel occupation is potentially either a victim or a loose woman (Fernandes 1997; Standing 1984). Given these choices, women domestic servants long for protection, actively seek it, or explain their misfortunes as due to its lack. Yet, protection is not the only thing they seek, the only standard by which they live. Despite, or perhaps because of, a life in which they have been less loved and nurtured than their brothers, and married off young, some women assert the right to live a more loved life, to be recognized and appreciated, even at the cost of protection.¹⁵ This desire for satisfying relationships, often construed as sexual licentiousness on the part of their *bhadralok* employers, may lead them to step outside the protection they otherwise hold so dear.

In search of protection

Although many young women in India migrate to the city in search of autonomy from their families, the search for protection seemed stronger than the search for autonomy in the women I interviewed.¹⁶ These women struggled to survive in a world that they saw as particularly hostile to unprotected women. Respectability was a powerful source of protection, and yet respectability was itself premised on already having protection. Thus, some women's pursuit of protection was relentless.

Mitali was born in Naihati and came to Calcutta to seek work after her father died of snakebite when she was eight years old. Her mother died when she was an infant. As an eight-year-old girl, she survived by living on the railroad tracks gathering and selling the coal that fell off the trains that thundered by. An extremely attractive woman today, she realized early that because her parents

were not there to protect her, she had to find a husband who would. Thus as a child, she says, she had two desires. The first was to see many films, and the second was to make sure she found a husband. The narrative of her life follows a search for protection.

She accepted her first job as a domestic servant simply because it offered her a roof, even though they paid her pennies a day. As Mitali learned some skills, she left that household for a series of jobs. As she went from house to house, husbands and young boys frequently tried to molest her—"they kept getting under my mosquito net," she says euphemistically. Finally, she convinced a woman employer to let her sleep on her kitchen floor, while continuing to work for other families. She recalls with appreciation her employer's anxiety when she returned late from a film one night. The relief that somebody was looking out for her more than compensated for her employer's wrath.

One particular story poignantly reveals what it means to be an unprotected poor woman in urban India. Mitali worked part-time in several houses, sweeping and mopping in one house, cooking in another. Her daily journey from one employer to the next took her past a street corner where a *goonda* (thug) hung out. This man, she says, wanted her for himself and threatened to kidnap her if she did not go to him willingly. She worried about it incessantly. What should she do? "I thought I should maybe give up working in that house so I didn't have to pass him, but I needed the money, so I couldn't stop." Then, however, she began wearing *sindur* on her head (the vermilion mark that is the most overt Hindu sign that a woman is married), in order to protect herself, and the plan worked. The man stopped harassing her immediately, because she was now under some other man's protection. The very success of this plan, however, worried her. "I thought, if people see me with *sindur*, they will think I am already married and then how will I really get married? I had no parents to marry me off, so I was already worried about that, and I was really anxious now." It was this anxiety that prompted her finally to give up the job in the house to which she could not travel without encountering the thug.

Subsequently, Mitali worked for an older woman who became very fond of her. She called this old lady "Ma" or 'Mother' and confesses that she frequently lied to her and went to the movies, much as a daughter would. "I earned 200 rupees, and I thought

‘Good! 100 for the movies and 100 to be saved for my marriage.’” But when she finally fell in love with a local night watchman, she turned to Ma for help. “I told Ma I have liked this boy, but how do I know he won’t take advantage of me and then abandon me?” The employer sent for the man and ensured that he agreed to marry her. She then accompanied them to the court to make sure the marriage was legalized. Mitali had effectively called upon precapitalist modes of loyalty and employer responsibility in order to enforce a contract that would guarantee her protection. Now that she has a son, she still works for Ma. She wishes she didn’t have to keep working and her husband weren’t so poor, but she considers that she has achieved what she had to, given her circumstances. “No one after all wants to make a living working in people’s houses. But that is fate. I was so worried that no one would marry me because my parents were dead, but that worked out.”

What strikes one about Mitali’s story is the single-mindedness with which she sought protection. If protection is ideally associated with passivity, a being-done-to rather than a doing, it takes on a whole new meaning here. The protection that Mitali sought was symbolic and institutional. She understood that being unprotected implied sexual availability and that this had little to do with her desires. She also understood that the only way for a woman to be considered respectable was to appear to be protected and that although a woman’s body is never really safe, it must, at least, be symbolically guarded.

Marriage is a formal system of protection, and parents are often eager to marry their daughters off when they feel incapable of protecting them further. When a young girl has no parents, her relatives are especially anxious to get her married. Thus Sonali (age forty-five), whose parents died when she was one year old, was married when she was eleven, becoming her husband’s third wife. She left her husband’s home as soon as she could and has been working for the same employer for the past twenty years. There are no alternative protections available for Sonali. Thus she stays with her employers despite their exploitation of her, their refusal to give her new clothes, and the sharp tongue of her mistress.

The failure of patriarchal protection is not limited to parents. Many women work as live-ins despite being married because they wish to escape the violence of their husbands. Rama, who is fifty-six, works to support her five grandchildren, left in her care by her

daughter's death. Although her daughter was clearly burned to death by her husband, Rama spoke of it as suicide. When I challenged her, she told me that she couldn't afford to point a finger at her son-in-law, for who would look after the children if he were in prison? If there was ever a reminder that the ideal of husbandly protection is often not a reality, this surely is it.

Husbands and families can't always protect them, so women workers have learned to protect themselves. They try to remain indoors as much as possible, and they strictly police their own behavior and the behavior of their daughters. Women domestic workers live in a cultural world where the respected and respectable, protected and protectable *bhadramahila* is the ideal. Yet, their world is filled with real and mythic predators—from their employers to their own husbands. Often orphaned young, unable to find a husband or married off to strangers, the workers I spoke with desperately hold on to respectability under circumstances and occupations that are calculated to rob them of it. Protection for these women is not only a cultural ideal but a very real need as well.

In search of recognition

Lakshmi (age forty) was born in Calcutta and is relatively new to domestic work, having done it for only the past seven years. She is married and thus technically has protection, but in her eyes, her marriage violates what she considers to be an essential principle of humanity—the right to be loved. Although Lakshmi knew that I was interested in her life as a domestic worker, she did not wait for me to ask the first question. As soon as we sat down she initiated the conversation by talking to me about her marriage. “I married by choice” were her first words. “I married by choice despite resistance from my family. My uncles and aunts asked me repeatedly, ‘Lakshmi, are you sure, are you absolutely sure,’ but I said I was.” Her parents had died when she was young, and she was raised by affectionate and well-meaning relatives. However, her life was not easy after marriage. Her husband sold goods out of a roadside stall, and they could not make ends meet. Once she became pregnant, she started to cook for a family but could not sustain it because of her pregnancy. She tried her hand at several other jobs—piece-rate sewing, making and selling dung patties, and so on. That was still

not enough to sustain her *sansar* (family, or world). As babies were born, she continued to try various ways to make ends meet. She initiated a move which helped her husband's store, by buying cooking oil at wholesale prices and selling it retail. She recalls with pride how she was so scared to get on a bus that she would clutch her husband's shirt as they got on and off the bus. Now, however, she has figured out which the best places are and can manage to bring back 100 liters of oil on her own.

But even as she talks with pride about her new confidence and abilities, she returns continually to her relationship with her husband and to her realization that he never loved her as she thought he did. She repeats the questions her relatives asked her twenty years ago—"Are you sure, Lakshmi? Are you absolutely sure?"—to emphasize to me just how wrong she had been. For the love he had, she has now concluded, was for the dowry he thought she would bring. She suspects that he felt cheated when she came to him empty-handed. What else can explain her inability to win his love or his refusal to give her the *adhikar* (right) to make demands on him. He always wants her subordinated (*parajito*, or defeated) to him. "So for these few years now, I have been doing this *ayah* (nanny) work," she says. It is as if this work she does is a result of his not loving her.

Lakshmi returns repeatedly to the subject of her husband's failure to love and appreciate her, his jealousy and possessiveness, and his will to dominate. The issue that brings tears to her eyes is that he has never given her a sari, not even for the religious festivals.

A lady gave me a watch the other day. She said her husband had given it to her and that he had given her another watch before that. Do you know, he also buys all her saris for her! When she told me that, I went home and cried that night and thought: "How fortunate she is, to have the love of her husband, a husband who loves enough to buy her these things." Had my husband bought me so much as a blouse-piece, I would be the happiest woman.

"What do you want from your future?" I ask. She is silent for a

moment, and then says, "Just some love. There is much I did not understand when I was younger. One can't live without love. Just like a plant or a tree, one withers and dies. There is a man who loves me now and does a lot for me, but he is not my husband." She looks away and then turns to me again. "But tell me this, am I wrong to accept love from someone else when my husband has refused it to me for so long? If a thief steals, are you going to beat him up or find out what the circumstances were that led him to commit this act?"

What she means by "love" is many things. Love represents, on the one hand, a fulfillment of all that is missing; and on the other, it represents responsibility, recognition, and appreciation. It is her husband's failure to give her recognition that leaves her feeling unfulfilled. It is the absence of his "confirming response," as Jessica Benjamin would say, and the absence of his acknowledgment that she is important to him or affects him, that Lakshmi finds unbearable (Benjamin 1995:33). Because he has never shown her that she matters to him, he has lost the right to keep her. The minute her duties toward her daughters are fulfilled (i.e., they are married), she says, she will leave her husband. She will move into the home of her employer's daughter and work as a live-in. If her husband gives her no love, at least her employer and her family do. She does not expect the same sort of love from her husband as from an employer. However, her employers love her as employers can, while her husband does not love her as husbands could or should.¹⁷ Lakshmi will, in other words, give up a culturally accepted form of protection, under these conditions.

Economic logic would not predict a move from live-out to live-in work. Most servants want nothing more than to be able to move out of their employers' homes and out from their power twenty-four hours a day; however, Lakshmi's search for a satisfying relationship propels her in a different direction. Her employer appreciates her and her abilities, but her husband does not.

When she asked me whether I thought she was wrong to accept love from a man who was not her husband, she was asking me to understand the conditions under which she had come to this decision. She had come to a moral position based on her husband's failure to give her the affection and recognition which should have been her right. It was important to Lakshmi that I think of her decision in that light and not think of her as a woman committing

adultery. She seeks to give her decision respectability by assuring me that the man who loves her has “no dirtiness in him”—he does not simply want sex from her, and he has given her two blouses for her saris. She recognizes and has every intention of fulfilling her responsibility toward her children, but she no longer recognizes her obligation toward her husband. She is willing to defy his patriarchal authority, but she will do so by opting for a benevolent paternalistic or maternalistic relationship with her employer. Here domestic service provides Lakshmi with the opportunity to trade protections—a failed one for one that just might work. It could be argued that Lakshmi’s actions were in fact an assertion of an alternative, non-*bhadramahila* morality, but I suggest that her deliberate desexualization of her relationship with her lover indicates that she is in fact steeped in that morality.

Lakshmi is not alone in emphasizing her employer’s affection for her. The search for a decent, caring relationship is often uppermost in women servants’ minds, and when they don’t find it with their husbands, some turn to their employers, often pulling their female employers into their lives. Pushpa recalled her first employers with great fondness: “I was fortunate when I worked for them. I was so young and irresponsible, but they were a good and loving family.” Many of these women have been denied parental love and often the love of a husband. They long therefore not just for a romantic love but also for the parent-like figure that they never had.

And yet, the failure to win one’s husband’s love is a bitter pill to swallow. “What does it matter what work I do when my own husband does not love me,” says one woman. And another says: “I don’t like this work. What will it take for me to be free from this life? If my husband were better, then life would be tolerable. I don’t get love from anybody—not parents and not my husband. And now my children resent me because I am not there for them.” In many of these women’s stories, the hostile encounters they describe with their employers have much less emotion in them than the encounters with those who are supposed to love them. In their already deprived lives, they are unwilling to give up the right to be loved.

Manisha Roy (1972) has documented the way that upper-middle-class Bengali women are almost schooled in romantic fantasy and expectation, taught to daydream about the men they will

one day marry (often a stranger they barely know). These fantasies are not restricted to women of the upper classes. Indeed, through novels, folktales, folk songs, television, and films, Indian women of all classes are steeped in a culture of longing.¹⁸ These desires do not belong simply to the realm of unattainable fantasy for poor women. Lakshmi, for one, has transformed the desire to be loved into a source of strength. She has made it her right, transformed it into a requirement for humanity, and can therefore use the violation of this right as a justification for her subsequent actions. She uses her employment as a lever to enable her to leave her marriage, just as Mitali used her employment to enter it. If Mitali pursued protection because she had never had it, Lakshmi can walk away from it because the protection of marriage costs too much for her.

SUBALTERN MASCULINITIES

If the essence of domestic service is subservience, if it is less about the completion of tasks than about being at the beck and call of the employer, then it is also a job that runs counter to hegemonic ideas of masculinity, both *bhadralok* and other (Rubbo and Taussig 1983:2-23). There is a clear awareness on the part of male domestics that this is a bad job. Given the recent transition to a majority female occupation, there is also regret among some in the older generation of male servants that the job is being progressively de-skilled and is therefore even less desirable for men than it previously was (Hansen 1992). Further, those men who work as domestics today have failed to find a better job when popular opinion maintains that men can easily find less demeaning jobs. Given the increasing association of women with this already low-prestige occupation, how do male domestics manage their gender identity? How do they negotiate their daily presence in a space that is demarcated for women?

When the ideal is *bhadralok* society, male domestic workers—men who work as cooks, factotums, and sweepers—have failed to be men on several counts. *Bhadralok* are men of culture and education, and they do white collar jobs. If they are successful, they are professionals and if unsuccessful, clerks, but *bhadralok* never work with their hands. Because of the caste system, many forms of menial labor are steadfastly associated with servitude. In addition,

bhadralok have jobs which allow them to be patriarchs of their homes at the end of the work day. For live-in male domestics, this is not a possibility. So it is that, in the domestic workers' eyes, what prevents them from being men of the *bhadralok* classes is both that they do menial work and that they do dependent (*paradhin*), not independent (*swadhin*), work. Finally, *bhadralok* earn enough to support an establishment, so their wives can remain protected and not have to work.

These are standards few working-class men can live up to. Factory work, which meets two out of the three criteria, is the prized working-class job, but it is not easy to find. There are many informal-sector jobs that allow men to be more *swadhin*, but they do not provide security. There is no other job that fails to meet the first two criteria as profoundly as domestic service, and thus the men engaged in this work are often bitter and frustrated with themselves.

Most men who work as domestic servants cannot afford to have wives who do not work. However, some men redefine masculinity such that even if a man is not the sole support of his family, he is a good man if he is financially responsible. It is a masculinity of duty, both filial and paternal, a masculinity that resists the image of the failed and ineffective man. By being financially responsible for the family, by being, in other words, a 'good family man,' these men defy the images that the *bhadralok* have of the *chhotolok* class. Unlike the good subaltern of the past, these men do not put their employers' families first; they swear undying loyalty not to the families of their employers, but to their own.

Swadhin versus paradhin work

We are not free, and therefore we are not men.
(Arun)

Arun is the oldest domestic servant in his apartment building. Although he has worked with the same family for over twenty years as their cook, they pay him little, and he has little affection for his employers. When, fresh from interviewing women domestic workers, I ask him if his employers are fond of him, he shrugs. "Sure, but not enough to give me more money or new clothes, or even money for medicines when I am sick!"

Arun was the youngest son of eight children, born in the district of Medinipur to poor farmers who had a little land themselves but had to farm other people's land to make ends meet. Because he was the youngest, he was at least able to study until the fourth grade. Just as Lakshmi was more interested in talking to me about her marriage than her work, Arun wanted to tell me about his childhood and adolescence, when his life was really worth living. Arun told me about life in the village (which he left when he was fourteen) and about the time he was a soldier in the underground struggle for Indian independence. His tired eyes and lined face brightened as he described his participation in the resistance against the British, the cooperation of the neighboring villagers together, and the conch-shell alarm blowing when British soldiers came looking for them. After several years of guerilla warfare, his father, increasingly afraid for his son's safety, helped him escape to Calcutta where he joined his older brother. Arun's summary of the next fifty years of his life is an account of his failure to keep a succession of jobs through lack of skill, illness, or sheer bad luck. Finally, he began work as a cook. Today, twenty-six years later, he still works for the same family.

I suppose I am OK here. I say sometimes that I will leave. They [the employers] say, where will you go, you have no other skills? Do what you can here. And they are right. As I grow older, they will forgive me if I do less than acceptable work. But who else will forgive me? Sometimes, if I forget to put salt in the food, they still eat it. Others won't let me get away with it.

He believes, as his employers have repeatedly told him, that he does not have the ability to find a less demeaning job. His lack of skill keeps him dependent, and his dependence on this particular family has grown in the years he has been with them. He knows that his mind and body have slowed down. Thus, today, he dare not leave. Arun's narration of his participation in the struggle for Indian independence contrasts particularly with his assessment of the lack of freedom in his later life. He realizes that his sons are not going to support him when he can no longer work.

My sons are useless. They will give me nothing.
 So I have decided what will happen to me when I
 am old. I will kill myself. I have lived my life with
 my head bowed, but I will not bow my head at the
 end of my life. I have lived *paradhin*, but I will
 take some sleeping pills and that will be the end of
 it.

Arun can hope only to die like a man—freely and independently.

Hegemonic masculinity is unkind to those who fail to pass muster. Almost without exception the men with whom I spoke blamed themselves for not attaining the status of an independent man. The word *paradhin* is usually applied to subjected peoples (as India was *paradhin* under the British). There was no male domestic servant who did not use this word, which confirms the degree of subservience and lack of control this work implies. There seems, at least on this ground, to be agreement between employer and male servant about the nature of this work and its effect on men. This is not a job for adult and independent men, because they have to ask permission to go out for an hour and are often closely monitored and ultimately because they are dependent on the employer's charity and whims. One man told me how he had served his former employer well and was stunned when he was left with nothing when his employer moved to another city, his expectations of feudal relations of servitude betrayed.

Raghu, a young servant in his thirties who originally came to Calcutta as an adventure, has been working as a domestic for several years now. Although he didn't think doing domestic work was a problem when he was single, he believes this work should not be done after one is married. Yet this presents a no-win situation. On the one hand, a man doesn't want to look *paradhin* to his wife. On the other hand, he needs security more once he has a family. His job is *paradhin*, but it seems secure; he struggles to maintain his self-respect while doing it. For example, he refuses to accept old clothes from his employer and so maintains some semblance of being *swadhin*.

Because the key to the *swadhin bhadralok* world is education, the men voice regret at not achieving enough education to have a clerical job. Achin, whose father frequently abandoned his family

for months at a time, speaks bitterly about begging his father to allow him and his brother to go to school, and about his refusal to do so. Shibu, who has two daughters, constantly worries about their future, and considers himself weak because his wife has to work.

There is shame involved in not being independent as well as not being able to support one's family. Some male servants regret that their wives have to work, and some lie to their in-laws about their employment. Achin's in-laws, for example, do not know that their daughter works outside the home and they think he is a chauffeur—a job that has more dignity and more independence. Chauffeurs (or drivers, as they are called in India) occupy an intermediary space between *paradhin* and *swadhin* work. They are skilled, and they work outside the home. He knows that his daughter tells her friends that he is a chauffeur as well. He is embarrassed, but he understands his daughter's need to tell her friends her father does more *bhadra* (civilized) work than he does.

On responsibility and sacrifice

Not all male servants accept that they are less than men because they do *paradhin* work and because their wives work. Rather than accepting failure by the standards of upper-caste Bengali *bhadralok* masculinity, Kamal, and others like him, actively counter the disparagement of their work and life by redefining the notion of a good man.

About forty years of age, Kamal has been working for the same family for over twenty years. When his male employer died, the widow became increasingly dependent on him. Today, he says, he does everything from washing dishes to bank-related errands. His wife works part-time for the same family. He earns well compared with the other male domestics I spoke with, and his employer helps his daughter with her homework in her apartment. He appeared both confident and resigned and spoke calmly about the decisions he had made about his life. "What does it matter what work I do as long as I can carry out my responsibilities to my family? There is no good work or bad work, just well paid work and badly paid work." Here he effectively bypasses the caste system and the *bhadralok* disparagement of menial labor. What matters is not the substance of the work but whether it enables one to put food on

the table. Kamal thus sees himself as the worker of capitalism, the contractual worker.

When I asked him what troubled him most about his life, he quickly responded that he didn't feel troubled.

Many think "there is no dignity in this work." I don't have that attitude at all. If I can do it well and earn enough to support my family, then I am willing to do anything ... I don't agree that there is a difference between this work and others. Some feel revulsion (*ghenna*) that a man should do "domestic work" but not me. People think sweeping, mopping, and washing dishes are women's work. But why shouldn't all people do everything? I find that 99 out of 100 people feel *ghenna*, but I am not like this.

Well aware that the image of men doing women's work stirs feelings of revulsion in many people, he steadfastly refuses to participate in a culture of shame. Instead, he has made the idea of supporting his family central to his sense of self.

Kamal knows full well that his is not *swadhin* work and that he is dependent on his employer. However, he has schooled himself to react not as a man who is being made to serve but as a man who has a responsibility toward his family who depend on him, and who therefore controls traditionally male reflexes. Many male servants spoke wistfully about their desire to be drivers, and regretted their continued domestic work, but Kamal was firm about his choices. As a father, he feels that his daughter is safer in the apartment building where he works than she would be in the slum in which they would otherwise live. Without delusion and with some resignation, Kamal has thought carefully about his life circumstances. He is socially ambitious but knows that the most likely candidate to escape this life is not himself or his wife, but their daughter. He urges her to be serious about her studies and scrapes together money for her dance lessons. He compares himself with other fathers in the building and knows that he is a better father than most, despite his financial constraints. Employers in the apartment building talk about his daughter with some admiration, and he sees in their eyes an expectation that she will make it. That is Kamal's source of pride.

He is a good man because he has succeeded in being a good father. Indeed, by a sleight of hand, he manages to conflate fatherhood with manhood.

For several male domestics, the feeling of pride comes from having done their duty. By doing *paradhin* work, they have ensured that nobody else in their family ever will again. Dipu says: "I have been working since I was twelve not as *swadhin*, but in others' houses. Naturally I have had to take the employers' wrath. I told my sons that as long as I am alive, they can study and then could get [white collar jobs]. They want it and I want it for them. I do not want that my son should work in your house." His sons are in college, his brothers work in the local government offices, and his daughter is married. He was able to pay for funeral ceremonies after his father died, and he sends money home to his mother.

Thus the admirable man sacrifices his masculinity in order to ensure the survival of his charges. Although the warrior who sacrifices his life so his people may live is considered a man and a hero, one who lives to ensure that his people survive is commonly not. But Kamal, Dipu, and others like them consider what they have done heroic. They have swallowed their pride and the shame of their *paradhin* work so that their families will not tread that path. Unlike the male servants of the past, they sacrifice their lives not for their employers' families but for their own.

CONCLUSION

The women and men whose life stories appear here often work twelve- to sixteen-hour days, cooking and cleaning, sweeping and mopping, dusting twice a day to remove the layers of dust that cover every item of furniture in the tropics, running errands, polishing silver, grinding spices, washing clothes by hand, wringing them out to dry, and taking care of other people's children while praying that their own will be spared this life. They are the workers that the lives of the middle classes are built on, yet they are the workers that no one wants to be.

I have argued in this chapter that domestic workers judge themselves by the extent to which they have achieved or failed to achieve hegemonic gender norms. Domestic work in Calcutta, and indeed, in India, is individualized, unorganized, and made familial.

Unions are either not interested in organizing these workers or give up after initial attempts, because the dispersed workplaces make collective action difficult. This is particularly true of those who do live-in work. Given this, and the extreme stigmatization of this occupation, it is not surprising that these domestic workers minimize their identities as workers and instead think of themselves as women and men, mothers and fathers, wives and husbands, daughters and sons. These are not, however, the only alternate identities that domestic servants can choose. In other parts of India, where there are powerful political parties and organizations representing lower castes (such as in the state of Bihar), domestic workers could make their caste identities primary. In Calcutta, however, domestic workers, by and large, lack caste or class representation.

I have also argued that although the workers do focus on gendered identities, it would be a mistake to romanticize these constructions as resistance, for they do not invent the content of these identities as they please. Their identities are constituted through their class location, the work they do, and their particular relationship to a domestic space, which is also their place of work. Unlike the Mukkuvar fishermen and women, or factory workers, live-in domestic workers have little autonomous space outside *bhadralok* culture (Ram 1992). Unlike part-time workers, they have no homes to which to return at the end of the day. They are therefore materially and discursively constrained within a universe that is not of their own making.

Yet, if there is a common thread between Mitali's, Lakshmi's, and Kamal's narratives, it lies in the way in which they represent themselves. None has had the chance to tell "their story" before this, and they are not interested in a story of victimhood, although it is against that backdrop that they want others to understand their tales. They want their agency, their ability to exercise choice in the midst of lives usually bereft of choice, to be appreciated. As I return to my question then, I choose neither structure nor agency but, rather, end with partial failures, defeats, and victories.

Bhadralok society can idealize particular notions of femininity and masculinity precisely because the subaltern classes cannot attain them; however, live-in domestic workers struggle with these ideals and try to fit their lives within them. Regardless of whether they ultimately accept or reject the *bhadralok* evaluation of

themselves, they judge their lives by the very ideals, which were designed to be out of their reach. Yet they also reach out to ideas culled from popular discourse and classic myth—ideas of love and responsibility. They hold on to ideas about womanhood and manhood that allow them hope and pride, which *bhadralok* ideology does not do. And in this process, female and male domestic workers are simultaneously defeated by and partially victorious over hegemonic gender ideologies.

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NOTES

¹ Glenn (1986) is a powerful exception. More recently, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997) address the ways in which migrant domestic workers try to mother their children from afar.

² In the late nineteenth century in Colonial Bengal, the Bengali elite lost their power over their land and had to turn increasingly to professional, administrative, and clerical employment. See Sinha (1995) and Sarkar (1997).

³ Of the fifteen servants, eight are women and seven are men. They are all first-generation domestic workers, who came to Calcutta from the rural areas of Bengal either because their land could not sustain them or, in the case of the women, because they were married. Most are lower-caste, two are Brahmin (a married couple), and one man is Christian. Three women are separated from their husbands, one is widowed, and the others are married. All the men are married, although two do not live with their wives. They range in age from thirty to sixty-six and have been working between seven

and thirty years.

The employers are primarily upper-middle-class, upper-caste, and Bengali. They live in old bungalows and apartment buildings and work in the corporate world and the professions. The youngest employer was thirty and the oldest, eighty. All of them grew up with servants, and none has been without servants for a long stretch of time. All interviews were open-ended conversations. The interviews with employers were conducted jointly by Seemin Qayum (from the University of London) and myself and lasted from one to four hours, with the average being two and a half hours.

I interviewed live-in workers at the sites they chose, usually their 'quarters' in the apartment buildings of their employers. It was more difficult to interview the workers than employers for several reasons. Because they are live-in workers, they are constantly at the beck and call of their employers and have little time to spare. Most workers have between one and three hours off in the afternoon. This is the time they use to shower, eat their lunch, sleep, or do their own errands. They were rarely free at night before 10 p.m. Thus, I often started conversations in the afternoon and completed them at night. Worker interviews were conducted in Bengali.

Why would domestic servants agree to speak with me, since I am clearly of the employer class? There is no simple answer to this question. I entered the 'field' with the help of a domestic servant I have known and talked with for many years. He introduced me to my first three interviewees who, in turn, led me to others. Because I was recommended to them by people they trusted, were they initially more open to me? Or was it the substance of the questions that convinced them that I was safe? Perhaps it is the intensity of their desire to speak and the lack of opportunity to do so that made the barriers fall. Although most interviews with employees started out slowly, soon I could barely keep up with note taking, as the workers, especially the women, spilled out their life stories. One woman said that my intentions were good, but the people who really needed to read my book (such as her employer) would not. "You see," she said, "They probably think 'Why would anyone write a book about those people?' Such people have no conscience. Can you really reach them?"

⁴ Indeed, despite the fact that their own data show that there are many thousands of male domestic servants in India, a study sponsored by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI)

declares that “in Indian tradition, females are most often involved in domestic chores” and claims that in most cases employers prefer female servants because of the idea that women are more “submissive, polite, and loyal” (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India 1980:31).

⁵ Domestic servants have historically been male in Africa. See Hansen (1992).

⁶ As Ruth Milkman and her colleagues have persuasively argued, “a crucial determinant of the extent of employment in paid domestic labor in a given location is the degree of economic inequality there” (Milkman, Reese, and Roth 1998).

⁷ However, this is a vastly undercounted number because the census includes only maids and other house cleaners (category 531) but not cooks, *ayahs* (nannies), or any other category of domestic worker. In addition to women and men, this class comprises thousands of children, both girls and boys, who work as domestic servants, whom the Census leaves out. According to a study commissioned by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI), 16.65% of the domestic servants interviewed were under the age of fifteen (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India 1980:36).

⁸ For other writings on the *bhadralok*, see Sumanta Banerjee (1989) and Ray (1988).

⁹ Perhaps because they resisted the British through the intellect rather than the sword, the *bhadralok* were defined by the British as effete, the opposite of both the British gentleman and the loyal Pathan warriors. This charge of effeminacy applied specifically to the Bengali elite and not to Bengali workers or peasants (Sinha 1995:16). The British wondered at these “soft-bodied little people” who could nonetheless compete successfully against the British in the civil service exams and become the salaried workers, professionals, and civil servants that form the core of the Bengali postcolonial elite (Rosselli 1980:86).

¹⁰ For a fascinating study of the advice given to middle-class women hiring servants at the turn of the century, see Swapna Banerjee (1996).

¹¹ *Swadhinata* here refers to a specific relationship to work. It is not so much the fact that one works for someone else that prevents one from being *swadhin*. People who work in offices do work for someone else. But, rather, it is the fact of having to be on call all

day and be unable to go home at the end of the day, which makes one *paradhin* (unfree). While both employers and servants use this word, the servants use it repeatedly, as we shall see.

¹² Hansen (1992) reports a similar dynamic in Zambia. In Bujra's (1992) study of Tanzania, only two out of the sixty employers interviewed thought women were better servants.

¹³ Bengali landlords, for example, frequently used lower-caste men to fight off rivals and frighten tenants. See Rosselli (1980).

¹⁴ I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who reminded me of this point.

¹⁵ Psychologist Sudhir Kakar concludes, following his interviews with two working-class women in Delhi, that "despite their many hardships, there is nothing to dim the luminosity of their romantic longings" (Kakar 1996:71). I would argue that it is not just romantic love to which they cling but rather to the idea of being acknowledged, recognized, and appreciated.

¹⁶ The literature on domestic workers in Latin America emphasizes young women's desire for autonomy as well. See Jelin (1977).

¹⁷ Lakshmi uses the same Bengali word *bhalobasha* to refer to the affections of her employer and husband.

¹⁸ See, for example, *Hum Aapke Kaun* (Who Am I to You?) and *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (The Gallant One Will Win the Bride), two of the most popular Hindi films in recent years.

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7

THE AESTHETICS OF DOMINATION: CLASS, CULTURE, AND THE LIVES OF DOMESTIC WORKERS IN RIO DE JANEIRO

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*This chapter is an abbreviated version of a much longer chapter published in my book *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown* (University of California Press, 2003). I want to thank Dr. Ved Vatak for his inspiring lineage of writings about social justice in India and in the Indian diaspora. When I read Dr. Vatak's work for the first time after the original publication of this chapter, I found provocative parallels between my own research and his interests, overlapping in their attention to social class, inequality, and humor. While the context of my work is in Latin America and among the marginalized classes of urban Rio de Janeiro, I hope that readers will indeed see linkages between the ideas I express here and those of Dr. Vatak's oeuvre.*

And we do not yet know whether cultural life can survive the disappearance of domestic servants.

Alain Besançon, *Etre russe au XIXe siècle*
(Besançon 1974, cited in Bourdieu 1984)

One afternoon in May of 1995, during a return visit to Rio de Janeiro, I found myself with Glória and her daughter Soneca in the

From *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown*. Copyright © 2003, University of California Press.

kitchen of her new employer, “*Dona*¹ Beth,” a fifty-ish middle-class woman for whom Glória began working a year earlier. Beth’s kitchen was typical of the older apartment buildings in the *Zona Sul* that had been built earlier in the century; it was small with not much room for more than just one person to move about comfortably in, but it had all of the modern amenities. In Beth’s well-stocked cabinets, there were many international products acquired during trips to Europe and the United States or bought in the fine foods section of certain chic Rio groceries. These were the items that Glória, who was familiar with the preparation of a wide range of Brazilian food products, would not immediately recognize and would therefore not know what to do with. Glória would usually ask Soneca, if she were accompanying her, to help her read some of the preparation instructions. A few of the packages were in English and so I was put to good use that day, helping Glória and Soneca take stock of all the ingredients stored in the cabinets. While explaining the preparation instructions for a falafel mixture, it suddenly occurred to Glória that the presence of her two helpers could be put to a much greater use. Glória commented that Beth had looked rather disturbed before leaving for work that morning, and she felt it was due to the contents of a letter *Dona* Beth had recently received and over which she seemed to still be preoccupied. Glória, worried about the emotional state of her *patroa* (boss, employer),² abruptly moved toward the desk where she had seen *Dona* Beth place the letter, and pulled it out. She then asked Soneca to read it out loud. Despite my protests concerning the personal nature of other people’s mail, Glória was quick to convince both of us that her knowing what was upsetting *Dona* Beth would ultimately be beneficial to everyone. Glória had already become an important confidante of *Dona* Beth, and her confidence in this role overruled any of my concerns about privacy.

The letter, from Beth’s daughter, a woman in her early twenties who was attending university abroad, read as a typical middle- or upper-class girl’s coming of age note; here was a daughter relating to her mother how excited and interested she was by her studies abroad and how, at the same time, she realized that being far away from her mother and family was liberating in terms of her own personal growth and development as a professional. At

one point in the letter, Beth's daughter states that, in short, she loves her mother, but would like more independence from her.

It was at this point in Soneca's reading of the letter that Glória waved at her to stop and entered into one of her hearty and uncontrollable bouts of laughter—which are indeed contagious. After I had joined Glória in her fit of laughter that left us all at the point of tears, I finally ascertained that Glória (and Soneca) found the letter to be extremely funny because *she* (Glória) wants to be independent from her *own* daughters, and yet she sees the irony in *Dona* Beth being upset by this declaration from her own child. Glória often felt as if she wanted to escape the endless responsibility of supporting so many children, most of whom were not fully convinced of the importance of school—they instead felt the pressure to work and earn money. I know that some of Glória's daughters found it extremely difficult to secure decently paying working-class jobs because of their observable racial and class characteristics, a combination that worked against them. Glória's daughters suffered doubly in an economy that rewards Afro-Brazilian women the absolute lowest pay within the highly skewed and unequal Brazilian economy (Lovell 2000). Domestic work, one of the few employment opportunities readily accessible to them, is distinguished by the fact that it is both one of the lowest paying jobs available and is filled disproportionately by Afro-Brazilian women. Many jobs required a "*boa aparência*," which literally means a 'good appearance,' but which is more often a thinly disguised discriminatory phrase placed or implied in job advertisements and meant to discourage dark-skinned people from applying.

Only recently, Glória had gone 'solo'; she left her own shack with her young teenage and pre-teen children still living there and had moved a few miles away, in with her lover at the time, Mauro. Despite the fact that Glória had raised several older children who now had independent lives of their own, she still had several others who depended on her. And even though this dependence wasn't as great as it once was—she was able to leave her own shack to move in with Mauro—she was still the sole provider for these children. Glória joked about her own situation as one where she, the mother, was "running away from home," running away from the responsibilities of having so many children to care for. Glória still strongly ruled her own household from afar and spent all of her

hard-earned money to sustain them, but she had removed herself from tasks such as cooking, laundry, and daily cleaning. By moving out, she forced the children, especially the young girls, to do those things for themselves and the other younger children still at home. Unlike *Dona Beth*, who would have liked to keep her daughter near her for as long as possible, Glória imagined herself as that person who would have liked to witness her children becoming independent. All of this made Glória and Soneca laugh at the absurdity of *Dona Beth*'s tears shed earlier that same day.

THE STRUGGLE TO EARN A LIVING WAGE

Dona Beth offered to pay Glória approximately five minimum wages per month³ for a six day work week if Glória would agree to work as her exclusive *empregada* (domestic worker). Having accepted Beth's extraordinary offer—most domestic workers earned only one minimum salary—Glória's life and that of her children had transformed. By 1995, she was in a much stronger financial situation than when I had originally met her back in 1991. Glória's life in the early 1990s would be best characterized as having been a slave to feeding both her own and her adopted children.⁴ She would wake up every day at 5:30 or so and order one of the younger boys to go out to the bakery and pick up some soft white bread, baguette style. In the meantime, she would get up and start making a large pot of heavily sweetened coffee for everyone to share. She would gather up and place the bedding outside on the clothes-line to air out, fold up the pieces of foam used for mattresses and place them in a corner, and do a quick morning sweep of the shack. By the time the bread arrived, Glória was passing out half-full glasses of hot, sweet coffee, and each child was allowed to politely pull off a piece of bread for him or herself. Glória often was out the door at about this time, running to the bus-stop even before the morning breakfast ritual was completed. She worked fourteen or fifteen hour-long days and spent one or two hours everyday travelling, often changing buses two or three times to reach each employer's home.

In the early 1990s, Glória would travel each day of the week to a different employer's home and do the heavy-duty cleaning as well as a fair amount of cooking. This arrangement, cleaning houses on a daily basis, is known as that of a *faxineira* (heavy-duty day-

cleaner). Because she preferred to live at home and work for a variety of clients in this manner, nobody signed her *carteira de trabalho*,⁵ or work card. Although none of them employed her exclusively at the time, all of them expected that, in addition to normal cleaning duties (clean entire apartment, change bedding and do laundry), Glória would cook and freeze food for them, even if she only worked one day a week in their homes.

I accompanied Glória on many of these fourteen-hour-long work days, and was impressed by her efficiency and competence. Each household presented an exhausting and strenuous array of tasks. She would arrive at the employer's home and immediately change into her comfortable cleaning clothes. Then, she would clean the bathrooms and the kitchen, including the usual large pile of dishes left from several days worth of meals. She would change the bedding, gather up dirty laundry, get a wash going, then begin sweeping or vacuuming the rooms of the apartment. If the floors needed waxing, she would get on her hands and knees to apply the strong-smelling wax, allowing the greasy circles to dry into a thick filmy layer, and later returning to remove that sticky layer and then buff the floor by hand with a dry cloth. She would take a break by looking into the refrigerator and the freezer for what was available to cook with, and then descend to the markets on the street to buy any ingredients that might be lacking. Usually, the entire afternoon was devoted to cooking three or four main dishes and an equal number of side dishes, and then finally, to ironing and folding clothes. By the time Glória left an apartment, every piece of glass and silver was shining, clothes were cleaned and ironed and put back in their closets, floors were slippery from their new coat of wax, and the refrigerator was filled with cooked foods, meals that would last for a number of days.

Glória often would not leave her employer's home until 6:00 or 7:00 in the evening; she would then make her way downtown to the bus terminal—a ride of a short distance that could easily take longer than an hour during Rio's rush-hour traffic. Sometimes, before leaving the *Zona Sul* and partially as a strategy to avoid super-crowding on the buses during peak hours, she would meet up with a friend to have a few beers in a neighborhood bar before getting on the bus. But usually she would get a bus to the terminal and then wait to catch a bus back to *Felicidade Eterna*, a ride that

often meant standing for hours until the bus finally pulled off at her stop on the side of the highway near the faux Indian façade of a divey motel known as the “Hotel Apache.” (Motels such as the Apache are places where couples seeking brief, sometimes illicit sexual encounters can find privacy, and so each time I had to yell the name as “my stop,” I felt a guilty delight.) Glória rarely arrived home to *Felicidade Eterna* before 9:00 or 10:00 in the evening. Transportation time and its costliness ate into her earnings. Often she attempted to skimp by choosing to travel by the slower, less comfortable, but also less costly, buses to and from the *Zona Sul*, and what she lost in precious time, she gained in disposable income that she could then use to buy more food for her family or an occasional beer for herself. At one point in 1992, the express bus cost five *cruzeiros*,⁶ while the slower and more meandering bus cost only two. After this gruelling ride home, Glória often then had to clean up around her own house. Late at night, exhausted and hungry, she would sometimes fry a fish or two and drink a beer before settling in to go to sleep.

From Glória’s perspective, there had been some distinct advantages to this work routine, where payment was made on a daily basis by each different employer. Glória’s tight economic situation—with so many mouths to feed each day—was highly compatible with this arrangement. Each day provided just barely enough money for her to shop in small amounts and to provide for her household directly from that day’s work. If she missed a day of work due to some emergency at home, she could make up the work by doing two apartments in a day, working from early in the morning until late in the evening and combining two days of work into one long one.

In 1992, I calculated that Glória was earning somewhere around six dollars⁷ a day. Approximately one dollar was spent on the round-trip transport, so that, by the end of the day, she came home with an average of five dollars. This amount barely provided enough to sustain all of the children that depended on her. Glória’s clients at this time were paying her the average rate or better for daily *faxineira* work, and many (although not all) belonged to a large network of AIDS activists, many of whom were gay men and lesbian women. Glória often humorously reminisced about this colorful period of her life—which lasted many years—as the time

when she worked almost entirely for “*viados*⁸ e *sapatões*” (‘fags and dykes’). These words are often put to use derogatorily, but Glória employed them similarly to how her patrons used them, many of whom had embraced these words in their own everyday usage as a way of taking control of their meaning, much in the way that *queer* has been adopted in the North American context.⁹ The relationships she had within each of the households she worked in were amicable, and Glória was quite fond of many of the people she worked for. In each household, there were different sorts of flexible arrangements that enabled Glória to solicit help in times of need. Glória was, in part, willing to put up with her often hefty work load in each household because of the benefits she received from these multiple patron-client relationships. When her son Ney had become very ill, for example, one of her clients sped her in a car to the hospital near *Felicidade Eterna*, where he was interned and later died. Another employer, who was a medical doctor, offered to perform a thyroid operation Glória needed without charge. Many of her clients would also lend Glória money in times of trouble. Even though this kind of extra help from her employers proved vitally important, Glória was nevertheless unable to substantially change the amount she was paid in a daily wage—until she started working for *Dona Beth*.

The pay Glória earned as a *faxineira* during those years was more attractive than that generally offered to live-in domestic workers. She had already done much of that in her youth and had given it up. Many domestic workers who live and work in a single household are only able to command one minimum wage, even under stringent legal protections.¹⁰ Glória earned substantially more in her position as a *faxineira*, but there were some disadvantages to this as well. Often, her employers, many of whom were middle-class and could not afford full-time service, would leave two or three days of complete chaos for Glória to clean up. Over the years, Glória grew tired of this routine, despite the congeniality and the “*bom papo*,” or ‘good conversation,’ she enjoyed with many of her employers.

Beth had employed Glória as a *faxineira* throughout the early 1990s, and had come to greatly appreciate her work. To hire Glória full time, she was willing to pay Glória a living wage of five salaries per month, an amount considered extraordinarily generous

by Glória's network of friends as well as by most middle-class standards. In part, this generosity stemmed from the fact that she could afford it; her husband was a highly-paid industrialist, and if they were not in the country's elite sector, they were definitively in the upper reaches of the middle class.¹¹ But Beth herself worked as a social worker at FUNABEM,¹² an institution that was home to 'street children,' and she was someone who was conscious of the importance of women's labor, and she made a deliberate effort to pay Glória beyond what most ordinary employers were willing to pay domestic workers in the free marketplace. She also paid Glória extra for the transportation costs she incurred. Beth was trying to make an impact in her own way, but also I believe she was willing to pay for the stability and allegiance of having a highly competent worker stay with her over the coming years. She also agreed to sign her *carteira* in return for Glória's commitment. Both of them felt lucky to have found such a sympathetic situation.

Both Glória and *Dona* Beth understood their roles with respect to one another, although not in any entirely typical sense. There is always a particularity to the way any two individuals will negotiate a *patroa-empregada* relationship, and in this particular relationship the feelings between Beth and Glória were indeed good enough to keep the work relationship strong and to foster a complicated set of ambiguous affections. For example, according to Glória, *Dona* Beth was flexible and didn't "*esquenta a cabeça*" ('get hot-headed') about the days Glória would miss due to problems in her own home that needed resolving as long as there was enough food prepared to cover the days of Glória's absence. On a day that Glória had matters to attend to in *Felicidade Eterna*—such as taking a sick family member to a clinic—she would send one of her young children down to the *orelhão*¹³ (big ear, public telephone) near the bakery, instructing the child to dial *Dona* Beth and inform her that she wouldn't be coming to work that day. Glória was especially good at anticipating these kinds of problems, and she would often cook four or five meals at a time and then freeze them, so that all Beth needed to do in the evenings was to pull the prepared foods out of the refrigerator or freezer and heat them up.

There were also some quite typical traditional elements of paternalism built into their relationship. When Glória's ex-husband Zezinho died suddenly, *Dona* Beth lent Glória the money to travel

with Soneca to Minas Gerais, a state north of Rio, in order to track down Zezinho's mother so that she could pay for his proper burial. And when Soneca, after a difficult pregnancy and birth, needed a calm place for herself and her newborn daughter to spend their first few precarious¹⁴ months, Beth allowed them to live in the tiny *empregada* room in her apartment.

Glória is just one worker in an economy characterized by ever-increasing numbers of workers in the lowest paid sectors (this is the demographics of Brazil); in this setting, there is not enough expansion of the formal sector to absorb these workers. It took Glória until well into her late forties to garner a position with a wage high enough to raise her out of the lowest economic category and into the working classes, and most of her friends saw her situation as exceptional, indeed, anomalous. If she had not found Beth, Glória would have continued earning one to two minimum wages per month in her *faxineira* position. Much like in the United States, the minimum salary designation is not really a living wage; it is a subsistence wage. The market rate for all domestic work is disproportionately low compared to what is needed for a worker's proper sustenance. These wages are also disproportionately low if we calculate them as a proportion of the income of the same middle- and upper-class clients desiring these services. Middle-class wages vary greatly, but even the lowest wage for a single middle-class person would hover at approximately five to ten salaries per month. Another way to view this situation is to understand that the system demands that domestic work be the lowest paid, affordable to even the lowest ranks of the middle classes, since it is in and of itself a distinguishing feature of middle-class life.

For the middle class in Rio de Janeiro, employing a domestic worker is not only perceived as a necessity; it is also a class marker, a form of identity in the deepest sense. While for the elite, the very top of the upper classes, having servants is a class marker as well, they are not obsessed with the same fear of slipping back into that dreaded pool of the population who must supply manual labor to others—a fear that plagues middle-class families.

Everyone in the middle class expects to be able to afford a person to cook and clean for them. Because this is a defining feature of middle-class life, it is one that I suspect will be the last luxury to be forfeited in times of economic stress. As Brian Owensby points

out, Brazilian middle classness is a *state of mind* “oriented to a dynamic social and economic arena” (1999:8). In other words, middle classness is a historical identity construction in process, and more than a mere economic enumeration. Employing a domestic worker is part of middle-class identity formation. In examining this process in the 1930s in Copacabana, Owensby writes:

Servants stood as a second difference between typical middle-class and working-class budgets. Working-class families rarely had maids. In respectable collar-and-tie families at least one servant appears to have been de rigueur. This was more than just a matter of having someone to clean the house. It meant that middle-class men and women could project to the world the fact that they were free, at least symbolically, of the most degrading manual labor involved in running a household. Moreover, for a majority of middle-class men the presence of a servant meant that however much they were subject to bosses, or social superiors outside the home, they could at least return at the end of the day to a situation of dominance over a (sexual, class, and often racial) inferior who owed them even more deference than their wives. In the case of middle-class women the presence of a maid served to reinforce traditional lines of authority and social privilege, according to which certain people could employ others to do the heaviest and most undesirable work around the house. (Owensby 1999:107-8)

This state of mind is a historically constituted one in the sense that it is simply anathema for the middle classes to take an interest in the kinds of manual labor that are required to manage a household properly. What we need to keep in mind is that middle-class identity was historically conditioned to be dependent on having others do the work for them. Being middle-class, in this sense, signifies that you are not the serving class.

Middle classness is nevertheless an ambiguous position, because on the one hand the middle classes are supposed to make things happen economically and politically within the country, but on the other hand, they are not supposed to be burdened with the stigma of manual labor. So, the site of employer and domestic worker relations is really a site of class formation and differentiation. The middle classes are defined by their ability to pay somebody else to do the manual labor for them, and in this sense they live much like the upper classes, although the upper classes have a wider variety of these kind of services available to them. The members of the middle and upper classes who have domestic workers and have always had them don't really know how to do basic things for themselves—clean, cook, wash clothes, or take care of life's little nasty chores. Yet this dependence on somebody else—this very helplessness—has become a positive form of status and prestige for these classes. The following quote from a forty-year-old university professor illustrates this point well:

I always had a domestic worker before I left Brazil. When I faced the situation where I did not have a domestic worker, I began to ask, where did food come from? How do you buy it? How do you cook it? Food had been a 'God-given gift.' Til then I couldn't see the value of these chores. I could dirty things up or throw food out; everything was a 'God-given gift.' People who take care of themselves, feed themselves and wash their clothes, become aware of the situation. One is closer to reality than when somebody takes care of you. (Quoted in Pereira De Melo 1989:263)

This cultivated incompetence is an important sign of class. In this sense, domestic workers are a good example of cultural capital¹⁵ (Bourdieu 1984) objectified as a kind of good or service. You cannot belong to the elite classes without utilizing these services. In this case, the place of domestic workers in the lives of *Cariocas* is like any other good consumed by the middle and upper classes. The more workers you employ—divided by tasks, such as *babá* (nanny), chauffeur, *empregada*, *cozinheira* (cook)—the more

economic and social prestige you exhibit. In some households, for example, there is a domestic worker who cooks and does the everyday cleaning, but even so, on a weekly basis they will hire a *faxineira* to do the heavy work. In other households, usually with less resources, a worker will come two or three times a week. Sometimes, *Dona* Beth would give Glória a break by hiring Glória's neighbor Marilse to do the ironing, a task Glória hated. Having or not having such workers, as well as how many of these employees one can afford, determines one's social place. It is this work through which the identity of the classes becomes fixed.¹⁶

The desire or need for domestic help is not limited to the middle and upper classes, however. Ironically—although perhaps logically—such services are at the top of the list of services that low-income women like Glória say they would procure immediately for themselves if they could afford it. It is rare to find within any of the classes anyone expressing the notion that domestic work ought to be shared by household members. Rather, it is seen as a 'natural' and desirable service, one even coveted by those currently performing such duties for others.

In addition to giving poor women like Glória a concrete symbol of 'making it' to grasp on to, these relations, more importantly, serve to create and sustain among the poor a vision of themselves as inferior. Most domestic work is carried out by women and a high proportion are Afro-Brazilian, thus the profession reflects, in many ways, the most disadvantaged workers, workers who find themselves at the very bottom of a series of interlocking economic and social hierarchies.

Although Glória and many of the women in her generation have spent much of their youths and adult lives working in the homes of wealthy people, the relationship between domestic workers like Glória and their employers is anything but straightforward. This relationship has been described as an affectively ambiguous one, and its ideological and cultural subtleties have been noted in the literature pertaining to Brazil (see, e.g., Pereira de Melo 1989; Kofes 1990; Brites 2000). Glória, for example, is one individual in a growing workforce¹⁷ of live-out domestic workers, a kind of work regime steadily gaining adherents over time. Domestic workers desire the physical separation from their employers and many employers find that live-in domestic

workers take away from their own freedom (Pereira de Melo 1989:252). In the years she worked as a *faxineira* before committing exclusively to *Dona Beth*, Glória's situation exemplified the precarious situation of workers in this profession. As the sole earner in a large household, her menial wages meant that she worked hard and yet could barely keep everyone clothed and fed properly. Glória is just one individual among a large class of working poor, but her situation captures an essential aspect of Brazilian class relations.

POVERTY IN BRAZIL AND RIO DE JANEIRO

Located about 400 kilometers north of São Paulo, Brazil's most prosperous city, Rio is Brazil's second largest city and its second most important port. Rio's economy has been in decline for many years; it is generally accepted that it has definitively lost out in the struggle with São Paulo for commercial and industrial dominance. This is reflected in a number of economic statistics. In 1985, São Paulo accounted for 26 percent of the country's manufacturing production, while Rio accounted for only 7 percent. Many of Rio's leading banks, industries, and research and development headquarters relocated to São Paulo during the 1980s. In 1988, average household earnings per capita were 22 percent higher in São Paulo than in Rio, and between 1976 and 1988 real earnings in Rio de Janeiro fell by 29 percent (Tolosa 1996). Rio's population throughout the 1980s thus became poorer in both relative (to São Paulo) and absolute terms in the period just before my fieldwork began.¹⁸ As Tolosa notes:

By 1989, Rio had the most unequal distribution of income of any metropolitan area in Brazil; during the 1980s it had displaced even the cities of the north-east from first place. (1996:6)²¹

Gross poverty directly alongside incredible showcases of wealth—people of all ages begging for money and food outside chic restaurants and clothing boutiques—distinguishes Rio as a city of extremes. The low-paying service economy that seems to keep the city afloat gives the sensation of a predominantly two-class system

with only a very thin middle class, the latter a sign distinguishing Rio from São Paulo.²⁰

One of the more dramatic changes in Rio's demographics has been the increasing feminization of its workforce and the growing participation of children in the economy.²¹ Migration to the city has been a significant factor in Rio's growth since early in the century. According to the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*²² (IBGE 1996), migrants to the Rio metropolitan area make up approximately 22 percent of the total population. It is important to note that these migrants to the Rio metropolitan area have come mostly from the economically impoverished states to the north: Minas Gerais, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Espírito Santo, and Ceará. Needless to say, a large proportion of poor women who have ended up in Rio, either as recent migrants or the daughters of older migrants, find domestic work—work without regular benefits or healthcare—one of the very few employment opportunities available to them.²³

CLASS, CULTURE, AND THE EFFECTS OF DOMINATION

I note these statistical trends in order to lay the foundation for capturing the aesthetics of domination inside of Rio. But these numbers, while helping to shape some of the analysis that is to follow, cannot substitute for a more subtle analysis of the effects of domination in a city so marked by such extreme forms of inequality. The studies that have addressed domestic service in Brazil have mainly approached the dynamics of this relationship from an economic perspective—an exchange of labor for wages—noting the typically low wages paid these workers and the entrapment of these workers in an economy that cannot absorb these women into other sectors (see de Souza 1980; Jelin 1980; Saffioti 1978). Research that has extended beyond the strictly economic has often separated public and private domains of power relations, reserving the study of the 'political' to public spheres of power, thus largely ignoring the more subtle forms of domination present here. The domestic worker/employer relationship merits closer attention precisely because it is one of the rare places where relations of intimacy take place despite the class gap that characterizes Brazil's "social apartheid" (Buarque 1992). Because the experiences of the working

classes, specifically the domestic workers who are at the economic bottom of the working-class pay scale, are so distant from the life experiences of the middle- and upper-class families for whom they work, the social apartheid Buarque speaks of is a division of both class and everyday culture.

Through my initiation into Glória's world, I was able to grasp the intimate ways in which she and many of her associates in *Felicidade Eterna* had become involved in the lives of the elites they worked for in the *Zona Sul*—and contrastingly, how relatively little these same employers knew of their lives.

[...]

COLONIAL RIO DE JANEIRO

Rio de Janeiro is a city whose history has been intimately connected to the lives of slaves, ex-slaves, and of domestic workers since the beginning of the colonial period. Because of this colonial history, the domestic worker setting is an ideal context to view the practices of both class and cultural domination over time. Relations between domestic workers and their employers are a perfect site within which to explore how cultural practices are produced and reproduced, and what effects this form of domination produces. In the domestic worker/employer relationship, the extremities of the class divide are exhibited and performed—and a racial dimension is always present. The domestic worker, no matter what her skin color, is symbolically associated with the dirty work to be done in a household. Palpable in the racial commentaries across classes is a recognizable discourse that associates domestic work with dark skin, and dark skin with slavery, dirt, ugliness, and low social standing. This association, however, doesn't preclude lighter-skinned women from working as domestic workers. In fact, many domestic workers are white or light-skinned migrants from the most impoverished regions in Northeast Brazil. Still, the association of dark skin color with slavery, and slavery with unpleasant tasks and with dirt is strong, influencing how even the lightest skinned domestic worker is perceived. Despite these negative associations, it is also the same domestic worker who, on another scale, is fondly venerated, even cherished in the households of the middle and upper

classes, appreciated for her caretaking activities. These relationships of servitude stemming from Brazil's period of slavery, their racialized aspects and the discourses they inspire, work in the current context to solidify a particular form of domination by the middle and upper classes.

Quite commonly, one hears middle- and upper-class *Cariocas* of all ages wax nostalgic about their favorite nanny or their favorite domestic worker. To the outsider, the non-Brazilian, these words of praise fall on cynical ears. Yet these words of affection form part of a telling class discourse that is inappropriately nostalgic for the pampering of a lost colonial era.

Gilberto Freyre, the Brazilian social historian writing in the 1930s, discussed the special place of the slave woman in the sexual life in colonial Brazil, both as mistress of the planters and as sexual initiator of their white sons. In the colonial-era expressions of tenderness such as "*meu nego*" and "*minha nega*" (literally, 'my Negro'), we can recognize that these terms were meant as terms of endearment for slaves.²⁴ These terms originated (according to Freyre) out of the feelings of intimacy and engaging affections that whites held toward their slaves. Freyre's work, of course, has been interpreted as proposing an easy-going and humanized relationship between masters and slaves, but scholars began debating—and continue to disagree on—his specific propositions soon after they were first written (see, e.g., Harris 1964:66). While I generally reject the position that considers Brazil's version of slavery "soft,"²⁵ I would agree that certain peculiarities were present within these relationships, and that contemporary expressions of this relationship reveal profound ambiguities.

Even after the legal abolition of slavery, domestic servants were expected to provide sexual services to masters and their sons, and nurturing services to younger children as 'milk nannies,' thus reproducing almost entirely the full range of slave relationships within the context of paid domestic work (Freyre 1986[1933]:378). We know from scholars of late nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro that servant women—either as slaves or as free women—were the largest single occupational group of women up through the early 1900s and that servants worked and lived under conditions similar to those of slaves. Historian Sandra Lauderdale Graham notes that at slavery's end the order of relationships between *patrões* and

servants still remained outside of the realm of public regulation and instead was viewed as a “a matter of private negotiation and personal control” (1995[1988]:130). This feature of the transformations that occurred post-slavery meant that the treatment and abuse of domestic workers were not to be regulated by the law.

What also becomes a clear feature of this moment of transition is that elites were consciously attempting to show the rest of the world that they belonged to the group of civilized nations, those that had embraced a modernity beyond slavery. The laudatory writings of Freyre that emphasize Brazilian exceptionalism with regard to race can be partially explained by this desire to be accepted by the rest of the ‘civilized’ world. The elite (and later middle-class) desire to be modern, can perhaps also help explain some of the ambiguities visible in the contemporary domestic worker-employer relationship. While this relationship is common in other Western countries as well, in Brazil the ambiguity engendered by its particular historical legacy and the so-called mixing of the races presented a particular challenge. On the one hand, manual labor was despised so the transition from slavery to servanthood needed to preserve the ability of the upper class to hire others to perform these tasks. On the other hand, the desire to disassociate themselves from the backwardness of slavery left the elite of the time in an awkward position vis-à-vis their European counterparts. This uneasiness is still readily apparent in contemporary Rio society. There is, even today, an almost automatic reliance on “the economy” as an explanation used by the middle and upper classes as part of a tortured defense regarding the “naturalness” of domestic work and the inability for the economy to absorb the lower-class population in any other productive manner. Domestic workers are part of an emotionally explosive area of social relations, on the one hand providing a sense of identity to both the middle and upper classes, and on the other, filling them with guilt and self-doubt about their status in the civilized world.

Indeed, progressive members of these classes know that there is something wrong with this relationship—that it still reeks of their colonial/seigneurial past—but they are themselves stuck in it. It is a relationship that has by now become so culturally expected and naturalized that they cannot begin to think about giving it up, which is why they have had to come up with reasons why it is a necessary evil: that there is an abundance of labor and therefore labor is cheap

and therefore they are doing a good thing by helping the employment situation in their country. At some levels, this logic is completely anachronistic because these classes delude themselves, attempting to hide their own shame and guilt about robbing another person of fuller more equable lives, and instead pointing to the ambiguous fact that, indeed, many such “grateful” workers remain with them over the course of a lifetime.

*PARA INGLÊS VER, OR FOR THE ENGLISH TO SEE*²⁶

The visit of King Albert and Queen Elisabeth of Belgium to Rio de Janeiro in September of 1920 represents a telling historical moment when Brazilians (here, of the elite classes) attempted to make a particular presentation of themselves in order to show a positive picture of their city to the visiting European monarchs.²⁷ The visit and the preparations are worth noting because they highlight certain aspects of the crisis affecting the city’s elites at that moment. While the government attempted to prepare the city “for the King to see,” that is, continuing to highlight certain aspects and hide others, there was a sense among some intellectuals and artists at the time that by hiding the city’s poverty and the authentically Brazilian aspects of the city, the elites were actually opening up the country to ridicule and contempt by the European powers. Again, this debate about what King Albert should or should not see culminated in a later more powerful statement by the Brazilian Modernists,²⁸ but what was at stake in both cases were fundamental questions of identity. Brazilian elites wanted to be accepted as citizens of modernity and such acceptance, it seemed, could only be validated by Europe’s post-colonial gaze.

Historian Thomas Skidmore (1993[1974]) addresses the question of how Brazilian elites thought about race and national identity in the years immediately preceding and following the abolition of slavery, approximately the time period between 1870 and 1940. As Skidmore points out, the Brazilian elite, before the end of slavery and before the declaration of the First Republic (1889), were very much concerned about the image they conveyed to their North American and Western European counterparts in trade. There was a certain amount of shame attached to their long history with slavery as well as to the large Afro-Brazilian and

mixed-race population that was to become Brazil's trademark, a quality often noted by famous travel writers, diplomats, and visitors to the country at the time.

Brazilian elites grappled with the latest European conventions regarding race, specifically the idea of scientific racism that was taken as common-sense in the late 1800s and early turn-of-the-century. This formal racism held that biological and racial differences were causative and reflective of different progressive stages of 'civilization.' Brazilians, recognizing their own racialized history, struggled with this European ideology, and did so by proposing a 'whitening' of the population. Part of what the Brazilian elite worried about was the sheer numbers of dark-skinned and mixed race people that had, to different degrees, successfully integrated into their society. In practical terms, this led to an open door policy with regard to white European immigration.

This tension about race was played out in post-emancipation urban and architectural design, one that physically reinforced the separation of the privileged classes from the non-privileged classes. The historian Jeffrey Needell (1995) writes about the elites' conceptions of public space in Rio just after Brazil became a Republic (1889) and throughout the first half of the twentieth century. He describes an elite class that constructed public spaces for themselves and for foreign tourists, diplomats, and businessmen as part of their desire to belong to the great "civilized" capitals of Europe, Paris in particular. In the process of designing a Paris in Rio, Brazilian elites made public spaces into private ones

... by defining the public space and consciousness of their concern along lines restricted by wealth and Europhile culture. The great mass of their countrymen were simply excluded. It was not that they were ignored; rather, they were pushed aside or even attacked. In Rio, for example, poor people were often forced out of the repaired or newly constructed thoroughfares in the old City because much of their housing was demolished, police increased their harassment, and shabby commerce or Afro-Brazilian culture was forbidden there. The poor people interfered with the elite's fantasy of

civilization and so had to be hidden away in the Afro-Brazilian slums near the docks and on the hills ... (Needell 1995:538)

The elite in Rio often looked to certain areas of the city—those areas that contained the poor masses of Afro-Brazilians that had migrated there in the years following slavery—in much the same way that Europeans viewed their colonies—as areas “obstructed by an inferior race and culture” (Needell 1987:50). It was not so much that these areas were physical threats as much as they were psychological reminders of their mixed-race past.

For, if the reforms meant that Cariocas were achieving Civilization by becoming more European, they also meant, necessarily, a negation, an ending, of much that was very Brazilian indeed. The embrace of Civilization was also the leaving-behind of what many of the Carioca elite saw as a backward, colonial past and the condemnation of the racial and cultural aspects of Carioca reality that the elite associated with that past ... (Needell 1987:48)

This structuring of exclusion enabled national elites to legitimize themselves internationally, but ultimately the architecture and planning reveal the forms of neo-colonial domination to which this elite had wholeheartedly succumbed. Needell’s reading of Rio’s elites offers a fundamental framing for how we might also apprehend the transition from slavery to domestic work—from the perspective of an elite group desiring legitimation—at this turn-of-the-century moment.

The word neo-colonial expresses the contradictory nature of the phenomenon to which it refers. It suggests both the new and old bonds of colonialism. It also refers to the kind of colonialism typical in the third world in the era

after post-colonialism, a dependency and control between metropolis and colonies in which no formal (that is, political) domination is present because it has been overthrown and less straightforward forms of domination (economic, cultural, ideological, military) have taken its place.

Something of neo-colonialism's contradictory, less straightforward nature often seems to touch all of the complex relations which it subsumes. Cultural neo-colonialism is perhaps the most slippery. (Needell 1995:539-540)

Rio's elites traveled to Paris, read French, and admired Paris as an example of what a 'civilized' city should look like. Planners during this time period, looking to remake Rio into a 'modern' city, adopted explicitly Haussmannist proposals, a type of urban planning that had turned Paris into a European showcase through the planned exclusion of the poor from public spaces. Haussmannist strategies to city planning in Rio entailed the reform of public and private spaces so that the working classes, Afro-Brazilian culture, and shabby commerce were pushed either into the *Zona Norte* (North Zone) or onto hillside *favelas*, while simultaneously giving the elite of the *Zona Sul* easy access to a newly sanitized city center. In fact, Needell argues that in this imitation of foreign cities, Brazilian elites turned public spaces into private spaces "by defining the public space and consciousness of their concern along lines restricted by wealth and Europhile culture" (Needell 1995:538).

Up until the Modernist movement in Brazil, the elite were caught up in a kind of neo-colonial imitation where they weighed their own identity in relation to the Old World, struggling with a sense of insecurity about their racially mixed population. In the period of time after World War I, Brazilian elites began to develop a nationalist consciousness, an awareness of themselves as different than Europe and North America, and, in 1922, this nationalist sentiment combined with a progressive modernist art and literary movement. It began with a Modern Art Week (1922) in São Paulo, financed by a wealthy scion of a coffee family in São Paulo. His name was Paulo Prado, and he had himself published an important

book examining the elite's crisis of identity, titled *Retrato do Brasil: Ensaio sobre a tristeza Brasileira (Portrait of Brazil: An Essay on Brazilian Sadness)* (1972[1928]). This text has been interpreted as an ambivalent one: on the one hand it contains a rather pessimistic reading of Brazil's past—and particularly its lascivious past. Prado names the “mixture of three races” as a “source of that peculiar sadness,” one characteristic of the Brazilian soul (Parker 1991:20). On the other hand, Prado's text is also a treatise on ‘whitening,’ an optimistic look at the possibilities of the future regarding race in Brazil (Skidmore 1993[1974]:205).

The Modern Art Week itself stands out not only as a significant artistic moment, but also as a moment when the ideas of ‘whitening’ and the belief in scientific racism were in the process of transformation. The week also coincided with the publication of the initial writings that led to Freyre's *The Masters and the Slaves* (1986[1933]), work that ultimately helped both solidify the reorientation of Brazilians toward race that was occurring during this time frame as well as setting out a new doctrine from which to build a new Brazilian national identity. Indeed, *The Masters and the Slaves*, a social history/ethnography of plantation life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is credited with extending the Boasian convention of substituting ‘culture’ for ‘race,’ thereby solving the ambivalence of the predominantly white Brazilian elite toward a historically mixed-race population. This ideological shift was embraced by Brazilian elites because it allowed them to reject biological and scientifically racist doctrines that naturalized racial inferiority. It enabled them to celebrate their origins and to recognize the mixing of European, African, and Indian cultures in the formation of a ‘new world in the tropics.’

Although Freyre's thesis was still positioned within the framework of the ‘whitening’ ideal, it moved Brazilians much farther and much faster away from the racist ideologies of Europe and North America prevalent at the time, and his ideas became the basis of a national ideology celebrating Brazil as a racial democracy. Brazil refurbished its image of itself not as an inferior nation among the white civilized world, but instead as a proud mixed-race civilized nation, an image that became the essence of *brasilidade*.²⁹

The rethinking provided by the Modernists and Freyre allowed for a rupture in Brazil's neo-colonial relationship with Europe. The Modernists, in a kind of playful parody on cannibalism (represented in Oswald de Andrade's (1970[1928]) work titled *Manifesto Antropófago* (Anthropophagist Manifesto), suggested that rather than imitate foreign models, Brazilians ought to cannibalize those models and turn them into something new and uniquely Brazilian. This movement served as a kind of radical awakening for the Brazilian elites and began a process that opened up discussions about the tendency toward imitation as well as their own particular history of exploitation with regard to the European powers.

[...]

AMBIGUOUS AFFECTIONS

Glória's close relationship with *Dona Beth* extended in specific ways to her daughter Soneca. When Glória first started working as a *faxineira* for Beth, Soneca, just a child herself at the time, would occasionally accompany her mother to Beth's to work—the purpose being not to earn any more money, but to learn how to do the job and to help her mother finish her job in less time. Although Soneca was for the most part compliant in these situations—recognizing her mother's need for help in supporting the family—Soneca also made it clear that she would not follow in her mother's footsteps as a domestic worker. Soneca had been an exemplary student in school, completing her first years with near-perfect marks, and she could read and write at a reasonably competent level. In 1992, before leaving Brazil, it became clear to me that Soneca was serious about continuing her studies toward a concrete profession outside of the realm of domestic work. She had expressed some interest in secretarial work, and so I put aside a quantity of money for her to begin schooling at a computer institute, where she was to be trained in basic typing and computer skills and then helped to find placement in a permanent job. Later, I found out that it was quite impossible for her to complete this course: at the time, there were still too many younger children at home who needed attention. Since Soneca was the most responsible of the girls, she was the most likely person to be able to care for the younger children still

left in the household, and when Glória exited to live with Mauro, Soneca was left at home to take on the lion's share of household chores. Additionally, Soneca admitted to me later that she ultimately lost interest in the course due to its fast pace and to a set of expectations she felt she could not possibly fulfill. In the end, Soneca, an inveterate romantic, fell in love with Sílvio, a light-skinned boy and gang member who lived in a house on an asphalt-paved³⁰ street just a short walk from the entrance of *Felicidade Eterna*, and soon after became pregnant with his child.

Glória became outraged when she discovered Soneca's pregnancy, declaring loudly that "she wasn't going to support a child *and* a grandchild!" Soneca had been forewarned by those around her that Sílvio was not going to marry her, nor was he likely to provide much support for their child, and so she found herself in a bind because Glória was unwilling to tolerate even one more mouth to feed in her house, despite her usual generosity in such matters. Glória had often proclaimed that the pot that feeds a few can feed many, but she was exasperated with what she felt was Soneca's lack of responsibility in this case. Soneca thus found herself wanting to have a child, but not having any financial support. *Dona* Beth had gotten to know Soneca from her occasional visits, and was updated about Soneca's drama through Glória's telling. Beth took pity on Soneca, perhaps because she worked with many teenagers in a similar situation, and allowed Soneca and her tiny daughter, Diana, to live in her maid's room behind the kitchen of her apartment for almost a year. Further, she even served as a grandmother figure to Soneca's first-born. She made sure that Soneca ate properly and provided her with baby clothes and toys. According to Glória, without *Dona* Beth's support, Soneca would not have been able to support herself and her child. Over time, however, Glória made it clear that she was annoyed that her own hard work, rather than being directly rewarded to her, was instead being recognized in the form of *Dona* Beth's generosity toward Soneca.

Both Beth and I were caught in situations where we wanted somehow to help the people we cared about, yet neither of us could provide more than a very temporary 'solution.' In the end, Glória was annoyed that Soneca had squandered her chances for training at the computer institute with the money I had provided, but she also

recognized that she needed Soneca's help at home to take care of the younger children. I think Glória would have ultimately preferred that I had left *her* any money I could for the purposes of helping their situation, rather than attempt, as I did, to invest directly in the wage earnings of the next generation. I came to this tentative conclusion after realizing that Glória was annoyed with Beth for taking Soneca into her home and caring for her granddaughter, rather than simply rewarding Glória's own hard work more directly. Both Beth and I had become involved in exchanges that were more than mere economic exchanges. Beth had opted to attempt making a difference by offering shelter and food to Soneca and her daughter during a vulnerable period. I had attempted to invest in the training and education of one of Glória's children with the hope that a skilled laborer could eventually bring in more wage earnings, thereby relieving the economic stress in Glória's household. Of course, both of these attempts were complicated by the affective relations involved: Beth was Glória's employer and was extending her own patronage to Glória's daughter. In my own case, Glória was my principal informant and friend, and I was looking for creative ways of compensating her and her family for being willing to work with me.

These ambiguities and complications are so ingrained and embodied throughout the stream of daily social relations that everyone gets entangled in these kinds of situations, regardless of their good intentions. Both *Dona* Beth and I were forced to balance that fine line between wanting to help, and recognizing the limits to what was possible or expected. In Beth's case, while she opened her home to Soneca, there were still internal spatial limits that were enforced naturally, without any specific rules being mentioned. I never, for example, found Glória or Soneca lounging around in Beth's living room; they remained in the kitchen and laundry area. These physical boundaries are marked from both ends. Despite the ambiguous affections involved, for both the *patroa* and *empregada*, each firmly knows their place.

The historical constitution of these relations has always been somewhat ambiguous:

House servants experienced most sharply the
profound tensions that characterized the

relationship of master and servant as one personal and proximate, perhaps long-lasting, but never one between trusted equals. The closeness allowed for the tender recollections of wet-nurses, but also for the suspicion or resentment with which patrons viewed servants. For masters the ties with servants were necessarily unstable, because mistrust, even contempt, for those on whom they relied for the maintenance of family and household resonated with ambivalence, requiring repeated confirmations from servants of reliability and loyalty. The bond that linked family and servants surely held a different meaning when servants lived in their own housing or worked for a family only sporadically. A family could not expect the same loyal and devoted service, nor a servant the same favor that a closer relationship or one of longer standing merited. Even the weaker bond, though, required that both patrões and servants meet their reciprocal obligations at least minimally. (Graham 1995[1988]:107)

And, as Graham further points out, the elites themselves also experienced this relationship as problematic:

The conduct of domestic life was awkwardly personal. Countless daily exchanges between patrões and servants within the narrow confines of city houses accentuated the perceived tensions between family and non-family. Where neither could stay entirely aloof from the other's near-constant presence, their mutual but unequal dependence became compellingly immediate. By relying on women that maintained their households and made privilege concrete, patrões rendered themselves continuously vulnerable. (Graham 1995[1988]:91)

Many middle- and upper-class Brazilians talk about their domestic workers with a mixture of love and appreciation. They express familial-like affections toward their employees. There is a fondness expressed for that special domestic worker who lived with their family for many years, and devoted her life to serving the family, or the nanny they had as a child, who pampered them in special ways, such as by cooking them their favorite foods or comforting them in times of sorrow. Certainly, these sentiments are common enough. But these same affections also reveal a sense of uncertainty and distance, often about the very same people.

One middle-class friend once shared with me a story about another friend who had recently experienced what she called a “*cura baiana*” (‘Bahian cure’). My friend’s friend was a psychoanalyst from a prominent family, but had married a much younger man from a lower-class background. Eventually, he left his psychoanalyst wife for a younger woman, rendering my friend’s friend emotionally devastated and depressed, partially, at least, because her own transgressions of class, gender, and age rules had already predicted this tragic outcome. Her loyal *empregada* administered the *cura baiana*, which consisted of the domestic worker’s preparation of special foods, such as fresh orange juice, delivered directly to her in bed. Of course, this story was related to me with a certain amount of self-awareness and irony which I am sure may have even been shared by the actual recipient of the *cura*. There is a certain self-consciousness that many progressive-minded Brazilians possess concerning the complicated and perverse aspects of these relationships. Here, for example, is a psychoanalyst receiving a psychological cure from her own domestic worker. My friend’s story was a narrative whose goal was not only to illustrate the intimacy of the patron-client relationship, but also to laugh about how the relationship is likely to become its own peculiar burden over time.

I recall the case of Renata, a middle-class professional living in the *Zona Sul* whose family had a long and complex relationship with their live-in *empregada*, Cida. Cida was brought into the household—into the “family”—as a live-in domestic worker at the same time the family’s three daughters were about to leave home. Their father had recently passed away and the girls wanted to hire an *empregada* as a kind of surrogate daughter, someone who would

stay at home and care for their aging mother. Renata, one of the daughters—a woman in her early forties at the time of this interview—described the relationship between her mother and Cida as complicated, a mixture of love and hate:

The relationship with my mother is complicated. Cida is now the daughter that you abuse, because she [my mother] can't do that to the others. A type of stepdaughter that you can abuse. It is very ambiguous. A love/hate relationship. She loves my mother like a mother because my mother has done a lot for her. But she hates her because she's not her daughter and she doesn't treat her like her child and she keeps bossing Cida around ... so it's difficult ... None of the daughters want to have the responsibility of their aging mother, so they want to have Cida living there. They don't want her to leave. (Taped Interview, Renata, 1989)

Thus, while Cida was not really treated like a daughter, she was expected to carry out filial duties. Cida was alternatively spoken of by the family to others with a great deal of love and affection, as well as described as an uncouth and uneducated creature, one in need of special training:

She has been in my mother's house for fourteen years or so by now. She came to my mother at about the age of 19. Cida came through family connections. Someone knew her cousin, a *Nordestino*³¹ who was gay and from a poor class, working in the house of a family friend as a *copeiro* (serving the table). She had just come from the Northeast. She spoke completely wrong. For example, she would say "*istambre*" instead of "*estômago*" (stomach). She spoke wrong because she had heard the words but she couldn't read or write, so she didn't know the correct word. Many everyday words she needed to be taught. My

mother had to teach her. Mentor her ... (Taped Interview, Renata, 1989)

Stalleybrass and White (1986) discuss the class dimensions of carnivalesque activity and point to the purpose of maintaining a proximate “low Other” as an object within view of the bourgeois high-culture gaze. The intimate presence of the service worker perhaps carries out a similar function in contemporary Brazilian households. The presence of this “low Other,” reminds the middle and upper classes what it is they strive not to be. Stuart Hall makes a similar point about identity when he says:

[W]hen you know what everybody else is, then you are what they are not. Identity is always, in that sense, a structured representation which only achieves its positives through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself. It produces a very Manichean set of opposites. (Hall 1991a:21)

The middle and upper classes need this “low Other” in order to know who they are. On the other hand, the very same presence may feed their fears about being stuck in some kind of abysmal premodern slot that identifies these labor relations as indicative of a backward ‘third world’ country status. Without an internal critique of what is wrong with the system, they are left in their own kind of blindness, unable to extricate themselves from their own incorporated history.

One of the most commonly remarked upon aspects about domestic workers is how they actually “talk differently,” and Cida was obviously not exempt from this type of commentary. Stories about the linguistic limitations and the inarticulateness of *empregadas* are part of the commentary that the middle and upper classes engage in when exchanging stories about domestic workers. It is sometimes even the source of a certain kind of smug, deprecating humor:

[Cida] is a bit stupid. She is not intelligent. There is something—I don't know how to say it. She doesn't know how to report anything, how to *relatar uma história* (tell a story). For example, if you ask her what happened in the *novela* (soap opera), she says something like, "Maria got tired of Pedro, and, well, I forgot. I don't know how to tell, I don't know." (Taped Interview, Renata, 1989)

The idea that these workers are a bit stupid because they can't "tell a story" or aren't very articulate, or speak "*errado*" ('wrong') is so common that I came to expect these discourses in my conversations with middle- and upper-class *Cariocas*. The 'innate' inability of the working classes to function in what is considered to be everyday, ordinary, middle-class society is a common theme among them, a complicated discourse in which their class privilege is implicitly protected as 'natural.'

The protection of class privilege is highly visible in everyday interactions not only inside domestic space but outside as well. There are endless physical signs that reinforce the sense, for the *povo*, or the masses, that they are less. Brazil has an incredibly vibrant consumer culture that caters to the middle and upper classes, and the mass media encourages consumption habits that the majority cannot possibly live by. Furthermore, as I have described above regarding the Europhile tendencies and the shame of the elite that led to the redivision of public space in Rio de Janeiro—poor neighborhoods and *favelas* were pushed out onto hillsides and into the outer edges of the city—reinforcing the sense that the poor ought to remain out of sight except in their roles as service workers. Ultimately, over time, these neighborhoods came to be perceived as eyesores by the wealthier classes. The continuation of segregating architectural forms—such as the continued division between service and public entrances to buildings—reinforces a sense of inferiority among the poor and working classes. The stories the elites have told themselves about Brazil being a racial democracy are not necessarily wholeheartedly embraced, but these stories still serve as a euphemization of the official transcript. I have to agree with Scott (1990) that these relationships need to be euphemized because otherwise there would be revolutions in the making.

Scott borrows Bourdieu's (1977) idea of *euphemization* in order to express this aspect of domination: "The imposition of euphemisms on the public transcript plays a similar role in masking the many nasty facts of domination and giving them a harmless or sanitized aspect" (1989:157). Scott illustrates euphemization with the case of how, in the ante-bellum South in the United States, paternalism substituted as an official story that argued that slavery was in the best interest of the slaves because it kept them properly fed, clothed, and the like. Similarly, the contemporary Brazilian elite use a specific form of paternalism to explain their case. They refer to the idea that poorly paid service work is the outcome of the country's third world status, and point out that domestic workers are actually better off as workers in their homes—where there is enough to eat, shelter, and protection—rather than living a 'typical' lower-class life. This paternalism comes in the form of charity, little gifts and other favors—such as the case of *Dona Beth* inviting *Soneca* to live in her service quarters—that highlight the benevolence of the individual, emphasizing the interpersonal aspects of the relationship and downplaying its structural constraints. Euphemization, the cleaning up of the official or public transcript, thus serves to hide domination. It can, as I have struggled to point out, even be done with good intentions.

[...]

A GAME OF SIGNS: CULTURAL CAPITAL AND THE REPRODUCTION OF CLASS

Cida was, in the scheme of things, treated 'well' and given a flexible enough schedule by her employers so that she was able to attend secondary school at night.

Cida always studied. When she arrived, she couldn't read correctly. Cida did secondary school twice. She went through the whole thing twice. Twice freshman, sophomore, junior, senior. She keeps re-enrolling ... She wants to have beautiful handwriting; it is almost more important than writing itself. [Cida knows] Handwriting tells

where you come from immediately. You glance at handwriting and you can tell everything. She knew this. Handwriting can do this. I can tell what social class somebody is from just from their handwriting. (Taped Interview, Renata, 1989)

Renata recognizes that the academic credentialing system doesn't really lend itself to social mobility, especially in Brazil's highly class-segregated school system. Renata appreciates Cida's concerted efforts to move forward, but also understands the numerous obstacles Cida faces. So much of class belonging is embedded in codes that would ultimately prevent a person like Cida from attaining social mobility, even under the most ideal circumstances.

For Bourdieu, hegemonically constructed forms of cultural capital are a possession of the dominant classes and acquired through the process of class production and reproduction. Handwriting is a good case where such capital becomes visible. Similarly, bodily movements and ways of behaving are easily marked and distinguished as being a part of one's general cultural capital and indeed give one away as being of one class or another. In Cida's case, there is a palpable tragic element to her concern with her handwriting. Cida seems to believe that if she can just work on her handwriting, then she may have a chance at social mobility; what she doesn't understand is that handwriting is just one of the physical signs of an entire set of skills connected to cultural capital. Her impulse is correct, however. She recognizes class as a game of signs.

[...]

“MUCHACHAS NO MORE”³²

In contemporary Rio de Janeiro, one can see signs of the bonds of patronage, dependency, and deference exhibited in many aspects of the domestic worker-patron relationship. Domestic workers still use the service entrance and the separate service elevators of the luxurious apartment buildings in the wealthy *Zona Sul*. They still usually address their patrons with the polite and deferential forms of

address, including “*Dona*” and “*Seu*,” while they are themselves usually addressed by simple first names. There is, often visibly, a deference in the body language of this serving class, as well as other signs of social origin; these markings are often so clear that most middle- and upper-class members of society readily admit being able to discern social class instantly by as much as a walk, a style of dress, or simply an utterance.

But all is not entirely quiet. There are signs of resistance and a growing backlash against the most blatant hold-overs of the kinds of relations associated with slavery. Indeed, not all women living in *Felicidade Eterna* work as domestic laborers, and there is a growing rebellion against such work. Unlike most of the women I met who were in Glória’s generation—in their mid-to-late forties and older—women in their late teens and early twenties no longer wanted to work as domestic workers, but were more willing, it seems, to take their chances in the factories of Rio’s industrial suburbs. Domestic work was viewed as honest hard work, but it was also seen as being at the absolute bottom of the occupational and pay-scale ladder and as being associated with slave-like relations of labor. Young women are instead choosing to work in the industrial areas nearby, in most cases, for not much better pay. While such jobs were not seen as ideal, for rarely do they pay more than one to two minimum wages, they were viewed more positively by this generation than the prospect of domestic work.

Filomena, for example, could easily have found work as a domestic laborer because her childhood with Glória had given her many of the necessary skills. By the time she was a young teenager, she had already become a talented cook and cleaner, but she worked hard to find an alternative to domestic employment. Filomena felt domestic work was too claustrophobic—she hated being indoors all day long, and she detested the long bus-rides to and from the *Zona Sul*. But the job she found herself in during 1998 was not exactly her ideal job either. Filomena worked for 30 *Reais* per week (close to \$30 US dollars at the time) packing cooking charcoal into bags in a cramped and dangerous storage area in Duque de Caxias (also known as Caxias), a city in the vast *Zona Norte*. In two large rooms, employees worked to stuff charcoal into bags that were then stacked high until reaching the ceiling, teetering. She lived in fear of the bags of charcoal someday falling on her, a fate that was all too real

since it had happened to an employee who was seriously injured only weeks before Filomena began her job. Filomena's other three colleagues at work were single mothers, and none of them were getting their *carteira* signed, nor were they receiving any other benefits. They were simple day laborers, earning barely a subsistence wage, thus if for some reason they had to miss a day of work, they were short of the immediate cash needed to supply food to their household that day. They were all afraid to protest their situation, however, because they could easily lose their jobs for merely complaining.

While the refusal to enter domestic work may seem like only a small bit of resistance to the bondage associated with domestic work, it is significant that at least some members of this generation are no longer willing to play into some of the more subtle, ambiguous, and deferential relations of the domestic worker/employer relationship. Indeed, as Hall points out, the process of resistance is a slow one:

Hegemony is not the disappearance or destruction of difference. It is the construction of a collective will through difference. It is the articulation of differences which do not disappear. The subaltern class does not mistake itself for people who were born with silver spoons in their mouths. They know they are still second on the ladder, somewhere near the bottom. People are not cultural dopes. They are not waiting for the moment when, like an overnight conversion, false consciousness will fall from their eyes, the scales will fall away, and they will suddenly discover who they are.

They know something about who they are. If they engage in another project it is because it has interpolated them, hailed them, and established some point of identification with them. (Hall 1991b:58-59)

In his work about the street culture of young male Puerto Rican immigrants in the East Harlem drug economy, Philippe Bourgois (1995) puts his finger on a process that is highly relevant to the discussion here. Bourgois, adopting what has become known as cultural production theory,³³ attempts to solve the classic structure versus agency problem in the social sciences by arguing that political economy does constrain the choices these young men make, but that they—as individuals belonging to a particular subculture—are also agents of their own futures.

The ethnography used as a guidepost by Bourgois, and most often referred to as the consummate example of how this theory works in practice, is Paul Willis' (1977) book titled *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. Willis argues that working class boys practice their resistance through their denigration of mental work, highlighting the emasculating aspects of white collar jobs. In this process, they end up in manual working-class jobs, the very target of their refusal. In their resistance or oppositional culture are the very elements of their own destruction. Bourgois makes a similar argument about young men involved in crack dealing in East Harlem. In their search for dignity and respect and in their rejection of racism and subjugation, their very own street culture winds up aiding and abetting their own self-destruction, as well as the destruction of the communities they belong to (Bourgois 1995:9). Ultimately, this oppositional culture is self-destructive because in seeking to unmask and lay bare the ideology that oppresses them, these agents wind up being unable to occupy the positions of their oppressors. By working against the dominant ideology, they are then unable to fulfill the requirements that would be needed to occupy any other class position. It seems ironic, but it makes sense. As Willis points out more concretely in the case of the working-class "lads," it is in their making fun of white collar culture and in their pranks with one another that they encourage the formation of particular masculine identities, identities that discourage them from seeking success through imitation. In this manner, they seal their own fate and end up perpetuating their membership in the manual labor force.

Male youths have become 'unruly' in their behavior, many of them choosing to join violent gangs that promise them status and respect in their own local contexts, while defining them as criminals

in the broader society at large. It is not mere chance, I would argue, that young men from the poorest segments of the working classes in Brazil, rather than choosing to enter into time-worn relations of deference, are instead choosing other more resistant and more violent futures for themselves.

Most observers discount the possibility of armed revolution in Brazil, but there are many instances of resistance that fall somewhere between passivity and complete upheaval. Oppositional culture, for example, is resistance and it is subtle, unorganized, diffuse, and spontaneous. It is registered in humor and laughter and in approaches to living that seem to be burdened with their own dangers. Revolutions are more organized, sustained and ideologically speaking, much more focused.³⁴

Oppositional culture, however, can still be viewed as an authentic response to domination, moving social scientists beyond the problem of “false consciousness” and other theoretical directions that blame the victim. The resistance in such cases is anything but false; rather, despite its authenticity and logic, it makes sense that it would backfire. In Brazil, there is the added component that there are very few high-status males of black or mixed-race heritage who have risen out of the lowest classes—very few success stories other than soccer players and musicians. So, it makes sense on a number of levels that the dream of so many young *favela* boys is to become a great soccer player. But with so little hope of social mobility in mainstream culture, it is also the gang leaders who often become folk heroes and more realistic role models for this generation. They become significant in the young men’s search to redefine their place in the world—one apart from the denigrating, deference-demanding positions that have typically been accessible to them.

Similarly, I would argue, women have their own distinct forms of resistance. Darlene, a dear friend of Glória’s who often teases her about the number of hours she spends at Beth’s house, decided years ago that working a few hours a day as a sex worker was far more rewarding—in financial terms and in the scope of possibilities it offers—than low-paid domestic work. Darlene, a light-skinned thirty-five-year-old Afro-Brazilian woman, was of the generation in-between that of Glória and Filomena. Darlene once worked as a domestic worker in a household in the *Zona Sul*, but over time, she

came to prefer sex work rather than domestic work as a means of providing a livelihood for her family. Because Glória found her perspective on life refreshing, she had always wanted me to meet her, and I finally had the opportunity in 1995.

Glória and Darlene met when Darlene was only seventeen years old. At that time, Glória was going out with a large heavy-set man by the name of Ignácio who played music with a *pagode* (popular samba form) band and was living in Duque de Caxias. In 1995, Darlene was caring for five of her own children and one niece. According to Darlene, Glória used to drink and *zoava* (get rowdy) quite a bit, but despite her occasional outrageousness, they formed a friendship over the years and still, many years later, leaned on one another in times of trouble to *desabafar* (let out feelings) and receive advice and comfort. In 1995, Darlene sought out Glória's advice about what to do about her suspecting husband, Antonio, who doubted whether Darlene was doing the domestic work she was claiming to do. He self-righteously insisted that she work as a domestic worker, and though she periodically tried, she couldn't commit herself to this kind of work. Mostly, she claimed, this was because nobody wanted to pay her what she considered a fair wage. So instead, she packed her "working clothes" into a plastic bag and went off every day for just a few hours to one of central Rio's prostitution zones, returning home in the evening, and pretending as if she had worked a full day in a *patroa's* house. She worried that her husband would some day find out and kill her and she solicited Glória's help to keep her secret from being known. Sometimes Darlene even borrowed stories from Glória's repertoire of *patroa* stories so that she could repeat them to Antonio and the rest of her family in the evenings. She often jokingly declared that the right amount of money would take her out of "the life"; otherwise, by her calculations, it wasn't worth it. "For my part, I have children to feed. I can't do that for one (minimum) salary," she explained. On the street, Darlene could earn up to 5 *Reais* per customer,³⁵ making sex work a much more lucrative position for her than domestic work or the other limited options offered to her by the economic system. Darlene was keenly aware of the fact that women of her generation and schooling were supposed to be working as domestic workers, and her suspicious husband kept her constantly conscious of this fact. She and Glória would tease one another about their different

choices, and through their humor, would point out the absurdity of attempting to support a family on one or two minimum salaries. Darlene's choice, in some ways, foreshadowed the feelings of the younger generation, who would rather do almost anything else than work as a domestic worker.

Darlene's choice of sex work over domestic servitude can be read as one example of what I am referring to as women's oppositional culture.³⁶ As I have pointed out throughout this chapter, the wages for most domestic workers are just about the lowest of any profession—set slightly above one minimum salary and rarely rising above five—and the work hours are long and physically and emotionally exhausting. Darlene discovered that by working independently in the center of Rio de Janeiro and taking in just a few clients a week, she could earn as much as she would in a domestic service position. With much less effort than full-time domestic work, and on her own terms, she found she could earn the money she needed to support her family.

THE LAUGHTER OF A COMMUNITY

During the years I spent among Glória and her network of friends and family, I became an avid Brazilian *telenovela* fan. There were a number of either daytime or evening hour programs that captured the attention of my friends, and I soon overcame my own initial aversion to these programs and tried to understand what was so appealing about them. So many of these programs were devoted to the lives of the wealthy³⁷ that watching them together with people in *Felicidade Eterna* itself became an interesting fieldwork experience. The *telenovelas*, in many respects, reinforced their own perceptions of the life of the *bacanas*, or the 'good life people,' gained through their own experiences as domestic workers. As a genre, it transported them into the lives and problems of people distant from their own lives and problems.

Watching television in *Felicidade Eterna*, which was always a group activity, there would often be a scene that among any other audience would be perceived as tragic. Yet, here, among a collection of people that live in absurd conditions themselves, the tragedies of the elites depicted in the *telenovelas* tended to fall on deaf ears. These scenes were much more often poked fun at rather

than wept about, much like Glória's laughter over *Dona Beth's* distress at her daughter's 'breaking away.' Perhaps we should not try to separate this distinct laughter from the context it is set in. Such 'laughter out of place' does not go unnoticed by the middle and upper classes, though it is often summarily dismissed.

Sometimes we'll see her laughing at the most tragic part of the *novela*—it's like something between cynicism and *bondade* (goodness, kindness). Everyone is sitting in front of the *novela* and crying and my sister will come over to me and say, "Watch Cida," and she will be dying of laughter and nobody knows why. (Taped Interview, Renata, 1989)

To Renata, Cida's behavior in front of the television is not only a case of inarticulateness and lack of education; it is also a case of inappropriateness of affect, the inability to function well in the public realm. Yet, Cida is firmly installed in Renata's mother's household in a quasi-sister arrangement and her carnivalesque laughter, to some extent, provides evidence of her difference from Renata and the rest of Renata's family. In a broader, more fully symbolic sense, it is Cida's presence and place as a low-Other, embodied in her misplaced (or misunderstood) laughter, that elevates and psychologically sustains these families in their positions, further solidifying economic conditions into more enduring class and cultural distinctions.

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NOTES

¹ Glória called her *Dona Beth*, using the polite form of address that is usually reserved for employers or elders.

² *Patroa* means boss in this context.

³ In Brazil, wages are defined by the notion of a *salário mínimo* or a minimum salary, and income level is defined by how many minimum salaries a person earns per month. One minimum wage typically hovers between \$80 and \$100 US. This amount is defined according to the *cesta básica* (basket of basic goods), which includes foods such as rice, beans, farina, etc., that are meant to sustain a family of four over a one-month period (Wood and Carvalho 1988:122). The minimum salary is therefore supposed to be able to sustain a family of four over a one-month period and it is adjusted periodically so as to keep pace with inflation and with a series of other consumer price indexes. Domestic workers typically earn one or two minimum wages per month. By all accounts, Beth's wages of five minimum salaries per month were exceptionally good.

⁴ Glória had taken in her sister's children after her death and had also adopted in her boyfriend's children when she reunited with him.

⁵ The work card is a legal document in which the employer registers the employee's date of hiring, salary, and function. This document guarantees the worker's constitutional rights to the minimum wage, weekly paid days off, an extra monthly salary per year (called the thirteenth salary), paid holidays, pension, one month paid vacation, etc.

⁶ The *Cruzeiro* was the currency in Brazil just before the *Real* replaced it in 1994. I say, "at one point" because inflation was significant at this time.

⁷ I calculated in dollars because at the time, inflation was extreme and the Brazilian currency was linked to calculations through a kind of mental dollarization. Good employers, for example, who were aware of the skyrocketing prices of foods, would attempt to adjust wages to keep up with inflation through this kind of dollar calculating.

⁸ The dictionary spelling will appear as *veado*, but in popular slang the word is written *viado*.

⁹ Glória lovingly and teasingly used these words to refer to her former employers, but her use of these words was also part of a broader, less politically correct popular vernacular.

¹⁰ See, for example, Pereira De Melo's (1989) statistics based on the 1980 census. They show that only 17.6 percent of women domestic

workers earned above one minimum wage per month, with the vast majority earning well below one.

¹¹ Of course, there is some interpretation here regarding where the middle classes end and the upper classes begin. For the purposes of this study, I am following the work of Wood and Carvalho (1988), who in their book estimate about twenty percent of the population as constituting the middle class, and earning somewhere between five and twenty minimum salaries, with the upper classes earning above 20 minimum salaries. I am, also, notably, following Owensby's (1999) notion of middle classness as a state of mind, with the greatest division being that between manual and non-manual labor.

¹² Fundação Nacional do Bem-Estar do Menor (FUNABEM, National Foundation for the Well-Being of the Minor).

¹³ It wasn't until 1998 that *Felicidade Eterna* had its own *orelhão* (public pay telephone) placed at the entrance. Before that time, one had to walk more than a mile to the bakery to find a public telephone.

¹⁴ I was told that Soneca had a difficult birth due to a condition related to sickle-cell anemia.

¹⁵ Cultural capital, an idea that is often associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), is that entity possessed by a person which derives from the symbolic knowledge, aptitude, dispositions, goods, and credentials, including years of schooling that is connected to a person's economic class. But the idea goes beyond economic and social definitions of capital and includes aesthetics and a range of signs that become distinguishing signs of class.

¹⁶ It is, as Anna Rubbo and Michael Taussig (1977:48) once noted as the major division in Colombian households: you either supply servants or you employ them.

¹⁷ Because of the limits of the available census data, it is hard to get a precise reading of the numbers of domestic workers working who are not registered in any formal way.

¹⁸ According to a United Nations summary report (Tolosa 1996:4), the increase in service activity signifies a decline in the proportion of the population with a formal contract. Tolosa examined the National Household Survey for 1990, paying attention to the sectors in which most workers were employed. He found that the service sector in Rio was dominant and its dominance had increased

precisely during the years of economic decline. Inequality worsened during the 1980s in Brazil's three largest metropolitan areas (São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Belo Horizonte) and, of those three, Rio's inequality grew to be the worst.

¹⁹ In 1981, the Gini coefficient—the calculation that measures the level of income disparity in a country or a region—in Rio de Janeiro was measured at 0.58. In 1989 it had increased to 0.67, meaning that the level of inequality had risen significantly.

²⁰ São Paulo has a larger working class and middle class because of its leadership in industry.

²¹ According to the IBGE (1996), approximately 40 percent of permanent workers in the Rio metropolitan area were women. Despite the legal restrictions on employing children under the age of 14, they account for approximately 4.6 percent of the work force (overall, in Brazil). This material comes from the U.S. Department of State (1997), "Brazil Country on Human Rights Practices for 1997."

²² National Institute of Brazilian Geography and Statistics.

²³ Not only does Lovell suggest that domestic work is racialized, but that the gender gap in wages is even greater than the existent racial inequality. She finds that "Afro-Brazilian women were paid less than Afro-Brazilian men in all educational categories" (Lovell 2000:95).

²⁴ Freyre (1986[1933]:418) also mentions that these became terms of endearment between whites as well.

²⁵ See Harris (1964), Chapter 6, titled "The Myth of the Friendly Master," in which he rejects Tannenbaum's (1947) notion that slavery was "soft" in Brazil.

²⁶ In the introduction to his book *Para inglês ver*, British anthropologist Peter Fry (1982:17) offers some possible explanations of the book's titling phrase.

²⁷ See Caulfield (2000:50-69) for a full description and analysis of the visit of King Albert and Queen Elisabeth of Belgium to Rio de Janeiro in 1920.

²⁸ The Modernists were a group of artists who wanted to set out a new national identity for Brazil with relation to foreign powers, and were especially keen on breaking the colonial trend of imitation.

²⁹ Freyre ignored and greatly downplayed the history of coercion or rape.

³⁰ Because most of the streets in the *favelas* were not paved, asphalt had the meaning of a neighborhood that had a higher economic class of people living in it.

³¹ Person from Northeast Brazil. Can be meant in a derogatory manner.

³² I am greatly indebted to the research done on household workers over the years by Elsa M. Chaney and Mary Garcia Castro who together published the edited volume titled, *Muchachas No More: Household Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean* (1989).

³³ Cultural reproduction theory, sometimes also referred to as cultural capital theory, refers to the Marxist analyses of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1991, 1993) regarding the reproduction of social inequality, especially through schooling. See also Bourdieu and Passeron (1977).

³⁴ Social movements, perhaps, are somewhere in-between armed resistance and oppositional culture. While in a broad sense, one would have to admit that the success of the *Movimento Negro* (Black Consciousness Movement) in Brazil has not been so great, one would also have to consider that in the city of Salvador, Bahia, for example, the Afro-Brazilian carnival groups have had some success in terms of creating a space for the development of black identity.

³⁵ This was in 1998, when a *Real* was approximately equivalent to one dollar. One salary at that time was about 100 *Reais*, which meant that Darlene only had to take in twenty customers in one month in order to clear one minimum salary.

³⁶ It may be that women's oppositional culture takes place in the form of seeking social mobility through marrying up (the commodification of love), seeking whiter or more financially secure men (whitening), seeking older men (the *coroa*), seeking the commodification of their own bodies through sex work, or even seeking religious conversion.

³⁷ There is now research and literature emerging about Brazilian *telenovelas*. See, for example, Leal (1990[1985]), Araújo (2000), Fernandes (1997[1982]), Hamburger (1999).

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8

EMANCIPATION OR ALIENATION?

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In my book *Romantic Feminism in Hindi Novels Written by Women* (Pandey 1988), I analyzed approximately two dozen female-authored Hindi novels written between the years 1971 and 1982. I identified these novels as *romantic* for two primary reasons: first, they challenge the social norms and classical forms associated with Hindi-novel writing, and second, they are specifically concerned with the problems that arise out of love relationships. By examining the way in which these novels portray the lives of their female characters, I concluded that the question still remains unanswered as to whether women's emancipation has brought either independence and self-reliance or alienation and estrangement. In a society that maintains interdependence as the dominant ideal for a happy and healthy social existence, family members in India find it difficult to free themselves from family obligations so as to lead a meaningfully independent life. This is especially the case for women, who stand much lower in the social hierarchy associated with the traditional Indian family. The conflicts I address in this chapter are not those of rural Indian women who might be helplessly integrated in their social milieu; rather, they are the unique situations of well-to-do city dwellers who, on account of their higher education, have acquired some meta-awareness of their social background and developed individualized ambitions and aspirations. Such women often find their goals to be in conflict with the restrictive family norms that structure their everyday lives. The

tension between individual goals and family norms is likewise central to the texts I review in this chapter, all of which feature educated middle-class female protagonists.

The protagonists of these novels seek to resolve this tension by freeing themselves from the tyranny of social tradition, religious superstition, and bigotry. Yet in their struggle for emancipation, they often come to realize that their sense of self has been so damaged and distorted that they are no longer able to achieve creative freedom. They feel misused, exploited by society, and doomed to isolation and alienation. Upon losing their traditional moorings, they seek support and justification in the modern sector of urban society, yet quickly become victims of a consumer-oriented world in which everything is commodified, bought, and sold. In this amoral and irreligious realm of society, men have become more powerful than ever before, assuming greater rights of action. Indeed, they appear to be waiting for just this type of emancipated woman so that they can carry out another level of use and abuse. The reader is left with the impression that women's emancipation inevitably leads to alienation and isolation, if not total destruction.

The consumption of literature in India is for the most part confined to a small elite group of highly educated city dwellers, precisely the group who is most likely to be confronted by ideas associated with modernization. This group often expresses concern with what they perceive to be the 'backward' and 'regressive' aspects of an Indian society mired in conservative institutions, often wanting to bring about progressive change. The kind of restlessness associated with these elites could be compared to a similar process that has been identified for certain middle-class citizens in first world countries, who are thought to have acquired a self-confidence and personality that exists independently of the family: "Ours is a self-conscious age. Perhaps never before in history has man been so much a problem to himself" (Josephson and Josephson 1962:9).

It is at this level that we could place Indian intellectuals on par with middle-class thinkers in the West. The problem of loneliness and alienation from one's fellow beings could be said to arise from the antagonism between *form* and *life*—that is, between social institutions and the individual—a conflict that is inherently present in the development of every civilization. Every form, whether

social, religious, or political, tends to become rigid and sacrosanct, having been originally meant for the protection of life. Paradoxically, the form often becomes “independent of and divorced from the energies of life which brought it into being” (Pappenheim 1959:20). In short, it becomes the tyrannical master of life, ever busy in regulating and directing human behavior to acquire eternal continuity. It is thus not surprising that we find pulsing in the veins of every new generation an attempt to reject the sacredness of dead or tyrannical older forms in order to revolutionize the timeless character of long-standing institutions.

Many of the problems that we face in India today are an outcome of precisely this kind of form-versus-life conflict. On the one hand, we have a traditionally formalistic society that holds on to the age-old caste system, family status, and the practice of arranged marriage as sacred; on the other, we have the modern educated individual whose self-awareness has made him anxious to realize his self-autonomy and distinctive personality. This modern ‘demythologized’ Indian individual, with an un-Indian goal-oriented and secular English education, has acquired a kind of self-consciousness that drives him to work for the fulfillment of very individualistic needs and desires, with little respect for society as a whole. He feels lost, if not devastated, by having to continue traditions associated with social institutions and cultural values that he perceives to be obsolete. Unlike his Western counterpart, however, he is not equipped with a strong individualistic sense of personality, nor does he feel independent enough to conduct his life according to his personal wishes.

My investigation of these novels seeks to uncover the parameters of this form-versus-life conflict as they materialize in contemporary Hindi literature. Specifically, I examine narratives that pit the modern individual against traditional social institutions in such a way that the individual suffers estrangement and alienation. In the novels I have selected, it is women, not men, who have chosen to challenge the sacrosanct traditions of society and family. The female protagonists of these novels must fight against not only their male counterparts, who may be fathers, brothers, or husbands, but also against mothers, sisters, and other female family members. Such challenges rarely lead to any kind of modern resolution; rather, the protagonists of these novels ultimately suffer

for trying to assert themselves by doing something unacceptable within traditional Indian society. In secular terminology, we could say that the women of these novels, by choosing to seek modern solutions to the ills that beset them, take the law into their own hands. Ultimately, however, they are judged not by the modern Hindu code, but by the custodians of traditional Hindu law.

THE NOVELS

In the many women's novels that I reviewed, the form-versus-life conflict materializes most prominently around the issue of arranged marriage. In Indian tradition, young women and men are typically not allowed to choose their own partners without the intervention of their parents, who enjoy the exclusive privilege of finding suitable matches for their wards. Indeed, the father's most important duty of dharma is *kanyadan* (the giving away of one's daughter in marriage), which is expected to involve a suitable young man belonging to the same caste and class. The endogamous system of arranged marriage must be taken seriously by all concerned; any breach of this law is bound to bring its own social and religious retribution. Both kinds of retribution are played out in Sunita Jain's novels *Bindu* (1977), *Bojyu* (Father's Sister) (1977), and *Anugunj* (Echo) (1977), each of which features a female protagonist who falls in love with a young man during her college studies. When the parents learn of their daughter's love affair, they tear her away from the romantic relationship and marry her off to an unknown partner against her wishes. Yet she is unable to adjust to life with her new husband, and despite having protested the arranged union from its beginning, she is ultimately blamed for its failure. Jain's female characters are known for making serious efforts to reconcile themselves to a fate with an unwanted husband, but they usually do so without much success, primarily because of the antipathy and jealousy harbored by husbands against their wives' previous lovers. Jain's female protagonist thus feels alone and fully alienated, both from her parents and from the rest of the society. She believes herself to be worthless, yet continues to carry on the roles of mother and housewife.

In those few novels where parents show some flexibility and allow their daughters to choose a partner, the resulting scenario is

equally grim. The female protagonist of these narratives similarly fails to develop a satisfactory relationship with her husband, although in this case it tends to be because of the sexist outlook that is generally associated with India's patriarchal society. During the last fifty years, Indian women have had much more opportunity to receive education, broaden their mental horizons, and open up their field of action, in part because of Gandhi's early call for women to participate in the national struggle for freedom. Yet even though Gandhi initiated a much-needed discussion about gender equality, the Indian population has been slow to embrace these ideas when considering partnership in marriage. While the typical Indian man may feel modern and progressive enough to enjoy premarital sexual relationships, he is not often prepared to forego the ideal of a virgin wife. This double standard is fully illustrated in Mamata Kaliya's (1971) early novel *Beghar* (Homeless), in which the male protagonist abandons his girlfriend when he has sex with her and discovers that she is not a virgin.

Indeed, many of these novels suggest that even progressive and educated Indian men will demand complete submission from their wives, even though they may purport to offer their wives full freedom to develop their individual talents. The men of these novels still demand the old ideal of Indian womanhood known as the *pativrata dharma*, the highest social and religious value associated with Indian women. As many of these novels suggest, men are quick to demand that their wives be Sita even when they themselves have no inclination to be Rama. This point is dramatized in Dipti Khandelwal's novels *Priya* (1976) and *Kohare* (Fogs) (1977), each of which features female characters who are compelled to give up relationships with lovers and husbands because of men's moral double standards. In fact, all of the female characters in *Priya* suffer at the hands of men, who cheat, rape, and misuse them in pursuit of money. The female heroine of *Kohare* is able to resist this double standard to some extent, telling her husband that he too will have to be as good as Rama if he wants his wife to behave like Sita. Ultimately, however, she becomes disgusted by her husband's inability to end his extramarital relations and returns to her parents with her baby, only to be divorced by him later.

The narrators in these novels often attribute the failure of the protagonist's marriage to the discriminatory treatment that she

received from her family early in life. Such is the case with the novels *Apne Sath* (With Oneself) by Jyotsana Milan (1977), *Viruddha* (Opposed) by Mrinal Pandey (1977), *Us Tak* (Up To Her) by Kusum Ansal (1977), and *Bindu* by Sunita Jain (1977). In each of these novels, it is the girl's faulty upbringing that is the main cause of her later maladjustment in marriage and subsequent unhappiness. Milan's protagonist Keka, for instance, has developed a sense of repulsion for her own body and its pleasures because she was taught in childhood that "sex is dirty." Pandey's Rajani and Jain's Bindu have also developed problems that stem from troubled childhoods: they were both unwanted and uncared for at their parents' houses while male children were loved and even pampered. Yet Rajani and Bindu both had to accept this practice because in Indian tradition sisters are supposed to obey and serve their brothers. The ongoing rejection and chastising from important family figures creates a significant sense of inferiority that prohibits these women from feeling authentic and worthy. This situation causes some characters to reject their upbringing altogether, along with the authority figures that come with it. Ansal's Mukta, for instance, stages a strong protest against her mother and even manages to leave the family house to live an independent life. Considered the ominous third daughter, Mukta had always been treated cruelly by her mother and looked down upon by neighboring women. In each of these novels, then, the authors portray society as responsible for the woman's maladjustment in conjugal love. The fact that Indian families withhold education and affection from their female children is shown to be the result of a sexist society. It is this kind of culture that is responsible for the development of unbalanced personalities among girls, which subsequently leads to their failure to achieve happiness in married life and motherhood. Writing within a tradition that I identify in my book as *romantic feminism* (Pandey 1988), these 1970s novelists again and again point out that it is men and man-made society that has hindered the proper growth of women, keeping them from emotional and spiritual satisfaction.

This is particularly the case in romantic feminist novelists' portrayal of married men. Although married men are supposed to have a sense of responsibility with respect to the observance of social norms and morality, they are presented in some of these

novels as careless and crafty adventure-seekers. For instance, they are sometimes shown enticing young and inexperienced women for their own sexual pleasures, or even blackmailing and exploiting their own partners for financial gain. In Khandelwal's (1976) *Priya*, for instance, Yashwant brings Saudamini home as his wife, offers her to his business partner, and even rapes her when she refuses to sleep with him; he later offers his own daughter to Arjun Ahuja for the same purpose. By the time that Saudamini returns to live with her elderly father after being exploited and raped, she has lost all trust in men. Unable to establish a meaningful relationship with anyone, much less her father, she decides to live alone and vows never to get involved with a man again. A similar fate befalls her sister, who is abandoned by her lover after eloping with him and having his child: left with no other option, she returns home to her mother. Men are also presented in these texts as making false promises to their girlfriends. As with Vijay's treatment of Sunita in Nirupman Sevati's (1976) *Patjhar Ki Avaze* (Voices of Fall), men promise marriage to their girlfriends but then leave them as soon as they have the opportunity to marry a girl of their own caste who has a handsome dowry. Anubha, the protagonist of Sevati's novel, is also rejected by her lover because her parents could not offer a good dowry. In Malati Rastogi's (1975) novel *Ghutan* (Suffocation), J. betrays his beloved by marrying another girl for her dowry, causing the protagonist to lose her mental balance and end up in a hospital for treatment.

A number of these novels feature an immature and naive young girl falling prey to the cunning of an adult married man who is only interested in carrying on a clandestine love affair. Because of the strict segregation between men and women in Indian society, he is able to do so in a manner that will not harm his wife socially nor create any kind of problem in an otherwise unruffled married life. But the same is not true for the young girl. Lacking self-confidence and a sense of responsibility, she is easily taken advantage of by an older man, particularly if he is married to someone within the girl's own family, as many of these male characters are. The women of these novels find it difficult to differentiate between a false declaration of love and an expression of real interest. Reva of *Ghutan* falls into this trap and gets involved with two married men, one after the other. The succession of abuse

she experiences ultimately leads to her tragic nervous breakdown. Anubha of *Patjhar Ki Avaze* is likewise unable to bear the duplicity of her married lover, Agrawal. She ultimately ends up in a hospital, where she tells him to leave her alone with her mother. In *Us tak*, Mukta's entire life is ruined by her married boss, who treats her as his mistress. Although Mukta is strong-willed and manages to free herself from his clutches, her relationship with him has distorted her personality to such an extent that she is no longer able to establish a genuine friendship with any man. She is ultimately betrayed and left to suffer loneliness and isolation. Finally, the female protagonists of Vina Arora's (1982) *Uske Nakshe Qadam* (Her Footsteps) each fall for young married men. They suffer from social estrangement and loneliness because of these relationships, yet nevertheless allow their lovers to carry on their married lives without disruption.

Even when the female protagonists of these novels live in relative freedom and have amiable husbands, their earlier socialization and Western education make it impossible for them to find harmony and happiness with their mates. For example, Keka of *Apne Sath* and Rajani of *Viruddha* both have considerate and loving husbands and live lives that are free of male trickery and oppression. In fact, their husbands even want to help them deal with their psychological problems. Yet because they live in a sexist family atmosphere that metes out discriminatory treatment to female members on a regular basis, they too suffer from truncated personalities and psychosomatic ailments. These novels thus establish that the kindness and generosity of one or two persons cannot possibly relieve these women from their suffering. Instead, the authors advocate for a more general change in the attitude of men toward women: women must no longer be treated as objects or possessions to be transferred at the will and pleasure of men. Moreover, family and society must develop a healthy atmosphere that is conducive to the growth of children, irrespective of their sex. Social conformity must not be achieved through the manipulation and mystification of sexuality. At a very basic level, parents must come to know that any kind of discriminatory behavior on their part will ultimately lead to the development of an unbalanced personality in their child, which will later be the main source of attendant social problems. Keka hates her body, detests intimacy with her own husband, and cannot feel authentic as either a woman

or a mother, precisely because she learned in childhood that sex was dirty and that men do bad things to girls. Rajani's fears of being unwanted and unloved can be traced to the fact that her parents expressed continued disappointment that she was born a girl instead of a boy. The feeling of isolation that this treatment begat was intensified by years of education in a convent school, where Christian nuns instilled in her all sorts of additional norms and taboos. Like many of the female characters who surface in these novels, Rajani is always at war with herself and lacks a strong sense of her own autonomy. She is unable to live in harmony even with a loving husband.

The women of these novels thus suffer from a dilemma that is uniquely situated within modernity. In contrast to what they learned through Indian tradition, they have come to believe that life must be seized from within, according to the laws of one's inner self. Yet they do not enjoy the freedom that they need to attain such a life, nor do they possess the personality and willpower required by it. Because these individuals are no longer able to find satisfaction within the parameters of traditional society, all of their efforts lead to frustration. In short, they are unable to feel authentic, autonomous, and genuine in a world in which they are obligated to perform certain traditional roles. The modern individual is thus portrayed as extremely lonely, if not hypocritical, engaged in a long-term battle that offers little hope of resolution.

These novels additionally illustrate that the isolation experienced by the educated modern individual is particularly acute in urban areas, where human relationships are depersonalized and have become purely mechanical. The female protagonist may feel homesick, even homeless. Her subjectivity may suffer on account of the formidable forces of modern technology. She may even feel reduced to a 'thing' rather than a person, a commodity that can be bought and sold. In the end, she may even be unable to comprehend her own sense of self, much less establish meaningful relationships with others. She may lose sight of her value and significance as a creative human being. As Gordon Roadarmel wrote in the 1960s regarding the dilemma of modern man, "he might even feel separated from other individuals and the rest of society, from his religion and social institutions, or even from himself" (Roadarmel 1969:241). All of these developments surface in the lives of the

female characters featured in these novels. Before this era of female-authored novels, the form-versus-life conflict that I have discussed in this chapter was largely seen as irrelevant to Indian women. Scholars writing on this aspect of modernity in India have too often assumed that women are much more integrated into traditional culture than are their male counterparts. But the narratives reviewed here suggest that the modern dilemma is true for women as well, at least for the middle-class protagonists of these female-authored novels.

CONCLUSIONS

The storylines in these novels bring forward a woman's point of view and provide important feminist commentary on contemporary social life in India. In all of the cases described in this chapter, it is ultimately the man who is responsible for the problems and sufferings of the woman. If this accusation comes across as somewhat diffuse and vague in the texts themselves, it is only because the fault has been laid at the feet of society, which is male-oriented, sexist, and dominated by the authority of the family patriarch.

It is significant that the female protagonists of these novels all belong to middle-class educated families. Socialized into traditional Hindu families, the protagonists spend their childhood in an environment where marriage is obligatory and arranged by one's parents. Yet this socialization is in conflict with the cultural systems introduced through Western education—a conflict that is reflected in the maladjustment and discord that later comes to characterize the women's married lives. A traditionally socialized woman who has not received any Western education may accept her parents' arrangement of the marriage as normal, if not desirable, adjusting easily to her new home and *pati-parmeshvar* (husband-lord). But the same kind of acceptance is impossible for the Western-educated women of these novels, particularly once they are exposed to Western ideas regarding the possibility of romantic love and free partner choice.

The feminist dilemma played out in these texts is decisively a phenomenon of post-1947 India. It was Indian Independence that brought about the spread of education, the growth of the middle

class, and the increasing urbanization that provides the background for the form-versus-life conflict that arises in these novels. The Bollywood film industry has also done its part to facilitate this dilemma over the last fifty years, offering tens of thousands of favorable depictions of 'modern' romance in love songs and scenes. For the women of these novels, one's relationship with a man is a personal matter that depends upon individual tastes instead of social requirements and family. Each of the protagonists ultimately chooses an individualized sense of morality over a group sense of social conformity. Yet in the divergence between form and life—or rather, between social institutions and the individual—the form of society continues to dominate, causing the self-aware protagonist to become dissatisfied and frustrated. In the state of isolation and alienation that results, the female protagonist is unable to determine the course of her life. None of the misery-producing relationships depicted in these novels ever ends in death or divorce. As I have described in this chapter, it is precisely the feeling of being incapable of establishing a meaningful and fulfilling relationship with one's partner that makes these female protagonists feel helpless, worthless, and lonely. At this stage in India's social development, then, we must continue to question whether the kind of feminist consciousness delineated here has brought women nearer to emancipation or, to the contrary, social alienation.

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9

HIJRAS AND THE USE OF SEXUAL INSULT

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I originally published this article twelve years ago in an edited volume on language, gender, and sexuality. Because Dr. Ved Vatak was foundational to the article's conception, I have chosen to reprint a slightly abbreviated version of it here as an expression of gratitude to a man who has in so many ways changed my thinking about the relationship between language and social life in India. I was one of the fortunate American graduate students who was able to study with Dr. Vatak while writing my dissertation at the University of California at Berkeley. After returning from a year of fieldwork in Varanasi and armed with hours of recorded data, I began to meet with Dr. Vatak on a weekly basis, benefiting from his diverse expertise in linguistics, folklore, and Hindi literature. Dr. Vatak added a level of detail and richness to my understanding of the Hindi language, always attentive to its employment as a product of both social context and social hierarchy. Although I would no doubt write this article very differently today, given the benefit of an additional decade of fieldwork in India among groups associated with gender and sexual alterity, its thesis regarding the way in which hijras strategically use language to speak back to social hierarchy is still viable. Indeed, many of the gains made by the hijra community over the last decade in the areas of politics and human rights have been propelled by the very discursive strategies outlined in this essay.

From *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender, and Sexuality*. Copyright © 1997, Oxford University Press.

Marginalized both socially and spatially, the *hijrās* have created an elaborate network that spans all of India, establishing a divergent social space that both parallels and opposes organizations of gender in the dichotomous system that excludes them. Discussed variously in the anthropological literature as “transvestites,” “eunuchs,” “hermaphrodites,” and even “a third sex,” most of India’s hijras were raised as boys before taking up residence in one of the many hijra communities that exist in almost every region of India. In addition to appropriating feminine dress and mannerisms, many hijras have male partners and choose to undergo a ritualized castration and penectomy operation. Although relatively untouched by police jurisdiction, hijras across the country have divided themselves according to municipal police divisions, in accordance with the demarcation of districts in mainstream society. They elect their own council of elders to settle group disputes, referred to as *pancāyats*, who rule over a select group of hijra communities within a particular region. They have regional meetings as well: simply through word-of-mouth, tens of thousands of hijras have been known to converge on a single area. Hijras in North India can often travel free of charge on government trains, knowing upon arrival in any new city precisely where to go for hijra company. The extraordinary factor at work here is that the estimated 1.2 million hijras now living in India (*Hindustan Times* 1994; Shrivastav 1986)¹ constitute a culture so diverse that all of India’s myriad social and linguistic groupings are represented within their numbers, and yet they are easily identified as part of one group by what might be referred to as a flamboyant and subversive semiotic system—a system identified through unique choices of dress, gesture, and discourse.

A number of European and American anthropologists have pointed to the existence of this network as evidence that a greater social tolerance of gender variance exists in India than in the West (see, for example, Bullough and Bullough 1993; Nanda 1990, 1992), but I argue instead that this network exists only because hijras have created it in resistance to systematic exclusion. Ostracized by friends and family, hijras have formed a parallel universe of sorts, its strength demonstrated by hijras’ loyal participation in local, regional, and national celebrations. Meetings that have won the attention of Indian journalists during the last three

decades include the 1979 celebration in Ahmedabad for the 50th anniversary of a hijra named “Dada Guru” Shankar (*Times of India* 1979); a subsequent celebration in Panipat for the coronation of a successor to the Delhi *takia* (Mohan 1979); the 1981 All-India Hijra Conference in Agra, which is said to have brought together more than 50,000 hijras from throughout India and Pakistan (Singh 1982); the religious festival associated with the city of Koovagam, Tamil Nadu, where approximately 10,000 hijras gather on an annual basis to “marry” Aravan, the legendary husband of a female incarnation of Krishna (Shetty 1990); and the annual jamboree at the village of Bechraji, Gujarat, where hijras gather in mass to pay homage to their goddess, Bahucara Mata (Mitra 1984).

Likewise, it is the network, not the government, that is ultimately responsible for a number of landmark political decisions during the past fifty years regarding hijra rights in India and Pakistan. Some of the most notable gains for the hijra community include the 1936 decision to give hijras government pensions, ration cards, and the right to vote (Shrivastav 1986), the 1952 and 1977 decisions to allow hijras to run for local office as women (Singh 1982), the decision in the 1950s to lift Ayub Khan’s ban on hijra activities in Pakistan (Naqvi and Mujtaba 1992), and the 1994 decision to give hijras the right to vote as women (*Hindustan Times* 1994). These gains were made only after lengthy protest from the hijra network, a fact not lost on the journalists and sociologists who report them. Chandar Mohan, for instance, in his article titled “The Ambiguous Sex on the War-Path,” offers a brief history of political platforms adopted by hijras, mentioning in particular stances taken at two influential national conferences in 1969: an All-India Hijra Conference at Nadiad, where participating hijras demanded to be counted as females instead of males in the national census (Mohan 1979; Singh 1982), and a subsequent conference in Bhopal, where hijras, who gain most of their income by singing and dancing at birth celebrations, launched an organized campaign against the anti-procreation stance of government-sponsored “family planning” (Mohan 1979; Singh 1982).

Indeed, hijras have strategically exploited their perceived status as “neither men nor women” in their own campaigns for political office. Two events, one forty years ago and one twenty years ago, exemplify what has now become a commonplace

political strategy. One of these events took place in Gonda, India, in the late 1970s, the other in Abbottabad, Pakistan, after the collapse of the Benazir Bhutto government in the 1990s. In Gonda, hijras urged President N. Sanjiva Reddy to invite them to form a government, arguing that as “neutralists” they would be able to serve the nation without the in-group fighting typical of “men and women” (Mohan 1979); in Abbottabad, hijras argued that because both “men and women” had failed as politicians, residents should try sponsoring a hijra instead (Naqvi and Mujtaba 1992). Credit for the visibility of the hijra in modern-day thinking, then, is perhaps best given to the hijras who actively participate in this network and who employ in-your-face tactics at public gatherings in order to make their positions heard. Hijras are not accorded respect in contemporary Indian society; they demand it.

In this chapter, I discuss how hijras reclaim space normally unavailable to them through the use of verbal insult, a discursive practice that both accentuates and constructs the same sexual ambiguity for which they are feared. I begin by tracing the formation of a cultural ideology regarding hijras’ “verbal insolence,” as evidenced in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century accounts of court eunuchs by European travelers, in nineteenth-century discussions of hijras by British colonialists, and in contemporary portrayals of hijras by South Asian journalists, poets, and novelists. I then move on to an analysis of hijras’ contemporary cursing strategies, referring to fieldwork I conducted with Veronica O’Donovan among four Hindi-speaking hijra communities in Banaras, India, during 1992 and 1993. I focus in particular on an in-group speech event that hijras perform in the presence of nonhijra outsiders. By employing what some Indian sociologists have named *aśīlī evaṁ dviarthī bhāṣā* ‘obscene and double-meaning language’ (Singh 1982), hijras are able to assume a position of control in their interactions with the public, inviting their nonhijra listeners to enter a linguistic space that questions dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality. Mapping their own sexual ambiguity onto linguistic ambiguity, India’s hijras are able to locate themselves on an otherwise inaccessible social grid.

A HISTORY OF VERBAL INSOLENT

As a means of contextualizing hijras' present-day social position as well as their use of verbal insults, I want to first offer a brief historical overview of the social and linguistic position of the "eunuch" in India. Throughout their various incarnations in history, India's eunuchs have been portrayed as providers of verbal as well as sexual relief: as overseers of the king's harem in the 4th century B.C.E.; as "shampooers" in the Hindu courts during the second and fifth centuries; as protectors of the royal ladies of the harem in medieval Hindu courts; as administrators under the Khiljis of Delhi during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries; as servants in the Mughal courts from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries; as slaves in the houses of Muslim nobility in Awadh (formerly called Oude) during the 1900s; and, finally, as the independent performers variously known since the early nineteenth century as *khojas*, *khusras*, *pavaiyas*, and *hijras*.²

Licentious tongues: The court eunuch in European travelogues

The eunuchs of the Mughal court, often referred to as *khwajas* in colonialist literature, are a very different entity from the hijras of the twentieth century, but because many of today's hijras conceptualize themselves as descendents of these earlier court eunuchs, frequently rattling off folk legends about sharp-tongued eunuch administrators, they merit attention here. The eunuchs' predilection for abusive language is documented in the literature over a span of several centuries, particularly in European travelogues. The lively stories narrated by the Italian physician Niccolao Manucci in the mid-1600s about his interactions with various eunuchs during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb provide some rather colorful examples. In his lengthy *Storia do Mogor* (translated by Irvine 1907), Manucci relates several stories regarding what he calls "that sort of brute" known as the eunuch, describing his greed, his vanity, and, most significant in terms of the present discussion, his "licentious tongue":

Another of their qualities is to be friendly to women and inimical to men, which may be from envy, knowing what they have been deprived of. The tongue and the hands of these baboons act together, being most licentious in examining everything, both goods and women, coming into the palace; they are foul in speech, and fond of silly stories. Among all the Mahomedans they are ordinarily the strictest observers of the faith, although I knew some who did not fail to drink their little drop, and were fond of wine. These men are the spies for everything that goes on in secret, whereby they are always listening among the kings, princes, queens, and princesses. Fidā'e Khān, of whom I have spoken, aware of the character of these monsters, did not allow such to be employed in his house, although he retained two young men who acted as pages; he was indifferent to the fact that this sort of people are kept in the houses of princes and great men. This suffices for a brief notice of what the eunuchs are. (Manucci 1907:v. 2, 80-81)

The author's rather negative depiction of court eunuchs as "foul in speech and fond of silly stories" and as "spies for everything that goes on in secret" is significant, particularly as it reflects a perspective characteristic of narratives on the eunuch during the next three centuries.

Many of the stories told by Manucci portray the eunuch as a child wronged, rendered angry and miserable by an unwanted castration. Especially moving in this regard is a narrative about the faithful Daulat, who carried the bones of his deceased master 'Ali Mardān Khān all the way to Persia in order to bury them in the tomb of his forefathers, only to have his nose and ears cut off by the King of Persia in return (v. 2, 215-216). Hiding away in a house in Lahore full of shame, the deformed Daulat asks Manucci to make his nose and ears grow again, thinking that as a physician Manucci might be able to conjure a remedy. When Daulat finally comes to terms with the fact that there is no remedy for his deformity, he

exclaims: “I know not what sins I have committed to be made an out-and-out eunuch twice over, first in my inferior part, and, secondly, in my upper half. Now there is nothing more to deprive me of, nor do I fear anything but losing my head itself” (v.2, 216-217). Yet in many of the stories told by Manucci, the eunuch will do anything in his power to revenge himself against his deprivation, as in the case of I'tibār Khan, a eunuch who figures prominently in Manucci's *Storio*. Sold into Mughal slavery at a very young age by his Hindu parents and bitter because of it, the “immeasurably stingy” I'tibār Khan takes great delight in helping Aurangzeb make his father, the elderly Shāhjahān, unconditionally miserable (v. 2, 76-77).

Of particular interest in Manucci's travelogue is a short narrative focusing on an unnamed “insolent” underling, a gatekeeper to Prince Shāh 'As seraglio, who tricks the author into giving away his money through a verbal slur against his family (v. 4, 225). It is not clear whether Manucci, even after recalling this exchange for his travelogue, recognizes that he has been duped, but the eunuch in question was clearly in control of the conversational encounter. After drawing blood from the prince Shāh 'A Manucci was given 400 rupees in payment, certainly a great sum of money in the seventeenth century. But when Manucci went to leave the seraglio, a eunuch at the gate remarked off the cuff: “It seems to me that you could never have had as much money in all your life.” The statement was immediately interpreted as an insult by Manucci, the proud and prosperous son of a chief physician of the King of Spain. “At once I took the salver and emptied out on the ground all the money in it in the presence of the gate-keepers,” Manucci angrily recalls, “telling them I made them a present of it. Then I turned to the eunuch: ‘Do you not know that I am the son of the chief physician of the King of Spain, who is lord over half the world and owns the mines of silver?’” (p. 225) Manucci appears to think that he is the winner in this dispute, but the verbal adroitness of his interlocutor cannot go unnoticed; the insolent eunuch, after all, became 400 rupees richer.

According to early accounts, many of the eunuchs who served the Mughal emperors were either kidnapped or sold into slavery by their Indian parents; others were brought from Ethiopia, Egypt, or Sudan as part of the Middle Eastern slave trade. Rajaram Narayan

Saletore (1974, 1978) gives perhaps the most comprehensive historical account of the institution of eunuch slavery in India, although there are innumerable references to the practice in the memoirs of various Mughal rulers and European travelers. Francois Bernier (1891), for instance, a French physician in the court of the “Great Mogol” Shah Jahan during the seventeenth century, records one instance when the Ethiopian King sent the court “twenty-five choice slaves, nine or ten of whom were of a tender age and in a state to be made eunuchs. This was, to be sure, an appropriate donation from a Christian to a Prince!” (1891:135). The practice apparently extended well into the mid-nineteenth century in certain areas of India: William Knighton (1855) identifies the eunuchs as “slaves” in his narrative on the household of Nussir-u-Deen, the King of Oude, and Richard Francis Burton (1886-1888, v. 1, 70-2n), who campaigned against the practice of slavery in general and took it upon himself to trace the development of pederasty in the Eastern world, provides an explicit account of the castration operation used on abductees from Darfur (i.e., “The parts are swept off by a single cut of a razor, a tube (tin or wooden) is set in the urethra, the wound is cauterised with boiling oil, and the patient planted in a fresh dunghill. His diet is milk; and if under puberty, he often survives”). The subject of court eunuchs in Indian history merits a full book in its own right; I mention it here as a means of contextualizing present-day ideologies about hijras’ language use.

Certain eunuchs, both before and during the Mughal period, did indeed rise to high positions in the royal courts, as suggested by several journalists and anthropologists when discussing the comparatively low status of hijras in modern-day society (e.g., *New Orleans Times Picayune* 1994; Clairborne 1983; Nanda 1990; Sharma 1984; Naqvi and Mujtaba 1992).³ Their impotence was said to make them especially faithful servants, and some of them apparently became influential in court politics; these included: Malik Kāfūr, Ala-ud-din Khilji’s favorite eunuch, who led the annexation of Gujarat in 1297 and a raid on southern India in 1310 (see Rawlinson 1952:226-227; Saletore 1974:202); I’tibār Khan, who in the 1600s remained one of Aurangzeb’s most trusted servants (as reported by Manucci); and Khwaja Saras Hilal, appointed in Agra as one of Sai’d Khan’s 1200 eunuchs, who later joined the Emperor Jahangir and named the town Hilalabad after

himself (see Saletore 1974:203). Yet behind all these sporadic tales of valor is the awareness that the eunuch is an orphaned servant, and an emasculated one at that, who exists without family or genealogy. This point is made especially clear in one of Manucci's narratives, in which he gives an eyewitness account of how I'tibār Khan reacted to two elderly visitors from Bengal who claimed to be his parents. After surmising that their claim was indeed true, I'tibār Khan angrily ordered them to receive fifty lashes and cried: "How have ye the great temerity to come into my presence after you have consumed the price of my body, and having been the cause, by emasculating me, of depriving me of the greatest pleasures attainable in this world? Of what use are riches to me, having no sons to whom I could leave them? Since you were so cruel as to sell your own blood, let not my auditors think it strange if I betray anger against you" (v. 2, 78-79).

Yet it is this very emasculation that allowed I'tibār Khan to become the gossiping governor of Aurangzeb's fortress, whose physiognomy, in the words of Manucci, betrayed the "vileness of his soul" (v. 2, 77). The eunuchs, in the minds of many European travelers, were thought to lead a contradictory existence: their emasculation made them faithful but their orphanhood made them cruel. Bernier, when reporting on a eunuch rebellion in Delhi provoked by an outgroup murder of one of the seraglio eunuchs, articulates this contradiction overtly:

It seems nevertheless to be the general opinion that he cannot long escape the power and malice of the eunuchs. Emasculation, say the *Indians*, produces a different effect upon men than upon the brute creation; it renders the latter gentle and tractable; but who is the eunuch, they ask, that is not vicious, arrogant, and cruel? It is in vain to deny, however, that many among them are exceedingly faithful, generous, and brave. (Bernier 1891:131-32)

Bernier's comparison of the court eunuch with "the brute creation," a phrase which when used in this context conjures the image of a male bullock feminized through castration, is telling, particularly as it points to several assumptions shared by European travelers

regarding the “humanity” (or lack thereof) of the eunuch. In many of the European accounts, hijras exist somewhere between the categories of man and beast, of man and woman, a liminality captured in Manucci’s more direct categorizations of the eunuch as “that sort of brute.” Because of their neutered status, many Mughal eunuchs served as protectors of the palace women; indeed, in many cases they were the only “nonwomen” allowed into the women’s quarters. But their association with feminine secrets won them simultaneous notoriety as court gossips, and cruel ones at that. Bernier, later in his travelogue, describes the procession of the seraglio in Agra and Delhi, in which the participating women were protected on all sides by eunuchs: “Woe to any unlucky cavalier, however exalted in rank, who, meeting the procession, is found too near. Nothing can exceed the insolence of the tribes of eunuchs and footmen which he has to encounter, and they eagerly avail themselves of any such opportunity to beat a man in the most unmerciful manner” (p. 373).⁴ The author’s repeated uses of the term *insolence* (formed from the Latin *in* ‘not’ + *solere* ‘to be accustomed to’) serves to characterize the hijra as someone who is ‘out of the usual,’ in voice as well as deed. As in the descriptions quoted here, travel reports of the court eunuch frequently conflate verbal insolence with physical cruelty, portraying the eunuch as inhumanely adept at both.

Verbal abominations: The hijra in colonialist narratives

The historical connection between the *khwaja* of the Mughal courts and the *hijra* of contemporary India is unclear. During the early 1800s, the status allotted to the court eunuch was mapped linguistically onto the “natural” hijra; that is, the term *khoja*, a derivative of *khwaja*, came to represent “hermaphrodites” in addition to court eunuchs, and both were defined in opposition to the more vulgar, artificially created *hijra* (see Ebdon 1855:522; Russell, Bahadur, and Lal 1916:206).⁵ Later in the same century, the more prestigious term *khoja* was, for the most part, lost on Hindi-speaking society, and natural eunuchs as well as castrated eunuchs were conflated under the single term *hijra*. But the perception of the emasculated orphan as “insolent” remained constant, continuing through reports made by British colonialists in

the 1800s, who systematically objected to hijras' vulgar manner of acquiring alms at births and weddings. Indeed, Lawrence W. Preston (1987), in his revealing discussion of the role of British colonialists in the oppression of hijras in the nineteenth century, explains that the vulgarity associated with hijras' begging techniques, particularly their predilection for verbal obscenity and genital exposure, led the Collector at Pune to direct an edict against its realization. The Bombay Presidency ultimately denied the Collector's request for legislation on the grounds that education, not law, would eventually solve the problem, but it nevertheless declared itself in support of the sentiment behind the request: "No doubt ... the evil will soon be mitigated, as far as it is susceptible of remedy in the present state of society, and that it will ere long altogether cease to exist, even in respect of the infatuated victims themselves, as other abominations have done under the advantages of education, and under a Government which will not tolerate them" (Webb 1837, quoted in Preston 1987:379).

Hijras' verbal "abominations" continued to be central to colonialist narratives throughout the late 1800s. John Shortt (1873:406), in his report on the *kojahs* of southern India (a term he uses for both natural and castrated eunuchs), identifies them as "persistent [and] impudent beggars, rude and vulgar in the extreme, singing filthy, obscene, and abusive songs"; Fazl Lutfullah (1875:95), in a short discussion of hijras in Ahmedabad, refers to their "obstreperous sallies of witty abuse"; and finally, F. L. Faridi (1899:22), in his entry on the Gujarat *híjdás* for the *Bombay Gazetteer*, remarks on their "indecent clamour and gesture." In a manner echoic of Bernier two centuries before him, Faridi exclaims: "Woe betide the wight who opposes the demands of a Hijda. The whole rank and file of the local fraternity [will] besiege his house."

CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS

The designation of the hijra as a loose-tongued upstart has continued to the present day, although it is now Indian journalists and sociologists who carry on this descriptive genre. Authors frequently point to hijras' idiosyncratic and nonconforming use of language, particularly to their mixing of feminine and masculine speech styles, as indicative of both gender dysphoria and sexual

perversion. They contrast hijras with women through reference to their lewd jokes, their love of excessive obscenity, and their aggressive conversational style; they contrast them with men through reference to their penchant for gossip and their tendency to chatter excessively, to babble without content. Like the court eunuch described by Manucci in the 1600s, the hijra is portrayed as a foul-mouthed gossip; her dual nature, in the opinion of modern-day Indian authors, enables her to outdo the most negative verbal stereotypes associated with either side of the gender divide.

The work of Govind Singh, the author of a popular study entitled *Hijrō kā sansār* (The World of Hijras),⁶ is but one example of this descriptive trend. Throughout his book, Singh portrays the hijra as a linguistically conflicted entity who, as he explains in the two excerpts reproduced below, shifts between positions of coquettish cursing and foul-mouthed flirting:

When several hijras are together, they can never shut up. Even the hijra who lives alone can never be quiet. Some Don Juan will tease him, and with a clap he'll turn around and give him a quick answer. This answer is often very foul-mouthed and obscene. Hijras, together or alone, always speak and converse in this way. They can be identified by their effeminate gestures in a crowd of hundreds and even from a long way off, and moreover, their style of speaking is just as peculiar.

They keep a storehouse of obscene words and they use metaphors that will shock all of those listening. The use of obscene words in Banaras is singularly unique and exceptional, but when face-to-face with the vocabulary of hijras, Banaras speech pales in comparison. No one can keep up with the rhythms of hijras' obscene pronunciations. On any particular day one of them might get angry at another hijra. When a hijra gets angry, he usually gesticulates in a coquettish manner and flares up. He is not bent upon exchanging blows or serious

mischief, but the hijra can't remain silent either. He will certainly begin to rave and babble. When they want something from someone in a crowd, they'll gossip about that man. (1982:94-95, my translation)

In these passages, Singh employs certain Hindi terms that work together to portray hijras' existence as linguistically troubling. In interactions with both the public and her own community, the hijra rebels against cultural ideologies of gendered language, assuming a linguistic position that is neither fully feminine nor fully masculine. She appropriates the masculine through her use of *kahā-sunī* 'verbal impropriety,' *garmāgarmī* 'heated verbal exchange,' and *apsābd* 'abusive words'; her speech is *phūhar* 'coarse-grained' and *aśīl* 'obscene, vulgar.' Conversely, she appropriates the feminine through her use of effeminate *hāv-bhāv* 'gestures,' as well as through her tendency to *maṭkānā* 'move in a coquettish manner' and to *baknā* 'babble,' 'chatter,' 'make disjointed utterances.' The hijra, in the opinion of Singh, is a kind of a linguistic maverick, and her refusal to adhere to hegemonic notions of either feminine or masculine speech becomes almost an instantiation of her refusal to adhere to a particular gender.

Cursing as a corollary of impotence

Hijras' use of obscenity tends to interest commentators far more than their use of gossip; Indian journalists will often devote full paragraphs to hijras' abusive displays, not just at birth performances but also in their daily interactions with innocent bystanders. The strategy of shouting obscenities in front of outsiders appears to be just one contemporary realization of what has been traditionally identified as "the hijra curse." Since the early 1800s, and perhaps long before that, people in a variety of Indian communities have believed that the hijra, by virtue of her own impotence, has the power to prevent the birth of male children; her curse has therefore been viewed as a performative in the canonical Austinian sense, which, if uttered in the context of the birth celebration, serves to interrupt the family lineage. Because this belief is still extant in

many communities, particularly in Indian villages, hijras often provoke fear among their clients.

Rupa,⁷ who shares a house with an Indian family in Banaras and considers herself to be the *pandit* ‘priest’ of hijras living in the city, expands on this point. She explains that Banaras residents, fearing the pronouncement of a curse like “may your child die,” will respond to hijras with *izzat* ‘honor,’ ‘respect’:

They’re very afraid of us. If someone has a child and we go to their door, they’ll always talk to us with folded hands—whenever they talk to us. Why do they talk to us like that? Because they’re afraid that something bad might come out of our mouths. And sometimes that really brings its fruits. They’re afraid that we’ll say something absurd, for example, *jā, terā baccā mar jāy!* ‘may your child die!’ We say that sometimes in anger. And because they’re always afraid that their child might die, they’ll say, “Don’t ever say anything to them, because if something bad comes out of their mouths, something bad will happen to us!” So they always have fear in their hearts, and they always speak to us with respect. (personal communication, Rupa, Spring 1993, my translation)

But because this respect is motivated by fear, hijras are situated precariously in the social structure. Even though many residents, as Rupa explains, still fear the curse of the hijra, an increasing number of Hindus and Muslims are angered at their manner of inspiring fear to collect alms, and they dismiss belief in hijras’ power over impotency as mere superstition. The modern-day hijra is left with little choice but to up the verbal ante with a sexual chip. And so it is that P. N. Pimpley and S. K. Sharma (1985:41) depict hijras as “making overtures to onlookers” and “cracking sexually charged jokes at men”; Kavitha Shetty (1990:52) describes them as “intimidating those who are wary of their queer appearance and outrageous behaviour”; and Nauman Naqvi and Hasan Mujtaba (1992:89) focus on a hijra in Mazimabad who “hurl[ed] the most vociferous abuses” so that a man was “forced to disembark from the

bus in shame.” Indeed, the United States Department of State (1992:1-2) even commented on hijras’ use of sexual insult when they answered a request for an advisory opinion on an asylum application made by a Pakistani “hermaphrodite.” Referring to information obtained from the United States embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, the Department informed the San Francisco Asylum Unit of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service that “[hijras’] performances, despite the fact that they often involve crude sexual jokes, are considered more socially acceptable than real female dancers (who more often than not are also prostitutes).”

Hijras’ predilection for obscenity has led a number of researchers, particularly those interested in the human psyche, to theorize on its psychological origins. Gautam N. Allahbadia and Nilesh Shah, who identify hijras’ collective existence as a “subhuman life,” pose this question directly in their introduction to a brief article on hijras in Bombay:

The style of begging is very aggressive. In groups of three or four they confront individuals, clapping and making gestures with their fingers. Give them money and they will bless you and your family and pray for increased libido for you and for male heirs for your family. Refusal is followed by abuse, and obscene gestures, and some of them will lift their petticoats, exposing their genitals and cursing. ... Why do they live like this? (Allahbadia and Shah 1992:48)

While Allahbadia and Shah, for the most part, shy away from answering the question of “why,” other researchers have tackled it head on, including Sumant Mehta writing half a century ago, who offered a sociological explanation for hijras’ “indecent gestures” and “mincing and inviting gait”: “It is not merely the lewdness which revolts,” he explains, “but the fact that the Indian Society has so degraded and inhumanised these people that, without actually meaning to invite an unnatural sex intercourse, these people behave as lewdness-loving people expect them to behave, just in order to earn a pi[e]ce or two” (1945-1946:47-48).

But Mehta goes on to attribute hijras' behavior (which he variously identifies as "malevolent," "unscrupulous," and "abased") to both the "inferiority complex" and "resentment complex" (p. 51), a claim more in sync with contemporary explanations. Satish Kumar Sharma, who conducted extensive research on the hijra community in the 1980s, works from the standpoint of Freudian psychology and links hijras' sexual overtures to their "feeling of deprivation at the psychological level" (1984:387). He is concerned less with the societal marginalization spoken of by Mehta than with hijras' inability to perform sexual acts, a state that, in his opinion, logically leads to the use of obscene language:

An interesting feature of eunuchs is that they pass on sexual overtures to the general population, especially to the males. Why do they do so? The enquiries revealed that though they are biologically incapable of performing sex, yet when they see couples in the society at large, they have a feeling of deprivation at the psychological level. The idea of sex and their imagination of performing sexual acts is gratified by passing sexual remarks, etc., on others. They do not have any physical sexual urge, but sex invades their mind. Thus they, in majority of the cases interviewed, have frustration of an unusual kind, i.e., no physical urge but psychologically they think of enjoying sex. This frustration, as revealed by some of the eunuchs, leads to the practice of sodomy, etc. (Sharma 1984:387)

Sharma's claim that hijras compensate for their own impotence by "passing sexual remarks" demands further investigation. There is a long-standing folk association in northern India of foul language with sexual frustration; the work of many popular psychologists builds on the notion that a lack of sexual virility results in verbal degeneration. One need only turn to the scores of popular works on Indian sexuality to see the pervasiveness of this association. Dayanand Verma's (1971) *An Intimate Study of Sex Behaviour* offers but one example. In a chapter entitled "Male Superiority by

Sex Capacity,” Verma attributes the verbal practices of both “name-calling” and “eve-teasing” to male impotency, explaining that a man who uses foul language “at least [proves] that he is potent and can have sexual relations with a number of women” (p. 75). Verma is concerned primarily with the male employment of insult terms like “father-in-law” or “brother-in-law,” which if used out of a sanctioned context implies that the speaker has had sexual relations with the addressee’s mother or sister, respectively (see Vatuk 1969:275). “A man’s main asset is his virility,” Verma proclaims, “if a man has all other qualities like courage, patience, etc., but is impotent, that is, he is incapable of having sexual intercourse, he isn’t worth being called a man” (p. 74). By calling other men “brother-in-law” and “father-in-law,” as well as by speaking sexually to women, the impotent man will “declare his manliness” and hence save face: “What he wishes to convey by narrating such incidents is—‘Now at last you should believe that I am not impotent. I possess in abundance the main quality of manliness, namely a wolfish hunger for women. I may not be brave, courageous or patient but I can certainly handle a woman in bed. Whenever you want, I can furnish proof of this quality of mine’” (p. 76).

[...]

A few American and European anthropologists have also connected hijras’ language use with their sexual confusion, frequently conflating the two as similar instances of perversion. Harriet Ronken Lynton and Mohini Rajan (1974), in their short introduction to hijras in Hyderabad, are a case in point. Reminiscent of Singh’s and Sharma’s analyses of hijras’ use of obscenity, the authors draw a causal link between hijras’ “manner of speech” and what they perceive to be their self-motivated withdrawal from the rest of society:

The self-mutilation of these impotent wretches and their acceptance into the Hijra community is a kind of allegory of suicide and rebirth, while their manner of speech suggests a yearning for identity and identification with a social group. So together

they have built a world for themselves. In Hyderabad, as in most of India, people are addressed less often by name than by the title which shows their precise status and relationship within the extended family. So also with the Hijras, with the added detail that the confusion of their terminology is a constant reminder of the sexual confusion which brought them into the group. (1974:192)

Lynton and Rajan's use of the terms *self-mutilation* and *suicide* imply that hijras voluntarily choose to leave the "normal" world of women and men in order to be reborn into the "abnormal" hijra world—a world that, in the opinion of these authors as well as many other social theorists, is identified by linguistic as well as sexual ambiguity. Isolation leads to a need for what M. D. Vyas and Yogesh Shingala (1987:89) identify as "vicarious gratification"; many hijras can achieve sexual satisfaction, in the authors' opinion, only by *talking* about the "normal sex life" of men and women.

Hijra as an abusive epithet

Hijras do not have the corner on the Indian obscenity market; a variety of communities are notorious for breaking expectations of linguistic purity. These communities include, but are certainly not limited to, children in Western Uttar Pradesh who invoke a "triad of sex, shit, and sadism" in play-group humor (Vatuk 1969); female singers of *gālī* songs in Eastern Uttar Pradesh who provide ritualized entertainment at weddings (Henry 1976); Oriya-speaking male "charioteers" at the Bhubaneswar Chariot Festival who chant sexually obscene limericks and songs to the devotees of Lord Lingaraj (Freeman 1977); and Rajastani village women who at annual festivals and life cycle celebrations sing of sexual engagement with spouses and lovers (Raheja and Gold 1994). But what sets hijras apart from these communities is the fact that obscenity is critical to hijras' own survival. The Hindi-speaking hijras I spoke with in Banaras see their use of verbal insult not as a logical consequence of a self-motivated withdrawal from society

but as a necessary survival technique in a society that enforces their marginalization.

In this sense, the hijra's curse is comparable to that of the Hindu widow who, because of the extremity of her marginalization, is given free range to defy the social order through her language use. This point is made clear in Shivarama Karanth's (1984) novel *Mukajjī*: the novel's main character is a widow who, in many ways, is the most powerful woman in her village.⁸ Since she has already suffered the worst curse possible, namely widowhood, she has nothing to lose if the other villagers curse her back; the other villagers, afraid of her curse, try desperately to remain on her good side. The hijra and the widow have much in common in this respect; not only are both of these unmarried states considered to be a curse, but the words for *widow* and *hijra* in a variety of Indian languages are considered curses in themselves. M. N. Srinivas's observation over a half-century ago that "the worst word of abuse in the Kannada vocabulary is to call a woman, married or unmarried, a widow" (1942:117) points to the pervasiveness of *widow* as a derogatory epithet, his words reminiscent of the well-known Hindi proverb *rāḍ se pare koī gālī nahī* (there is no curse greater than calling someone a widow). But to call a nonhijra a hijra is no minor transgression either, especially as it implies that the addressee is sexually impotent and therefore incapable of continuing the family lineage.

Nanda (1990:14) incorrectly claims that the word *hijra*, unlike its Telegu and Tamil counterparts *kojja* and *pottai*, is "rarely used" as a derogatory term in Hindi. In fact, its employment as such has been well recorded since the 1940s, when Mehta (1945-1946:52) wrote that "timid people are often abused as 'Hījadā' in Gujarat." Mitra (1983:25) implies that the term is used throughout India in reference to more "effeminate" men, in a way that is perhaps comparable to the use of *faggot*, *fairly*, or even *sissy* in contemporary American slang (i.e., "Even before turning into a eunuch, a passive homosexual in Gujarat would be referred to as a *hijra*. This is also true of the rest of India"). Alyssa Ayres (1992), who also notes the prevalence of this epithet in her research among hijras in Gujarat, suggests that the term is used among nonhijra men as part of a "male-bonding" ritual, in a manner that approximates

the use of *homo* among the American heterosexual men discussed by James Armstrong (1997).

The use of *hijra* as a derogatory epithet is affirmed by the hijras I spoke with in Banaras, who explained how they were repeatedly dubbed *hijra* when young because of their fondness for dolls and other girls' games. In the commentary reproduced here, Sulekha, a thirty-eight-year-old year old hijra who now lives with a male partner in a small village outside of Banaras, recalls how her childhood peers rejected her with the label *hijra*, refusing to allow her into their gendered playgroups:

There were a few boys at my school who I used to study with. When I sat with them, they used to tell me that I was a hijra. Then they started telling other people, "This is a hijra! This is a hijra! Don't sit near him! Sit separately!" If I sat with the girls, the girls would say, "This is a hijra! This is a hijra! Don't sit near him! Sit separately! So I felt very ashamed. I thought, "How is it that I've become a hijra? The girls don't talk to me; the boys don't talk to me. What terrible thing has happened to me?" I wanted to go and play with them, but nobody wanted to play with me. So life was going like that. Nobody would help me. (personal communication, Sulekha, Spring 1993, my translation)

The story of the reaction of Sulekha's peers to her interest in girls' activities (e.g., dancing and playing with dolls) is reminiscent of a narrative appearing in Bapsi Sidhwa's (1992) novel *The Crow Eaters*, written in English. When the father, Freddy, discovers that his son, Yadzi, has been writing love poetry (an enterprise Freddy categorizes as "emasculated gibberish"), he angrily pronounces him a *eunuch*. "If you must think and act like a eunuch," Freddy exclaims "in a cold rage," "Why don't you wear your sister's bangles?"

Sulekha's distress at the use of *hijra* as an epithet is echoed by Charu, a hijra who lives together with three other hijras in a small Muslim-identified community on the outskirts of Banaras. In the

passage reproduced here, Charu explains how difficult it is for a hijra to return home to her family after joining a hijra community, encapsulating society's disgust in the final two lines by referring to their use of the epithet "*E HIJRA! e hijrā!*" (HEY HIJRA! Hey Hijra!):⁹

hijrā cāhē, - apne ghar par calā jāe - vah sambhav nahī hai. iske- ye hijrā ke jariye hai- dekhiye samāj, aur asamāj kā bāt hai. - asamāj ho gayā-alag ho gayā, - agar ye jānā cāhēnge, - hijrā jānā cāhēnge, - parivār vāle nārāz hōge. - khuś bhī hōge, - khuś bhī hōge ((softly)) ki ye hamārā parivār hai, - hamārā betā hai, - yā hamārā larḳā hai, - yā hamārā bhāī hai. ā gayā royēge. - magar ek cīz kā nārāzgī āyegā, duniyā vāle bolēge ki "uphu, ye hijrā ā gayā. - iske ghar hijrā atā jātā hai. - isse hijrā kā rištā hai. - iske ghar śādī nahī karēge." - to ye duniyā ne asamājik banā diya. - duniyā burī nazar se dekhne lagā. - "*E HIJRA!*, - *e hijrā!*"

(Even if the hijra wants to go home, it wouldn't be possible. The hijra is the dividing line—you see, it's a matter of social versus asocial. He has become asocial. If they want to go [back into society]—if hijras want to go [back], the family members will get very upset. They'll also be happy—they'll also be happy [and think] "He's our family; he's our child; he's our son; he's our brother." But even though they might cry when he arrives, they'll still be angry about one thing: The worldly people will say, "Oh no! A hijra has come here! A hijra visits that household so they must be related to a hijra! We won't arrange a marriage with anyone in that household!" So the world has made him an outcast; the world has looked at him with an evil eye: "HEY HIJRA! Hey hijra!")

The family is, after all, what distinguishes hijras from most other members of Indian society, who are intimately involved in the extended families so instrumental to social organization. But since the hijra is thought to act as a curse on this very family structure—a belief based on the idea that her impotence will spread to her siblings and prohibit procreation (see, for example, Mehta 1945-1946:27; Vyas and Shingala 1987:75; Pimpley and Sharma 1985:42; Sharma 1989:51-59)—she is, in the words of Sulekha, a “black spot,” an existence that brings shame to the family’s potency. It is perhaps this fact that leads Charu to describe hijras as occupying the dividing line between society and nonsociety: if they were to cross this line by returning home, their appearance would be met with anger, fear, even hatred.

Recent employments of the term in derogatory reference to the Muslim community by the conservative Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) suggests that *hijra* is used as a derogatory epithet more generally. In Anand Patwardhan’s 1994 documentary *Father, Son, and Holy War*, to name but one example, a female BJP leader says scathingly of the now former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mulayam Singh Yadav, “*ek hijre par golī kyō bekār kī jāye*,” ‘Why would you want to waste a bullet on a hijra?’ Indeed, some Hindi poets and novelists have used the term metaphorically to suggest the ineffectiveness of the referent in question, including the Hindi poet Ved Prakash Vatuk in a number of political critiques (1977a, 1977b, 1987; 1995), such as in his poem *maīne āj īsā ko marte hue dekhā* ‘Today I saw Jesus dying’ (1977a) when he identifies India as a country of *pacpan karor hijre* ‘550 million hijras.’¹⁰ Khushwant Singh similarly exploits this metaphor in his novel *Delhi* in order to indicate the ineffectiveness of his narrator (who, incidentally, has an extended affair with a hijra named Bhagmati): “I was disowned by the Hindus and shunned by my own wife. I was exploited by the Muslims who disdained my company. Indeed I was like a *hijda* who was neither one thing nor another but could be misused by everyone” (1989:55).

The notion of shamelessness

Both hijras and widows, then, are perceived to be outside the reproducing heterosexual mainstream, and because death would be

a more welcome existence than life for those in such an unfortunate state, or so mainstream society thinks at any rate, the destitute have nothing to lose through verbal defiance. As illustrated by a well-known epithet from Kabir (*durbaḷ ko na satāiye, jākī moṭī hāy, binā jīv kī svās se, loh bhasam ho jāy* ‘Do not torment the weak, their sigh is heavy; Breath from a bellows can reduce iron to ashes’), the sigh of the weak, or in this case their “voice,” is thought to have the power to destroy the lives of those situated higher in the social hierarchy. Central to hijras’ narratives is the idea that because their existence is merely tangential to the world of women and men, they are a people without *śarm* ‘shame’; that is, a people freed from the constraints of decency that regulate the rest of society. Sulekha identifies the lack of *śarm* not only as the primary trait that distinguishes hijras from women, but also the motivating factor behind their use of obscenity:

We just speak from the mouth. Hijras aren’t counted [in the polls] as women, after all. Hijras are just hijras, and women are just women. If there’s a woman, she’ll at least have a little *śarm* ‘shame.’ But compared to hijras, how open can a woman be? No matter how openly a woman walks, she’ll still have a little *śarm*. But hijras are just hijras. They have no *śarm*. They’ll say whatever they have to say. (personal communication, Sulekha, Spring 1993, my translation)

Sulekha considers her own status to be so low that she is completely outside the social order altogether, a fact that gives her freedom to defy the propriety associated with caste and class affiliation through her language use. Several anthropologists report similar observations from hijras in other communities. G. Morris Carstairs, for instance, notes that the hijras in the community he studied “had the security of knowing that they had no vestige of dignity or social position to maintain; and their shamelessness made people reluctant to provoke their obscene retaliation in public” (1956:60-61). Likewise, Nanda remarks that the hijras she worked with in South India, “as a group at the lowest end of the Indian social hierarchy, and having no ordinary social position to maintain within that

hierarchy ... are 'freed from the restraints of decency' and they know that their shamelessness makes people—not all, but surely most—reluctant to provoke them in a public confrontation” (1990:51).¹¹ Like the Hausa-speaking Muslim 'yan daudu studied by Rudolph Gaudio (1997), who as “men who act like women” are said to be shameless in their employments of sacrilegious proverbs, hijras push their hearers to the verbal limit, leaving them with no other choice but to pay the requested alms.

The fear of hijra shamelessness is nicely articulated by the Hindi novelist Shani (1984) in his book *Sāre dukhiyā jamnā pār*. When describing his frustration with the city of Delhi, the narrator refers to an incident involving hijras, who arrive at his door unexpectedly and demand an *inām* 'reward.' Although the narrator initially refuses to succumb to the hijras' requests, their *gāliyō kī bauchār* 'shower of abuses' is too much even for him. When they threaten to expose themselves in front of onlooking neighbors, he is compelled to pay the requested 51 rupees in order to preserve his *izzat*:

The first day in Mayur Vihar, the night somehow passed and morning came. But it was a very strange morning; as soon as it arrived, it seemed that evening had begun. I hadn't yet finished my morning tea, when someone rang the bell. The door opened, and I heard the sound of bells, clapping, dancing, and singing, and behind that, the sound of drums. They were hijras. They came to get their reward. Reward? What for? You've come to a new house. House? Whose house? We're just renters, go find the owner. We were answered with louder claps, faster drum beats; we were showered with curses instead of songs. When we protested, they began to strip naked, and in a few minutes there was such a spectacle in front of our gate that all of the people in the neighborhood came to their windows and doors. If you care about your honor, please quietly give them whatever they demand and get rid of them, even though you know you're being black-mailed.

We paid them 51 rupees and got rid of them,
even though we knew that if someone asked us
what we celebrated, we would have nothing to say.

(Shani 1984:64-65, my translation)

Shani's account is paralleled by a diary entry written by Vatuk (1985), who recalls an actual incident in which hijras came to his door in Meerut: *hijre āte haī. ve beśarm haī. unkī koī izzat nahī ve kisī ke prati uttardāyī nahī. unkī zabān par koī niyamtraṇ nahī. atah ve har avasthā mẽ vijyī haī.* 'The hijras came. They are shameless. They have no honor. They are answerable to no one. Their tongue has no restraint. They are victorious in every exchange.'

CONTEMPORARY CURSING STRATEGIES

Yet both of these accounts, written from a nonhijra perspective, are not particularly flattering. Sulekha offers a different perspective on the hijras' begging technique, discussing it as a strategy for survival. Also concerned with the notion of *izzat*, she explains that hijras use obscenity during their performances as a means of reclaiming respect:

Suppose you went to sing and dance somewhere and people didn't show you any respect, or they didn't give you money. Then you'd curse them and they'd be afraid of you, right? They'd be afraid of hijras?

Yes, yes, yes! ... Yes, yes, yes, yes. If they don't give us money, we'll feel sad in our hearts. So we'll swear at them, we'll curse them, we'll wish them evil, we'll cut them down to size.

Does society give hijras a lot of respect, then?

Yes, a lot of them do.

So how do you feel about that? Do you like it?

If they give hijras respect we feel good. If they don't give hijras respect we feel bad. Then we'll strip down and start to fight with them. We'll shout *gālīs* 'obscenities' in order to get some money. But if someone gives us respect, touches our feet, and lets us sit down with him, even if he gives us less money than the others, we won't fuss about it. If someone gives us respect, we'll leave him alone. If someone doesn't give us respect, we'll fight with him like crazy. (personal communication, Sulekha, Spring 1993, my translation)

Throughout the passage, Sulekha identifies hijras' linguistic behavior with a variety of different verbs, among them *gālī denā* 'to utter obscenities,' 'to swear,' *sarāpnā* 'to curse,' *kosnā* 'to wish someone evil,' and *kaṭnā* 'to cut someone down to size.' It is significant, however, that she consistently uses the Hindi term *sarāp dena* 'to curse' (with an initial alveolar [s] as in 'sip') instead of the more traditional *śarāp dena* (with an initial palatal [ś] as in 'ship'), distinguishing the former from the latter as a matter of referential perspective. The term *sarāp* differs from its Sankrit counterpart *śarāp* in that it is associated with the powerless as opposed to the elite; while a *śarāp* is given by saints and those in power, a *sarāp* is considered to be an instrument of the poor, uttered by people who are otherwise helpless, such as widows, outcasts, or in this case, hijras. Although both terms mean 'to curse' or 'to imprecate,' *śarāps*, according to Sulekha, are uttered by people in respected positions as a means of maintaining the social hierarchy, while *sarāps* are uttered by the marginalized as a means of fighting against it. Forced to live on the outskirts of Banaras both socially and spatially, Sulekha and her fellow hijras employ *sarāps* (i.e., curses used by those in inferior positions) in an effort to save face in a society that has, in her own words, unmasked them. When offered inadequate payment for their song and dance performances, a gesture that hijras interpret as disrespectful, they shame their clients with a series of verbal abuses that quickly escalate from mild to severe. And if the most severe of these abuses also fails to bring the expected reward, the more aggressive members of the group will threaten to lift up their saris and expose their genitals, a practice that

has been associated with the hijra community for well over a century (cf. Goldsmid 1836, as reported in Preston 1987; Bhimbai 1901; Russell, Bahadur, and Lal 1916). Hijras, as interlocutors without *śarm*, are uniquely skilled in the art of ridicule and insult, their curses winning them financial—and, indeed, a certain kind of social—respect. (I should add that, in the passage just quoted, Sulekha uses the expression *naṅgā honā* ‘to become naked,’ which can be interpreted both figuratively as ‘to become shameless’ and literally as ‘to expose oneself.’)

The “fighting” behavior Sulekha alludes to in the excerpt just quoted consists of the overt employment of *gālīs* ‘verbal abuses,’ as well the more subtle employment of semantically ambiguous puns, rife with sexual innuendo. The invective reproduced in the next excerpt serves as an example of the former. Shouted by a Banaras hijra to the owner of a tea shop who had made sarcastic reference to her promiscuity (Singh 1982:33), its derogatory meaning is clear. What distinguishes this expression from the many other genres of *gālī*-giving in India is not so much the individual terms themselves, but rather the concentration of these terms in a single utterance:

nāspīṭe, mue, harāmī ke jāe, terī bībī kuttā khāe,
kalmunhe, khudā-kahar barsāe tujh par, randue!

(‘You worthless fool, good-for-nothing, son-of-a-bastard, may your wife be eaten by a dog, may you be dark-faced, may god shower calamities on you, you widower!’)

This series of invectives is, of course, not without some suggestion of sexuality. The phrase ‘may your wife be eaten by a dog’ indirectly implies (a) that the addressee is not able to satisfy his wife sexually, (b) that the addressee’s wife is potentially unfaithful, and (c) that the addressee’s wife has no discrimination with respect to sexual partners. Similarly, although the common interpretation of *mue* is ‘one who is dead’ and therefore a ‘good-for-nothing,’ the term is occasionally used to suggest impotence or emasculation. Finally, the term *randu* ‘widower’ suggests promiscuity, pointing up the instability between the Indian identities of ‘widower’ and ‘pimp’ (compare, for instance, the Hindi proverb *rāṅḍ to raṅḍāpā kaṭ*

le, *raṇḍuve kāṭṭnā dē to*, which translates roughly as ‘The widow would be true to her widowhood if only the widower would allow it’). But these are all familiar Hindi insults, and the sexual references they were founded upon are not necessarily salient to present-day users.

The hijra insults reproduced in Table 1, however, are performed in a manner quite different from those in this example. Like the ritualized insults identified for some gay male communities in the United States (Murray 1979), hijras direct these sexualized insults to each other for reasons of solidarity. Yet this speech event differs from that reported for English-speaking gay men in that hijras issue these slurs to each other *when in the presence of nonhijras*. There is a strong element of performance in this vituperative banter, as hijras create scripted quarrels among themselves to shock and embarrass their eavesdropping bystanders. Indeed, some hijra communities have a special *tālī* ‘clap’ used expressly for signaling the onset of this discursive activity (referred to by in-group members as *deḍh tālī* ‘one-and-a-half clap’), which they perform by producing a ‘full clap,’ where the palms are brought together with straight, spread, raised fingers, followed directly by an *ādhī tālī* ‘half clap,’ where the palms are brought together in the same manner but no sound results (see Hall 1995). When one of the hijras gives this signal, the uninitiated nonhijra becomes witness to a rowdy display of put-downs that demand a highly sexualized interpretation.

Representative of what Singh (1982) calls hijras’ *aślīl evaīm dviarthī bhāṣā* ‘obscene and double-meaning language,’ these expressions contain words words that, with the exception of the vocative *mue* ‘good-for-nothing,’ are inherently inoffensive when uttered alone. The majority of these insults, as in the first five examples reproduced in Table 1, involve an extended metaphor of the marketplace: the buying and selling of fruits and vegetables, the exchange of wares, the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of voracious customers. The bazaar is one of the most public sites in the community and is traditionally a man’s domain. The socio-moral geography of the community is such that the bazaar is off limits to “respectable” women, as illustrated by the existence of the Hindi term *bāzārū aurat* ‘market woman,’ which translates variously as

TABLE 1. *Selected examples of hijra verbal insults*

<u>Expression in hijra dialect</u>	<u>Literal translation into English</u>
(a) <i>khasam kā gannā cūs</i>	'Go suck your husband's sugarcane!'
(b) <i>khasam ke yār sāre bāzār ke kele cāṭ le, peṭ bhar jāyegā</i>	'Husband's lover, go and lick all the bananas at the bazaar, then you'll get full'
(c) <i>pattal kuttā cāṭe hai, terā bhāī hai</i>	'The dog who licks the leaf-plate is your brother' (i.e., 'You are just like a dog who eats other people's leftovers')
(d) <i>thūktā jā aur laḍḍū khātā jā, mue</i>	'Keep on spitting and eating <i>laédédu</i> (ball-shaped sweets), you good-for-nothing'
(e) <i>lakṛī bec lakṛī</i>	'Sell that stick!' (Singh 1982 glosses this expression as follows: "In other words, the addressee should open up a store for selling his private parts")
(f) <i>gilās mē pānī bharkar soyā rah, mue</i>	'Fill the glass with water and go to sleep, you good-for-nothing'
(g) <i>terī saut ko kutte kā bāp rakhe thā. tab to kuch na bolā. ab ṭir ṭir kare hai.</i>	'When that father of a dog kept your co-wife you never said a word. Now you're complaining?'

Source: Singh (1982) (recorded in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh).

'loose woman,' 'woman of lower morals,' 'woman who has no shame,' even 'prostitute.' Hijras often supplement the income that they receive from public performances at births and weddings by servicing men sexually in secret, despite popular perceptions of them as sexless ascetics. The metaphors employed here by hijras about the bazaar are meant to be understood ambiguously in sexual terms. These images—which, of course, carry euphemistic reference to male genitalia, as in the case of *gannā* 'sugarcane,' *kele* 'bananas,' *laḍḍū* 'sweets,' and *lakṛī* 'stick'—highlight hijras' own

knowledge about the closed and open spaces of the social geography. By referring to secret domains, in this case the male body and indirectly prostitution, hijras embarrass their male listeners and shamelessly collapse traditional divisions of the secret and the known, private and public, home and market, feminine and masculine.

At this point it would be appropriate to again consider Rupa's comment that hijras "even give curses like women." After insisting that hijras always speak like women when together, Rupa asserts in the next excerpt that they additionally refrain from using those curses which involve insulting reference to the addressee's mother or sister. These kinds of curses, she explains, are *mardānā* 'manly' curses, and oppose the more feminine variety of curses used by women:

gālī bhī dēgī, to aurat jaisā. - mardānā gālī nahī dete haī hijrā. - auratō jaisā. auratō jaisā dete haī.
- abhī nahī kahēngī "terī mā kī, terī bahan kī," nahī kahēngī, - ye gālī nahī dēngī. - ye gālī nahī dēngī. jaise chinrī, bucrī, ganjī, kanjrī, ye sab banaēgī aūratō kī tarah. - mardānā log kahte haī, "terī mā kī, terī bahan kī, - bhosrī vāle, ye- vo- cottā, sālā," - utāēgī vo nahī.

(We'll even give curses like women. Hijras don't give *mardānā* curses; they curse like women. Like women. We won't say "terī mā kī [your mother's...], terī bahan kī [your sister's...]," we won't say them. We won't give these curses. We won't give these curses. [We'll say,] for example, "chinrī [loose one], bucrī [earless one], ganjī [hairless one], kanjrī [low-caste loose woman]," we'll form all of these in the same way that women do. *Mardānā* people give curses like "terī mā kī [your mother's...], terī bahan kī [your sister's...], bhosrī vāle [vagina-owner], cottā [thief], sālā [wife's brother]." We won't say those.)

In Hindi-speaking Banaras, the genre sometimes referred to as *mardānā gālī* ‘men’s curses’ is thought to involve mention of sexual violence to women, in opposition to ‘women’s curses’ that generally only wish the hearer ill. The curses that Rupa identifies as *terī mā kī* ‘your mother’s...,’ *terī bahan kī* ‘your sister’s...,’ and *sālā* ‘brother-in-law’ are known in Hindi as *mā-bahin kī gālī* ‘mother and sister curses,’ and because the speaker who utters them asserts his own sexual prowess with respect to the addressee’s female relatives, women do not tend to use them. Oddly enough, these are precisely the terms that Verma (1971) claims are used by impotent men to make themselves seem more potent to the rest of society, a facade that is clearly meaningless to hijras, who collectively identify as non-masculine. Even in the structure of their curses, according to Sulekha, hijras assert their identity as feminine, employing “softer” curses that focus on either physical defect or sexual immorality, such as *chinrī* ‘loose one,’ *bucrī* ‘earless one,’ *ganjī* ‘hairless one,’ and *kanjrī* ‘low-caste loose woman.’

Yet in contrast to Rupa’s claims, hijras in Banaras do in fact employ *mardānā* curses in everyday conversation, as evidenced by Shashi’s angry employments of the term *mādar cod* ‘mother fucker’ in reference to her birth parents. Shashi, now a 78-year-old guru of a small hijra community in Banaras, ran away from home at the age of seven and joined a troupe of *bāī*, women dancers who are often perceived to be prostitutes: “I renounced my mother; I renounced my father; I renounced everybody!” But what was initially grief later turned into contempt, and Shashi, adamant about the notion that hijras have no ties to the world of men and women, whether of caste, class, or religion, blasphemes her own parents:

As far as I’m concerned, my mother and father were all cremated on *Maṇikarṇikā*. I cremated them. I hit them four times with a stick and then I let their ashes flow down the Ganges river. I said, ‘You *mādar cod* [‘mother fuckers’] flow down the river! Don’t ever show your face here again! If you come to my little town, I’ll beat the hell out of you!’

Moreover, one of hijras' favorite in-group insults is the term *bhosṛī vālā* 'vagina-owner,' an epithet so offensive to middle-class Hindi speakers that the Banaras resident who typed my transcripts refused to include this word, typing an ellipsis in its place. When used among nonhijras, the term is generally used between men and implies that the referent, although male, has somehow been demasculinized. The epithet is used differently from the American insult 'cunt,' then; for one thing, *bhosṛī vālā* is itself grammatically masculine and its referent must be so as well (the feminine counterpart *bhosṛī vālī* does not exist in contemporary usage). When used among hijras, the insult lies not in the accusation of emasculation, since the very definition of *hijra* depends on the notion of impotence, but in the suggestion of maleness. In the next two excerpts, Sulekha recreates two different scenarios in which the term might be used among in-group members, and while she clearly considers both uses somewhat humorous in retrospect, she nevertheless indicates that the accusation is a serious one. In both narratives, Sulekha illustrates how the term is used as both an attention-getting device and a means of expressing anger: in the first example it is used to convince her friend Megha to go to the movies with her, and in the second example it is used to reprimand initiates for speaking like men instead of women:

puliṅg bhī hotā hai. bāt karne mẽ, jaise Megha se hamārā bāt hotā hai, "Megha suno, calogī nahī kā sinemā mere sāth? cal sinemā dēkhe. cal nahī Megha. - E! na calbe kare, bhosṛī vālā!" ((laughs))
- gussā mẽ ho jātā hai, is tarah mazāk mẽ ho jātā hai. "are sun re!" is tarah ke ho jātā hai.

(The masculine occurs too. For example, if I'm talking with Megha, [it's], "Megha, listen! Won't you come with me to the movies? C'mon, let's go see a movie. Won't you come on, Megha? - Hey! Won't you come on? The *bhosṛī vālā* 'vagina-owner'!" ((laughs)) It happens when we're angry. And it also happens when we're joking. "Hey, listen to me!" We'll use it like that.)

sikhāyā nahī jātā hai. - anubhāv ho jātā hai. - dekhkar ke, - koī baccā to nahī hai, usko sikhlāyā jāyegā. ... kaise kar rahe haī, - is tarah hamko bhī karnā cāhiye. - nahī karēge to hijrā log hamko hansegā. - to kahegā ki “are barī kuḍhaṅgā hai, barī battamīz hai.” ((laughs)) hā. - “apne man se kah rahā hai bhosrī vālā” ((laughs)) sab mārne uṭh jātā hai cappal se. - hā. - dekhte dekhte ādat par jātā hai, - tab vaisā svabhāv ho jātā hai.

(It’s not taught. It’s experienced, by watching. After all, he’s not a child who needs to be taught. ... [The new hijra will say,] “I should also act just like they’re acting. If I don’t, hijra people will laugh at me.” [The hijra people] will say, “Oh, he’s very ill-mannered! He’s very ill-behaved.” ((laughs)) Yes! “He’s just saying whatever comes to mind, the *bhosrī vālā* ‘vagina-owner!’” ((laughs)) Then everybody will get up to beat him with their sandals. ((laughs)) Really! So gradually, after watching for a long time, it becomes a habit. Then it just becomes his nature.)

The older hijras’ employment of the masculine-marked epithet in the second example is particularly telling, as it reflects their dissatisfaction with the initiate’s attempts at discursive femininity. Refusing to grant the initiate the feminine reference so expected within the community (see Hall and O’Donovan 1996), the more experienced hijra veterans refer to the “ill-behaved” initiate with masculine-marked verb and noun phrases. Their use of the epithet *vagina-owner*, in this context, ironically implies that the addressee is acting too “masculine,” a behavior that merits retribution in a community that wishes to distance itself from male representations. The initiate is categorized, in essence, as a vagina-owning want-to-be, the grammatically masculine *bhosrī vālā^m* being used to betray her essential (i.e. anatomical) masculinity.

As with the term *bhosrī vālā*, the in-group examples recorded in Table 1 also carry an overt and, I would argue, deliberate confusion of feminine and masculine reference. The authors of

expressions (d) and (f) address their fellow hijras not with the feminine *muī* but with the masculine *mue*, a term that is itself generally thought of as a 'soft curse' used primarily by women. The first six of these examples point to the addressee's insatiable sexual appetite, which in (a) can be satisfied only through size (i.e., sugarcane), in (b), (c), (d), and (e) only through quantity (i.e., the bananas at the bazaar, regular supplements of sweets, leftover leaf-plates, a store of stick-buying customers), and in (f) only through pacification (i.e., a cold glass of water at bedtime). Yet while the first four examples attribute an aggressive femininity to the hijra addressee, placing her squarely in the feminized role as the husband's lover or wife, examples (e) and (f) highlight the addressee's masculinity, and point disdainfully to her machismo, referring to her insatiable *lakṛī* 'stick' on the one hand, and her need to subdue an erection on the other. The final insult reproduced in (g) again points to the addressee's femininity, criticizing her for passively allowing her male lover to take a co-wife.

CONCLUSION

With these verbal shifts of perspective, hijras who participate in this insulting banter are able to challenge dominant cartographies of gender and sexuality. In order to make any sense of the hijra's seemingly innocuous and nonsensical utterance, the passer-by must enter into what he believes to be the hijra's frame of reference, a linguistic space involving sexual innuendo, crudity, and gender fluidity. Yet by doing so, the hearer must additionally admit to himself that he in many ways also inhabits that same space. Through this verbal play, then, hijras, who have a precarious status in the Indian social matrix, are able to compensate for their own lack of social prestige by assuming linguistic control of the immediate interaction, creating alternative socio-sexual spaces in a dichotomously gendered geography.

For the hijra, who either is born an intersexed infant or undergoes castration in order to adopt the hijra lifestyle, it is the body itself that determines her ambiguously situated linguistic position, a body that has been interpreted as something outside and therefore inferior to the female/male dichotomy. Because hijras have a kind of between-sex status in contemporary India, their very

existence serves as a theoretical challenge to previous characterizations of women's speech and men's speech as discursive styles indexically derived from the sex of the speaker. Hijras, liminal to the world of women and men, have a privileged position with respect to the linguistic gender system, their experiences on either side of the gender divide allowing for strategies of expression unavailable to the mono-sexed individual. Indeed, hijras collectively exploit their liminality, subverting the linguistic ideologies associated with both femininity and masculinity in order to survive in a hostile world.

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NOTES

¹ Estimates on the number of hijras living in India during the past decade vary significantly, ranging from 50,000 (Bobb and Patel 1982), 200,000 (Associated Press 1994), and 500,000 (*The Tribune* 1983, referring to both India and Pakistan), to 1.1 million (Sharma 1989, quoting Bhola, president of the All-India Hijra Welfare Society), and 1.2 million (*The Hindustan Times* 1994; Shrivastav 1986, quoting Bhola, president of the All-India Hijra Welfare Society). I have chosen the latter estimate, as it is most consistent with the results of my own fieldwork in North India.

² Other terms used in reference to the hijra since the mid-1800s include *khunsā*, *khasua*, *fātādā*, and *mukhanna*.

³ Ayres (1992) and Preston (1987) attribute this loss of status to British colonialists, who launched moral and political campaigns against hijras during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

⁴ This passage points to an additional association of the eunuch with physical cruelty, which probably developed in response to the fact that they were often assigned the unpleasant task of inflicting royal punishments on offending persons. The eunuchs' penchant for physical cruelty was recorded even in the 19th century. William Knighton, for instance, comments that they carried out this task with "*gusto* and appetite": "Whether it was that I felt an antipathy to the class, or was prejudiced against them by the accounts I heard, I can not now tell; but my impression is, that the greater part of the cruelty practiced in the native harems is to be attributed to the influence and suggestions of the eunuchs. They were usually the inflictors of punishment on the delinquents; and this punishment, whether flogging or torturing, they seemed to inflict with a certain degree of *gusto* and appetite for the employment" (1855:161).

⁵ True hermaphrodites (or those thought to be so) were apparently considered more deserving of respect than castrated hijras, and so Edward Balfour's *Enclopaedia Asiatica* defines *khoja* as a "corruption of Khaja, a respectable man, a respectable term for a eunuch," apparently in opposition to terms that were perhaps not so "respectable" (1976, v.5, 564). John Shortt (1873:404), however, reverses the semantics of *hijra* and *khoja* in his article on the "kojahs" of southern India (which is later quoted extensively by Thurston 1901 in *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*), and identifies the "artificially created" eunuch as *kojah* and the "natural" eunuch as *higra*. Ibbetson, MacLagan, and Rose (1911, v. 2, 331) delineate the linguistic distinction between court eunuchs and hijras as follows: "a eunuch, also called *khunsá*, *khojá*, *khusrá*, *mukhannas*, or, if a dancing eunuch dressed in woman's clothes, *zankhá*. Formerly employed by chiefs and people of rank to act as custodians of their female apartments and known as *khwaja-sará*, *nawáb* or *názir*, they are still found in Rájputána in this capacity. In the Punjab the *hijéra* is usually a *deradár*, i.e., attached to a *dera*." W. Crooke (1896:495) identifies the term *khoja* (or rather, "khwâja") as a Muslim subclass of *hijra*, a distinction that further points to an association of the *khoja* with Muslim courts.

⁶ The existence of this book was pointed out by Rupa, the only hijra we spoke with who had learned to read and write. Unlike other hijras in Banaras, Rupa became a hijra at a very late age after receiving a childhood education. When showing this book to

Veronica, Rupa enthusiastically explained that “everything you need to know about hijras will be in this book.”

⁷ To preserve hijras’ anonymity, I have chosen pseudonyms for all of the hijras appearing in this article and have avoided giving the names of the four hijra communities I visited.

⁸ I am grateful to Ved Vatak for bringing this novel to my attention.

⁹ In order to convey how the Hindi quoted in this and other passages in this chapter were spoken, I have used transcription conventions adapted from Conversation Analysis: a hyphen with spaces before and after indicates a pause; a hyphen immediately following a letter indicates an abrupt cutoff in speaking; double parentheses enclose nonverbal movements and extralinguistic commentary; single parentheses enclose words which are not clearly audible (i.e., best guesses); brackets enclose words added to clarify the meaning of the text; underlining indicates syllabic stress; small caps indicate louder or shouted talk; a colon indicates a lengthening of a sound (the more colons, the longer the sound); a period indicates falling intonation; a comma indicates continuing intonation; a question mark indicates rising intonation at the end of a syllable or word; ellipses indicate deletion of some portion of the original text; quotation marks enclose quoted or reported speech.

¹⁰ The last four lines of Vatak’s poem are as follows (my translation):

Today I have seen my history being buried
and over its grave
I have seen dancing
550 million hijras.

¹¹ Nanda also discusses how hijras exploit their shamelessness for financial gain, drawing the important conclusion that “this stigma functions as an effective strategy of economic adaptation” (1990:51).

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10

UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES: FROM IMPOVERISHMENT TO MAY DAY RESURGANCE

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For the first time in nearly seventy years, some two million people marched on May Day in the United States. They were protesting moves in the U.S. Congress aimed at cracking down on undocumented immigrants, especially those from México and Central America. The choice to hold the march on the first of May 2006, when so many other nations were also celebrating International Workers' Day, was a notably symbolic move. A working Monday enabled supporters to highlight a national call for a boycott on working, buying, selling, and business as usual. Labeling it "*un día sin inmigrantes*" (a day without immigrants), organizers wanted to demonstrate the potential impact on the American economy if all undocumented immigrants were deported.

The May Day demonstrations for immigrants' rights in cities across the United States were the largest collective outpouring of street protest since the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Over 650,000 people participated in two marches in Los Angeles, 400,000 in Chicago, 250,000 in San José, 75,000 in Denver, and 30,000 each in San Francisco, Sacramento, Fresno, Houston, and New York City. Tens of thousands marched in other cities such as Seattle, Oakland, Santa Barbara, Orlando, Miami, Tampa, and Atlanta (Watanabe and Gaouette 2006;

Gorman, Millar, and Landsberg 2006). This chapter examines how the Latino-based protest mobilization swept across the United States like a storm, catching the non-Hispanic population and even the leaders of the Hispanic community by surprise. How did it happen? What were the underlying causes? Why was May Day chosen? What obstacles did the immigrant rights movement have to overcome? How did race, ethnicity, and language play into the immigration controversy? Will this movement lead to a revival of May Day in the United States?

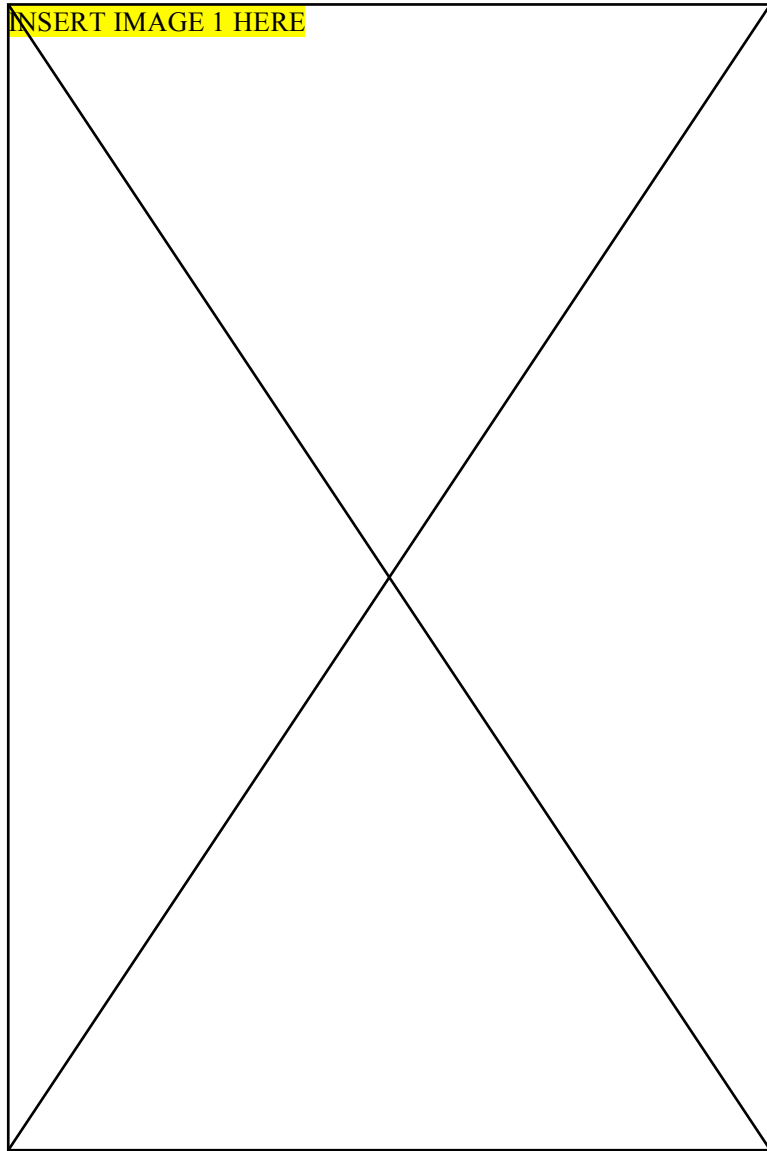
REVIVING MAY DAY

The upsurge in Hispanic activism was triggered by the U.S. House of Representatives' passage of the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (H.R. 4437) on December 16, 2005. Some of the more draconian provisions of H.R. 4437 include:

- Section 202 – makes it a criminal offence to provide housing or transportation for illegal aliens. Also provides for extraterritorial federal jurisdiction in such cases.
- Section 203 – makes illegal presence in the United States a felony crime.
- Section 607 – requires the federal government to take custody of illegal aliens detained by local authorities, even if a person was originally arrested for violations of local or state laws. (This would also serve to curb the practice of 'catch and release.')
- Section 1002 – requires the construction of approximately 700 miles (1127 kilometers) of 'reinforced fencing' at five zones of the most frequent illegal crossings along the U.S.-México border that currently have no barrier. (The longest continuous zone runs from eastern California along nearly the entire length of the Arizona border with México.)

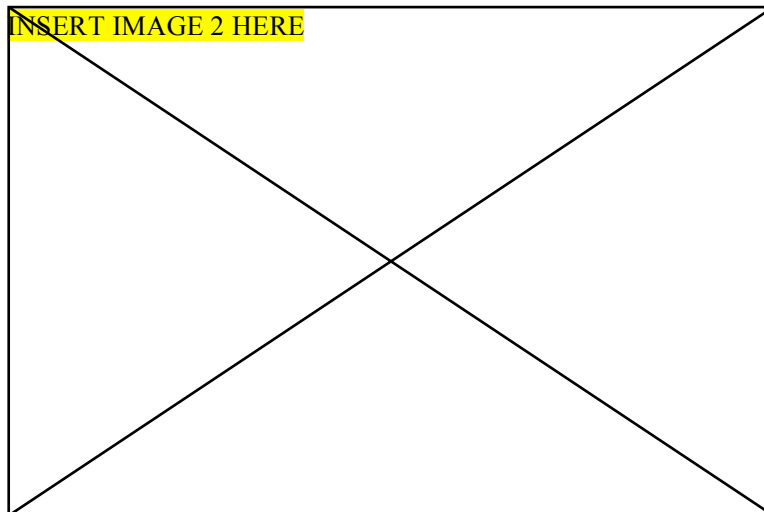
Political activism for immigrants' rights snowballed across the country during the months after the passage of H.R. 4437. The May Day demonstrations came on the heels of the largest political protest events in recent memory in such U.S. cities as Los Angeles (March

25: up to 1 million), Dallas (April 9: 400,000), Washington DC (April 10: 500,000), and Phoenix (April 10: 300,000). In San José, which has the largest Hispanic population in Northern California



and where most of the research for this chapter was conducted, the May Day march was ten times larger than the previous largest-ever demonstration that had occurred only three weeks earlier on April 10 (also for immigrants' rights), and fifty times larger than the largest antiwar demonstration in the city, held on March 20, 2004.

Carrying signs that read "*No a la H.R. 4437*," the protesters made it clear with their posters, banners, and slogans that undocumented immigrants are not what H.R. 4437 makes them out to be: "*No somos criminales*" (We are not criminals). One poster joked about an apparent contradiction in policy ("The Pilgrims were the first illegal immigrants"), reminding the crowd that the first European settlers to arrive on the U.S. northeast coast, though uninvited (and certainly without visas), were initially welcomed and aided by Native Americans. Another poster pointed out that "America is a nation of immigrants," while still another pleaded, "I came for my children." Other banners asked to "Honor our contribution," reasserting that undocumented immigrants are not burdens on society but instead give a great deal to the U.S. economy. Finally, there were slogans of empowerment such as "*Sí, se puede*" (Yes, we can) and "*El pueblo unido jamás será vencido*" (The people united will never be defeated).



Immigrants' rights protests were tempered only by the U.S. Senate's passage of a more moderate bill, the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 (S. 2611), on May 17, 2006. While S. 2611 would have stepped up enforcement of immigration laws, it would not have turned undocumented immigrants into felony criminals as would H.R. 4437. More importantly, it partially addressed one cause of undocumented immigration: the inadequacy of channels for obtaining visas and permits for entering and working in the United States legally. By providing for a three-year temporary guest worker visa and new visas for non-immigrant immediate family members, S. 2611 would have helped meet the U.S. economy's demand for low-wage labor, as well as enabled more foreign workers to enter the country legally. Nevertheless, S. 2611 would have encouraged the treatment of undocumented immigrants as threats until they could achieve legal status after a tortuous clearance process. Neither H.R. 4437 nor S. 2611 could have become law until a Senate-House Conference Committee reconciled the differences between the two versions of legislation.

The lack of consensus and political will in Congress allowed both H.R. 4437 and S. 2611 to die natural deaths. A year later, H.R. 1645 (the STRIVE Act) attempted to integrate Senate and House concerns by addressing enforcement first, positioning it as a precondition to opening a guest worker program and providing undocumented immigrants with a lengthy pathway to citizenship. Failing to satisfy the hawks in Congress and splitting the immigrant rights movement, it too failed to get passed. With the following year (2008) being an election year, immigration reform became too hot a political issue to be tackled in the 110th session of Congress. As a result, the desire among all sides for comprehensive immigration reform, albeit for different visions of reform, never came to pass.

Breakthrough in the barrier of fear

Undocumented workers and their families have long lived in fear of being caught and facing summary deportation. They have always kept a low profile, focusing on working hard and maintaining strong family ties. A new federal immigration law that would have automatically turned them into felony criminals touched a nerve in the Hispanic community, although on its own it was probably not

sufficient to bring them out to the streets in open protest. However, the Spanish-language media in the United States took up the immigration issue, and the discussion on the airwaves, print media, and the Internet rapidly gained momentum. Hispanic organizations decided that it was time to mobilize their once-quiet constituencies. The slumbering giant that tirelessly harvests America's vegetables, sweeps America's floors, builds America's homes, repairs America's cars, and cleans America's hotel rooms was awakening to a new political reality.

The rally of as many as a million people in Los Angeles on March 25, 2006, was a watershed because it sent a loud message to Hispanics all over the United States that it was time to come out of the shadows and engage in the political process. For undocumented persons, it sent a message that there are now so many of 'us' (an estimated 12 million people in addition to another 30 million legal relatives and compatriots) that there is now finally security in numbers; it was time to come out and openly protest against the attempts in Congress to criminalize 'illegal aliens' and extend the wall along the U.S.-México border. The weeks that followed witnessed mass political mobilizations in city after city. Even cities that were never before centers of political activism—Dallas, Houston, Phoenix, San José—suddenly jumped onto the national scene with protest demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people. For the first time, undocumented persons joined their legal brethren in open protest, proudly bearing placards calling for the legalization of their residence in the United States.

Despite the nationwide spread of these coordinated actions, the organization of immigration rights protests has been very decentralized. The mobilization of large marches was coordinated by local or regional coalitions like the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights and March 25 Coalition in Los Angeles, the San José Immigrant Rights Coalition, and the National Capitol Immigration Coalition in Washington, D.C. With the public now relying so heavily on the Internet, the Web has proven to be an unprecedented tool in mobilizing millions for coordinated actions across the country.

But behind the scenes were numerous nationwide ethnic-based organizations that played a key role in planning, mobilizing, or at least raising consciousness for nationwide protests, such as the

Mexican-American Political Association, La Raza, Coalición primero de Mayo, Latino Movement USA, Hermandad Mexicana Latinoamericana, and the League of United Latin American Citizens, which claims to be the largest and oldest Hispanic organization in the United States.

However, fearing the loss of permanent union jobs and downward pressure on wages, the main U.S. trade union establishment, the American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), continued to oppose a 'guest worker' program and amnesty for undocumented workers. Even the newly-formed Change to Win Federation, which broke away from the AFL-CIO in 2005, failed to really embrace the immigrant rights movement. Both trade union federations feared the true legacy of May Day, that of workers spontaneously implementing a general strike without the mediation of labor bosses. As a result, most traditional labor unions did not support the immigration rights marches and the rebirth of May Day. Only those union locals that had large Latino caucuses mobilized in support of the May Day demonstrations.

U.S. origins of May Day

May Day is a national holiday in most industrialized and developing countries around the world, celebrated as International Workers' Day. The United States is an exception, where successive governments and the trade union bureaucracy have feared the connection with labor movements around the world and consistently resisted recognizing May Day. Seeking an alternative date, the Knights of Labor in New York City initiated Labor Day on September 5, 1882, in order to recognize the contribution of American workers. In 1884, seeking to make Labor Day an annual event, the Knights of Labor lead the way in selecting the first Monday in September as a holiday from labor. Beginning in 1887, individual states came to recognize Labor Day as an official state holiday. However, it was not until 1894 that Congress made Labor Day a national holiday.

May Day itself also traces its origins to the U.S. labor movement. In 1884 the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, predecessor of the American Federation of Labor (AFL),

called for an eight-hour workday. When implementation appeared unlikely, a general strike was called in Chicago on May 1, 1886. On that day, some 80,000 workers marched down Chicago's Michigan Avenue in what is generally recognized as the first May Day parade. In the succeeding days, supporting strikes broke out in other cities such as Milwaukee, Cincinnati, and New York City. On May 3, police killed four striking workers at the McCormick Reaper Works in Chicago. At an evening rally on May 4 in Haymarket Square, organized to protest the killings, police moved in to disperse the crowd when a bomb went off, killing seven policemen. Police retaliated by firing into the crowd of workers, killing and wounding an unknown number of civilians. Determined to stop the labor agitations, police interrogations and arrests went on well into the night. Eight people were eventually charged and convicted for the deaths of the policemen, though no evidence was ever presented that directly linked them to the bombing in Haymarket Square. Four of the defendants were publicly hanged in 1887. In Paris in 1889, the International Workingmen's Association (Second International) called for international demonstrations on May 1, 1890, commemorating the struggle of Chicago workers. Thus was born the international tradition of May Day.

Over the next three decades, workers incrementally won eight-hour working days through struggles with individual companies. Finally, the Adamson Act was passed by Congress in 1916, establishing a statutory eight-hour working day for railway workers with additional pay for overtime work. Thus, contrary to popular myth in the United States, May Day did not originate from socialism or communism, but rather from the very U.S. trade union movement that brought about the basic eight-hour working day that is taken so much for granted today.

FRAGMENTED POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The base of virtually every immigrants' rights demonstration has been overwhelmingly Hispanic. While a small percentage of non-Latinos have always joined in support, there was no large-scale participation by other ethnic communities (with the possible exceptions of protests in Philadelphia and San Francisco). Yet it was only a short time before when Muslims, Arabs, and everyone

who 'looked like' them were being subjected to racial profiling in searches at ports of entry in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Where were the Muslims, Arabs, and other Asians who mobilized for civil liberties and against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq? Many African Americans felt sidelined by the immigrant rights marches that have eclipsed the size of the civil rights marches of previous decades (Watanabe 2006). Why were African Americans not joining the protests in large numbers?

There are at least two factors that account for the lack of participation by other ethnic groups. First, Americans who identify as members of one minority ethnic or religious group or another tend to see it as their primary identity within American society. Even in the Left, speaker after speaker at antiwar rallies talk of the "unity of African American, Latino, Native American, Asian, and Middle Eastern sisters and brothers." Rarely, however, do they mention the unity of workers, farmers, teachers, students, undocumented workers, the self-employed, and the unemployed. Instead, grassroots mobilization is frequently done on an ethnic or religious-community basis and manifested in banners bearing names like Muslim Students Association, Black Voices for Peace, South Asians for Collective Action, Filipino Workers Action Center, and Catholic Mothers for Peace. Thus, when political mobilization happens in the Latino community, even when it occurs nationwide, it may have little initial impact on non-Latino communities.

Second, even when ethnic communities do come together for a common political cause, they often take defensive positions and fail to forge a common cause against a common oppression. For example, when an Asian American in San José accused a black city official of racist discrimination some years ago, the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) came to the defense of the black official. When scientist Wen Ho Lee was falsely accused in 1999 of espionage at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, it was primarily Chinese American associations all over the country that came to his support. When Muslims and Arabs were subjected to racial profiling after September 11, the East Asian, Hispanic, and African American associations largely sat on their hands.

The ethnocentric fragmentation that is endemic in the American polity must be broken. Ethnicity-based organizations may

still have a role to play as fronts for grassroots mobilization, but they need to be integrated under pan-ethnic or, better yet, class-based umbrella political organizations. Alternatively, the ethnicity-based organizations could well serve as mass organizations for a working-class political party.

Parallel media universes

Prior to the May Day march of 2006, the political firestorm over immigration reform and the rights of undocumented immigrants had been gathering for some time. The kindling point was the passage of H.R. 4437, which touched an emotional nerve in the Latino community where many families have one or more undocumented members. Because nearly everyone knows someone who is or was undocumented, Congressional attempts to criminalize honest, hard-working family members and erect physical barriers dividing families between the United States and both México and Central America struck hard, and on a personal level.

According to U.S. Census estimates for July 1, 2005, 14.4% of the U.S. population (42.7 million people) was of Hispanic origin. Today, much of that population is served by Spanish-language radio and television stations. Spanish-language newspapers are freely available in metropolitan areas. Large national and international networks dominate the airwaves, including Univision, Telemundo, Hispanic Television Network (HTN), Hispanic Broadcasting Corporation (HBC), Spanish Broadcasting System (SBS), and TeleFutura and Galavisión (both owned by Univision). Collectively, the Spanish-language media in the United States has long carried a full range of news, talk shows, movies, singers, and comedies that are little known outside of the Spanish-speaking community. This diverse collection of media plays a crucial role in informing and shaping the consciousness of the Spanish-speaking community in the United States, for whom it serves as a primary media outlet.

Consider the Spanish-language and bilingual newspapers in California. In the weeks leading up to May Day, the front-page headlines read: “Marcha histórica en Los Ángeles” (‘Historic march in Los Angeles,’ *El Mundo*, Oakland, March 30, 2006), “Primero de Mayo” (‘May 1’ by Armando Roman, *Alianza*, San José, April 20, 2006), “Primero de Mayo, un día sin latinos. ¿Cómo la ve?” (‘May

1, a day without Latinos. How to see it?’ by Rosario Vital, *El Observador*, San José, April 28, 2006), and “Americans back immigrant-friendly reform” (*La Oferta*, San José, April 21, 2006).

After May Day, and the abundant news coverage of the May Day demonstrations, the Spanish-language press continued to react strongly to immigration-related events. On May 15, 2006, President George W. Bush announced his plan to dispatch 6,000 National Guard troops to the U.S.-México border in an attempt to placate right-wing supporters, while simultaneously offering an olive branch to immigrants and their employers by supporting a guest worker program and a conditional pathway to legalization for many undocumented workers. Two days later, the Senate’s passage of S. 2611 authorized building some 370 miles (595 kilometers) of new fencing along the U.S.-México border. The headline drama continued: “6 mil soldados a la frontera” (‘6000 soldiers to the border’ by Maribel Hastings, *La Opinión*, Los Angeles, May 16, 2006), “Más tropas y legalización” (‘More troops and legalization’ by Agencias, *Hoy*, Los Angeles, May 16, 2006), “México: ¿Zona de guerra?” (‘Mexico: war zone?’ by Rosario Vital, *El Observador*, May 19, 2006), “Senado aprueba muro en frontera con México” (‘Senate approves wall on border with Mexico’ by María Peña, *La Oferta*, May 19, 2006).

Even those media organizations that publish in both English and Spanish had very different approaches to reporting across the two languages. The former Knight-Ridder newspaper group, for example, reported in the *San Jose Mercury News* (Arrillaga 2006) on “militias and minutemen” patrolling the U.S.-México border. Its sister newspaper, the English-language *Contra Costa Times*, had little to say about the vigilante groups that undertook on their own to hunt down ‘illegal aliens’ crossing the U.S.-México border. Yet in the Spanish-language newspaper *Fronteras*, published by the *Contra Costa Times*, the phenomenon was sensationalized with the title “Nazis en la frontera” (‘Nazis on the border,’ Contreras 2006). Thus, the Latino community became far more aware of, and emotionally involved in, the issues behind the immigration debate than other ethnic communities or the general English-speaking population.

As discussion and outrage over H.R. 4437 escalated in the Spanish-language media, the attention of the rest of the country was

focused elsewhere. When antiwar forces were mobilizing for nationwide demonstrations on March 18-19, 2006, the third anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, there was relatively little awareness of the gathering storm in the Latino community. As 25,000 people marched against the war in San Francisco on March 18, few had any idea that it would be dwarfed by the 1 million marching in Los Angeles on the following weekend. In effect, the United States today contains parallel universes of culture and political consciousness, each fully internally integrated and national in scope, but almost mutually exclusive in the communities they serve—one thinking (and being broadcast) in English, and the other in Spanish. (Other linguistic communities also have their native-language media, but tend to be more isolated and geographically localized, and thus more apt to rely on mainstream English-language media.)

The American flag: Dual symbolism

The antiwar movement and the Left in general has been uncomfortable with the American flag as a political symbol, not out of contempt for the country but rather because the Right has hijacked the flag as a symbol of the right-wing political agenda: national chauvinism, militarization, war, and assertion of U.S. hegemony over the world. By contrast, for the Latino community in general, and for undocumented immigrants in particular, the American flag is not taken to represent loyalty to the U.S. government, but rather the country into which they so desperately seek to become integrated. By adopting the mantle of the American flag, they seek legality and security of residence. They seek identification as being just another working American in a country that was built by immigrants. The slogan, “*Hoy marchamos, mañana votamos*” (Today we march, tomorrow we vote) emphasizes the longer-term goal of finding a legal path to citizenship and the electoral power associated with it. Among the most ubiquitous symbols in the immigration rights marches of 2006 was the American flag. Frequently, the second most prevalent symbol was the Mexican flag. Though sending mixed messages, the prominence of both U.S. and Latin American flags was symptomatic of the dual identity of these immigrants. But they also

came to symbolize the pride of coming out and asserting political power as a community.

This is not to say that members of the Latino community do not share some common perspectives with the antiwar movement. Overwhelmingly, the Latino community is working-class and suffers the double oppression of class and race, or the triple oppression of class, race, and existence at the margins of the legal economy. For example, when asked about the U.S. war in Iraq, the great majority of those who offered an opinion expressed opposition to the war. Many antiwar signs were seen scattered throughout the demonstrations in Los Angeles, San José, and San Francisco, several of which read, "The Latino community says NO to war." Some signs denounced police brutality and the heavy hand of the state. Others made fun of President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and the "Governator" (a reference to California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who formerly acted in the movie *The Terminator* and has been hesitant to allow undocumented immigrants to obtain drivers' licenses). Still other hand-written signs simply read "Support our cause," without specifying which "cause" was being addressed.

Consisting overwhelmingly of working-class people, the Latino community has been largely united with the predominantly middle-class antiwar movement, not only in opposing H.R. 4437, racism, and repressive laws, but also in supporting economic justice, labor rights, civil liberties, and opposing the pre-emptive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But the symbolism of the American flag poses a challenge for uniting the movements. For Latinos, the American flag is a symbol of inclusion in a system in which many of them are still marginalized. For the antiwar movement, as for the black-led civil rights movement, the American flag has become a symbol of the hegemony of state power over others, whether it be the United States over other countries (particularly developing countries), whites over blacks, or capitalist profiteers over workers. These dichotomies must be overcome either by decoupling the flag as symbol of the country from the flag as symbol of the Right, or by creating a new symbol of nationhood that is truly inclusive for the working class and marginalized poor.

Opposition based on racially tinged myths

Opponents of amnesty for undocumented immigrants launched a few small demonstrations in the days following May Day. They carried signs saying, “No illegals” or “No amnesty for illegal immigrants.” Most insisted that they were not against immigration but rather illegal immigration, arguing that the latter burdens the nation’s law enforcement, welfare, health care, and education systems. Yet many among them carried signs with distinctly xenophobic overtones: “Close borders now” or “Fix your own country before you trash ours.” Still others implied that immigrants from south of the border would drag down the U.S. standard of living. Slogans such as “Amnesty equals joining the Third World” or “Illegal employers import poverty” had unmistakably racist overtones.

Perhaps the central notion among opponents of immigrants’ rights remains that undocumented immigrants are an undue burden on public services. The assumption is that undocumented immigrants, coming mostly from impoverished rural areas and having little education, bring poverty, crime, and Third World diseases, and otherwise dilute the ‘American way of life.’ This is largely based on ignorance and lack of context. First, if undocumented immigrants utilize free public services, so too do legal residents and citizens. For example, all low-income groups tend to lack health insurance, and thus place an uncompensated burden on hospital emergency rooms and public healthcare facilities. Second, because non-permanent residents are not entitled to welfare or federal medical care benefits (Medicaid and Medicare), these public safety nets are not burdened even by legal immigrants, let alone those who lack documentation.

Third, undocumented immigrants enter the United States almost entirely for employment and because they can actually get work. Those who have valid tax identification numbers are required to pay income taxes, and most actually do so. To the extent that they contribute to the economy and pay taxes, they contribute as much as lower-class legal residents to funding the public services that they may utilize. However, to the extent that being undocumented pushes workers into the underground economy, a defined pathway towards legalization would create millions of additional aboveground

income taxpayers. The notion that illegal immigrants burden public services more than they contribute economically is partly based on a racially motivated presumption that they are lazy and do not work. In fact, their participation rate in employment (96% for men) is estimated to be higher than that of legal immigrants or citizens (Passel, Capps, and Fix 2004). However, owing to the frequently temporary nature of their work, many experience a significant degree of underemployment.

Fourth, there is often an automatic assumption by opponents of amnesty that undocumented immigrants, perhaps because they are defined as illegal, contribute more than their share to crime, hence disproportionately burdening the law enforcement, criminal justice, and correctional systems. Immigration opponents have claimed that in many cases 60% to 90% of serious crimes in the United States are committed by illegal aliens (MacDonald 2004). However, actual statistics tell a somewhat different story. For example, in California, according to the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, out of a total of nearly 171,000 state prison inmates in April 2006 there were 22,478 undocumented immigrants and persons suspected of being undocumented, a percentage significantly less than those figures cited by immigration opponents (see Sterngold 2006). (These figures do not include persons held in local jails and federal prisons.) According to the Pew Hispanic Center, a Washington, DC based think-tank, California had approximately 2,750,000 undocumented immigrants as of March 2006, out of the 11.5–12 million in the country (Pew Hispanic Center 2006). This gives undocumented immigrants an incarceration rate in California state prisons of approximately 817 per 100,000 population. According to the California Department of Finance, the total population of California reached 37.2 million in January 2006 (California Department of Finance 2006); the incarceration rate of the general population in California state prisons was therefore 460 per 100,000. This is a far cry from the greatly inflated crime rates for undocumented immigrants claimed by immigration opponents.

While undocumented immigrants were incarcerated at a rate that is slightly less than twice the rate for the general population, this remains significantly lower than the incarceration rates for black and Native American U.S. citizens, who are the most severely affected by racial profiling and negative stereotyping. Even legally

resident Hispanics were somewhat over-represented in the prison population because of racial profiling and being under-privileged. Furthermore, the incarceration rate for undocumented immigrants must be viewed in the context of a population that by definition lives outside the legal margins of society, even when performing normal everyday tasks that the legal population takes for granted. Thus, for example, identity theft crimes may be committed more for the purpose of acquiring a tax identification number needed for employment rather than for the purpose of tapping another person's bank account. Wherever driver's licenses are denied to undocumented immigrants, undocumented immigrants will be found driving without licenses.

Fifth, there is an underlying fear among opponents of amnesty that undocumented immigrants are taking away their jobs and pulling down wages. However, not only are undocumented immigrants hard-working, but they perform jobs that others are unwilling to perform, or at least unwilling to perform at such low (frequently sub-minimum) wages. Based on the March 2005 Current Population Survey by the United States Census Bureau (2006), 78% of undocumented immigrants are employed in low-wage and low-education occupations, among them farm labor, cleaning, household service, construction, repair, production labor, and transportation (Passel 2006). Thus, there is relatively little direct competition for jobs between most U.S. citizens and undocumented immigrants. To the extent that undocumented immigrants are willing to work at below-market wages, they do effectively reduce mean wages in those economic sectors where they predominate by virtue of their reduced bargaining power. But this is precisely what the capitalist system seeks in its relentless drive to enhance profit margins by reducing wages and costs. In fact, there is emerging evidence in certain sectors that Latino workers, in taking over low-wage jobs, are actually pushing black workers and other citizens up into higher-wage occupations (Gorman, Millar, and Landsberg 2006).

Sixth, undocumented immigrants effectively increase the purchasing power of all Americans by reducing the cost of certain labor services, such as cultivation, processing, freight transportation, maintenance, and repairs. Nevertheless, to defend undocumented immigrants is not to condone an economic system

that institutionalizes sub-minimum wages by perpetuating multiple unorganized sectors based largely on undocumented labor, nor to justify their social marginalization through exclusion from public services. All human beings have minimum social needs that can be met only by ensuring them a decent standard of living, and the fundamental human rights of unfettered access to healthcare, education, and social justice. This is yet another reason, no less important, for providing a dignified pathway towards legalization of undocumented immigrants who make essential contributions to the economy and have otherwise been law-abiding residents.

Non-Latino undocumented immigrants: Common struggle

The controversy over undocumented immigrants has focused almost exclusively on those from Latin America. This reflects the fact that an estimated 78% of undocumented immigrants as of March 2005 originated from Latin America in general, and 57% came from México in particular. That leaves some 1.5 million undocumented immigrants from Asia (13%), 600,000 from Europe and Canada (6%), and 400,000 from Africa and elsewhere (3%) (Passel 2006). While the great majority of undocumented immigrants from Latin America have made illegal border crossings, those from Asia and Europe are associated more with nonimmigrant visa overstays. Nevertheless, the unauthorized immigration status of those from Asia and Europe presents the same socio-economic marginalization and insecurity faced by undocumented immigrants from Latin America.

The statistical trend is even more revealing. In 1986, undocumented immigrants from Asia represented 6% of the total. By 2002, they constituted 10% (Wasem 2004); it took only three more years for that figure to reach 13%. Thus, in percentage terms, persons of Asian origins actually represent the fastest growing major segment of undocumented immigrants in the United States. According to estimates for the year 2000 by the former U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (now the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service), 1.64% of undocumented immigrants were from China, 1.21% from Philippines, 1.00% from India, and 0.79% from Korea (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 2003). Assuming the same percentages held in March 2006 out of a

total of 12 million undocumented immigrants, the following calculated numbers would represent significant underestimations: 200,000 undocumented immigrants from China, 145,000 from Philippines, 120,000 from India, and 95,000 from Korea. The numbers of undocumented immigrants from Pakistan and Iran are not far behind.

With pressure mounting in Congress to arrive at a consensus on tightening border security and rounding up at least a segment of undocumented immigrants, the scale of immigrant arrests, many without trials, escalated in the latter half of 2006 and in 2007. An ominous precedent was set following the September 11 terrorist attacks when more than 5,000 foreign nationals disappeared under secret detentions in the two years after the attacks. Nearly all were Muslims or Arabs. Although the pretext was unspecified "immigration violations," most were held without being charged and few were ever convicted. On June 14, 2006, in the case *Turkmen vs. Ashcroft*, U.S. District Judge John Gleeson upheld the U.S. government's authority to arrest and detain non-citizens on the basis of race, religion, or national origin, and to hold them indefinitely without explanation (Bernstein 2006; Cole 2006).

After congressional and presidential apologies and the payment of reparations for their sufferings, the World War II detentions of Japanese Americans, and to a lesser extent German Americans, purely on the basis of race or national origin was long thought to have been relegated to the dustbin of history. However, the spectre of such ethically reprehensible and openly racist events is once again raising its head. On some pretext of terrorism, enforcing immigration law, or national security, the next target could be Hispanic Americans, South Asian Americans, or East Asian Americans.

The potential threat to fundamental civil liberties is common to all immigrant communities. Therefore, it is in the interest of all immigrant communities to unite to oppose these draconian measures together. Although Latino immigrants have finally broken through the fear barrier and come out onto the streets defiantly proclaiming their rights, undocumented Asians have largely chosen to remain invisible. Only a small number of Asians, particularly those from the Philippines and Korea, have joined protests in solidarity with Latinos. Nevertheless, as more legal members of

Asian communities become citizens and as Asian communities in the United States awaken politically, it can be expected that legal and undocumented Asians alike will increasingly assert their political rights in the future.

THE FUTURE

The main challenge for the future is the unification of the immigrant rights movement with the trade union movement of permanent workers against anti-union policies and the profit-driven economy that is so ruthlessly attempting to drive down wages and slash benefits. The May Day demonstrations symbolize the potential for rebirth and unity of the U.S. labor movement, but there is clearly a long road ahead. Most traditional U.S. trade union bureaucracies have settled into the complacent role of being power brokers between workers and corporate management, preferring to avoid political struggles. If undocumented immigrant workers can lead the way, then permanent workers will need to reject their trade union bureaucracies to join them and reclaim May Day as International Workers' Day in the United States.

May Day 2008 could signal a start in this direction. Dock workers of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) on the West Coast have announced a work stoppage in protest against the U.S. war in Iraq on May 1. It could rekindle U.S. workers' claim to May Day as part of their rich heritage of struggle for better working conditions and the right to organize. It could also be the next step in linking unionized permanent workers with undocumented workers.

Much like the adverse effects of illegal drugs in the United States, the solution lies not so much in cutting off the supply, but more in reducing the adverse social conditions that give rise to the problem. The root causes of unidirectional migrations are both push and pull. Massive unauthorized immigration simply reflects such extreme pushes and pulls that even legal and physical barriers cannot stem the tide. On the one hand, the desperate economic conditions facing millions of marginalized farmers and underemployed workers in México and Central America as a direct result of globalized development in general, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in particular, are

pushing them to leave their native lands. The meteoric rise of Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his leftist Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD) in the July 2006 presidential elections in México is a direct result of the impoverishment of the masses of Mexican workers and peasants. Moreover, to the extent that the PRD policies could alleviate poverty, they could greatly reduce the push that gives rise to undocumented immigration. On the other hand, the increasing demand for low-wage manual labor in the United States—driven by outsourcing to the growing domestic unorganized sector, absolute cost-minimization business models like that of Wal-Mart, and the growing demand for domestic services—exerts an inexorable pull.

Undocumented immigrants themselves are not the underlying problem, but rather a symptom of the deeper social contradiction between rich countries and poor countries, or more precisely, between the metropolitan centers and the periphery of the world capitalist system. The U.S.-México border just happens to be one of those not-so-common instances where the center and periphery geographically meet, and where unequal development spawns a massive labor migration in the same manner that unequal water levels between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario spawn the Niagara Falls. No man-made barrier can stop the falls. Only an equalization of the water levels—or in this case, the wage gap—can accomplish that.

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11

NOBLESSE OBLIGE? DOMESTIC WORKER ORGANIZING AND MIDDLE-CLASS ACTIVISM IN THE SOUTH ASIAN AMERICAN CONTEXT

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One of the outcomes of recent changes in the structure of world capital is the vastly altered makeup of the American labor force. As large-scale manufacturing jobs have moved out of the United States, more and more Americans are engaged in service sector occupations, some of them as either self-employed or home workers. In addition, a significant proportion of the lower rungs of the American job market is now occupied by recent immigrants (Lamphere, Stepick, and Grenier 1994; Sassen 1991; Portes, Castells, and Benton 1989). Peter Kwong (1997a, 1997b) refers to the hardening of ethnic enclaves under the present labor market conditions, unlike the European enclaves of an earlier American capitalism. Workers may now spend their entire working lives with employers of the same ethnicity, instead of competing for jobs with other American workers on the open labor market. They may hardly interact with workers from other ethnic backgrounds, remaining unable to speak English even after decades of living in the United States. Some Chinatown workers that Kwong has met, for instance, continue to refer to Americans as 'foreigners,' a measure of the distance they feel from the society in which they currently live and

work.

This is also proving to be true of the South Asian working-class experience in the United States. Like the Chinatowns that Kwong describes, the Little Indias in major American cities have come to acquire a social solidity and autonomy that belies their makeshift exterior experience. Kwong's ground-breaking contribution has been his refutation of the *ethnic solidarity thesis* (Light 1972; Portes and Bach 1985; Zhou 1992), a generally sanguine view of these ethnic enclaves that has tended to regard them as havens of community support and avenues for upward mobility for new immigrants. On the basis of years of involvement with working-class communities in Manhattan's Chinatown and Brooklyn's Sunset Park, Kwong has found not only that earlier immigrants do not necessarily help newer immigrants find their feet in the United States, but also that earlier immigrant employers will in fact deliberately use the façade of ethnic solidarity to further squeeze profits from newly arrived immigrant workers.

Working-class immigration from the countries of South Asia into the United States on a significant scale is a relatively recent phenomenon. The vast majority of immigrants from South Asia came into this country after the 1965 Immigration Act expanded quotas and abolished all explicit national discrimination. The first wave consisted primarily of middle- and upper-class urban educated professionals who quickly settled into successful suburban lifestyles in the United States. There was a dramatic rise in numbers in the 1980s: data from the 1990 U.S. Census Bureau put the population of Indian Americans alone at more than one million, which represents an increase of 125.6% between 1980 and 1990. This trend has continued through the nineties and into the new millennium. Many of these new South Asian immigrants come from rural or urban working-class backgrounds and have made their way into low-wage occupations in American cities—for instance, as taxi drivers, street vendors, busboys in restaurants, or gas station attendants. As in other immigrant communities, the least visible segment of these new working classes are the undocumented workers, who typically work under secretive and harshly exploitative conditions for South Asian employers.

My focus in this chapter is on women who are employed as domestic workers in the suburban homes of South Asian

professionals. They are ‘undocumented’ both in the sense of lacking legal immigration status in the United States and in the sense of living lives that are hidden from, and undergoing experiences that rarely register with, broader American society. Many women who are employed as domestic workers have left their immediate families behind in South Asia. They may see their work lives here as temporary: for example, regarding themselves as migrant workers rather than immigrant workers. But changes in the institutional context can make a mockery of the ways in which these domestic workers make sense of what it is that they are doing in this country. The Immigration Act of 1996, for instance, bars undocumented aliens who leave the United States from re-entry for a ten-year period, and places severe restrictions on applicants for political asylum. Most of these women are therefore confronted with the choice of staying away from their families as undocumented workers in the United States (and therefore being particularly vulnerable to economic exploitation), or else returning to inhabit the lower levels of the imperiled economies of South Asia.

The class cleavages in the South Asian immigrant community are the key element in this situation. Because the employer-employee relationship in the United States frequently follows the script of class difference in South Asia, class relationships prior to emigration are critically important. The exact mode of the worker’s arrival into the United States—for example, her visa status or her conditions of employment—are often predetermined long before she sets foot on American soil. A likely recruitment scenario is that a South Asian professional may interview potential employees during vacations back in the subcontinent and then sponsor one of them for a tourist visa that will soon run out, making the employee an illegal alien.

Once the workers arrive in the United States, their employers may be the only people they know in the country. The worker may not know any English at all, and having been driven directly to the employer’s house from the airport, she may not know even the name of the town she lives in or her employer’s phone number. She may not be allowed to leave the employer’s house. The world she has left behind is endlessly in her thoughts: for example, I know a worker who has left two children behind in Bangladesh, and the

younger one is only two years old.

In this claustrophobic and isolated workplace, the possibilities for exploitation and abuse are almost endless. Wages paid to undocumented domestic workers nearly never rise to the level of the legal minimum wage in the United States; the hours can be as many as fourteen to fifteen per day, seven days per week. Indeed, the employee may never see her wages, which are directly remitted to her family in South Asia. She may never even be sure if this is being carried out properly because she may not be allowed to make any phone calls. Her passport may be in her employers' keeping. Given her undocumented status, the employer may constantly threaten to report her to the police or INS if she fails to perform satisfactorily. Physical or sexual abuse is sometimes reported. The termination of a job can mean homelessness for a live-in worker—homelessness in a strange country where she does not know anyone and could not communicate with them even if she did. As a result, many workers make no effort to leave nightmarish workplaces. There are often intricate 'do's and don'ts' around the employers' house; some workers have even talked about not receiving meals. Indeed, a worker who lived in Queens but worked for a family in Connecticut was not allowed to use any bathrooms in her employer's house.

The fact that these female workers are engaged in 'women's work,' usually for female employers, raises important reflexive issues about the meanings and outcomes of feminism. The employers of domestic workers, for example, are typically middle-class professional women who are able to work successfully in the public realm because of the gains made by the women's movement. Does the notion of *sisterhood* intervene in these employer-worker relationships? Is it used to further dispossess workers in the same way that the idea of ethnic solidarity has been used by Kwong's Chinatown employers? What have been the differential consequences for South Asian immigrant middle-class women and working-class women of the American women's movement?

The task of organizing such a workforce is truly daunting. Workers have to be prized out one by one from their atomized, isolated workplaces; they are unable to attend meetings easily because they have to account for every hour of their time. But, while I lived there, there were at least three steadfastly separate

groups that attempted to organize South Asian domestic workers in New York City. As someone who is dismayed by the turn of events that has led to this degree of organizational fragmentation, I would like to make a plea for some self-critical feminist envisioning and to place some slightly abstract questions on the table.

The groups that organize workers have some middle-class women in their membership. The numbers are kept low because it is, after all, a workers' organization, yet well-meaning middle-class women are thought to be useful to the group for their knowledge of English, their education more generally, and the social networks they can deploy for the use of the organization. There are clear preconditions that structure their participation: in all of the domestic workers' groups I have worked with, no middle-class woman was permitted to join if she herself employed anyone to do housework or childcare duties at her home.

But there remains a distinct dynamic in these organizations between workers and 'nonworkers' such as myself. The middle-class lifestyle of the average 'nonworker' must in many ways come across as exotic, even implausible, to the average domestic worker. In contrast to domestic workers, we are likely to have relatively secure immigration statuses, a familiarity with English, snug and fulfilling jobs in academia or the nonprofit world (or alternatively, eccentric and exciting student existences), and sometimes even nice feminist men in our lives who share equally in household chores. But even though ours are lives that the worker cannot identify with, they are very clearly recognizable for what they resemble most closely: the lives of the women who are their employers. The habits and practices that govern the worker's relationship with her employer in the claustrophobic workplace may thus enter the workers' rights organization and begin to run the relationships between working-class women and middle-class women.

There are heartbreakingly numerous examples of a sense of obligation on the part of working-class women towards their middle-class colleagues, as well as an unfortunate kind of *noblesse oblige* on the part of the middle-class women. Thus, a worker once said to me that nonworkers who volunteered their time in the organization were unselfish and self-sacrificing because they did not stand to gain personally from a strong workers' organization as the workers did. Some middle-class women very nearly share this

view. I remember a woman complaining that between a hectic work-week and organizational meetings on weekends, she hardly had time to go out to brunch with her husband. A reasonable enough complaint, perhaps, except that she was seeking—and getting—a sympathetic reaction from women whose closest family members lived in distant South Asia and who did not even know when they might see them next.

It is easy to see the damage inflicted on organizational democracy by what I describe as the *noblesse oblige* styles of participation that some middle-class activists seem to bring to this kind of labor organizing: a pronounced awareness of their own magnanimity and the consequent expectation that they should drive the group's decision-making processes, either openly or otherwise. This is coupled with an obliviousness to the potential résumé advantages and public approval that may accrue to them because of their community work (indeed, in the increasingly professionalized nonprofit sector in the United States, social activism can even become a viable middle-class career choice). For domestic workers' organizations with both middle-class and working-class membership, it is vital that class-based notions of entitlement and deference should not seep into everyday organizational interactions, and that we should begin to find new ways to respect each other for engaging in collective struggle.

Even if we are able to build a political culture that gets past this patron-client scheme of things—and I see this and the professionalization of activism as key problems in the organizations I have worked with—we are still left with the issue that the vision of liberation that present-day feminism presents us with is hopelessly middle-class. We continue to assume that women who engage in work that is in keeping with traditional women's roles are unfree, while women who are engaged in white collar work are living fulfilling feminist lives. In many parts of the world, middle-class women's movements began with women rebelling against housework and claiming public space, and contemporary feminist activists implicitly continue to conflate the rejection of traditional women's work with liberation. A flawed yet pervasive assumption, this also ties in with the patriarchal idea that tasks historically performed by women are of inferior social worth. In this view, domestic workers will always be the lowest of the low, even in

feminism's own reckoning, because of the work they do. It is a vision that can cripple domestic worker organizing—and must be reimagined.

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12

TERROR AT DONG REK

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ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM VIET NAM

In the spring of 1975, after thirty years of armed conflict, the Communists won control of Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia. The end of the war in those countries marks the beginning of the massive migration of the peoples of that region to the United States and other countries. Over 2 million people fled from the three war-torn countries, seeking asylum as refugees. Well over 1 million were Vietnamese, half of them children: between 10% and 50% did not survive. Among the Vietnamese survivors, some 540,000 came to the United States as refugees, but over 100,000, denied refugee status, were repatriated to Viet Nam, in some cases against their will. Another 400,000 Vietnamese were brought into the United States as legal immigrants.

In this chapter, we discuss a conflict in which several hundred Vietnamese asylum seekers, some of them now in the United States, became entangled in an international bureaucratic foul-up that nearly prevented them from being resettled; many languished for up to ten years at Dong Rek, Site 2, one of several isolated camps on the border of Thailand and Cambodia. Had it not been for the intervention of human rights activists, these people would unjustly

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have been denied refugee status by the one international agency expected to protect them, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The issues and events that surround these people are controversial; they highlight many of the concerns we have about the treatment of asylum seekers, especially children, throughout Southeast Asia. A minor miscommunication error escalated to become a source of unnecessary conflict involving the Thai government, the UNHCR, volunteer service and human rights organizations throughout the world, countries of resettlement such as the United States, and of course, the asylum seekers themselves. Interests of each of the groups were often at odds: none would admit error; resolution took years. The real losers in this conflict were those who had the least to say about it, the children of Site 2, who were imprisoned for years in a dangerous and destructive environment. As a result, they will forever carry memories of the terror of that place. What is especially disturbing to many observers is that the officials involved in this conflict were well aware of the damage that was being done to the children; yet none stepped forward to do something about it.

Throughout Southeast Asia, asylum seekers have said to us that the UNHCR harms rather than protects them, and many representatives of nongovernmental organizations agree. Although the events we describe bear testimony to the asylum seekers' claims, the UNHCR rejects all such claims as unfounded.

THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN

The flight of Vietnamese asylum seekers occurred in a series of 'waves': first, the 135,000-150,000 persons who left around the fall of Saigon in 1975; second, those who escaped by boat or overland starting a couple of years later, with several hundred thousand escaping between 1978 and 1982; third, intermittent smaller movements of asylum seekers thereafter. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the world opened its doors, though sometimes reluctantly, to resettle these asylum seekers as refugees. By the end of the 1980s, however, world sentiment had reversed. Countries of first asylum and of final resettlement were less willing to accept them.

In 1989, to discourage continued escapes from Viet Nam by asylum seekers, the UNHCR convened a multinational conference in Geneva. 78 countries, including the United States, adopted the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), one of the provisions of which was the designation of March 14, 1989 (mid-June 1988 for Hong Kong) as the cut-off date for people seeking asylum. Persons who arrived in countries of first asylum before that date were automatically considered refugees and were processed routinely for resettlement elsewhere. Those who arrived after that date were to be screened to determine their refugee status. Those screened in would be resettled; those screened out would be told to repatriate to Viet Nam.

Children accompanied by parents and sometimes by other relatives would be screened as part of families; unaccompanied children would not be screened but would be evaluated by a Special Committee, whose aim was to find a “durable solution” for the child based on “the best interests of the child.” A “best interests” recommendation could be resettlement in another country or repatriation to Viet Nam. However, UNHCR policy strongly influenced these decisions. In their view, children should be returned to their country of origin.

The criteria for determining refugee status, based on the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees, are evidence of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation. Prior to 1989, these criteria often were not applied to pre-cut-off date asylum seekers from Viet Nam. A UNHCR poster, widely circulated in the 1980s, showed an overloaded boat half submerged in the water, with the caption “If they survive, they are refugees.” Beginning in 1989, the criteria were applied in evaluating post-cut-off asylum seekers. Some 80% of the post-March 14 adult asylum seekers with their accompanying children were screened out, despite protests from many nongovernmental agencies and human rights activists throughout the world that the screening process was flawed and strongly biased against asylum seekers. Almost all unaccompanied minors similarly were told that it was in their best interests to repatriate. In several worst-scenario cases, which we personally observed in Viet Nam, orphans were repatriated when there were no relatives or functioning caretakers to receive them, children were

abandoned by relatives and stepparents, and some were returned to relatives who could not possibly afford to feed them.

At its height in 1990, some 160,000 post-CPA asylum seekers were in detention centers throughout Southeast Asia and Hong Kong. By early 1995 the UNHCR, along with 30 countries including the United States, agreed to begin the forcible repatriation of those who had been denied refugee status but had refused to go home voluntarily. The repatriation of these people was expected to be completed by 1996, at which time the camps were scheduled to close, and the hopes of resettlement of the Vietnamese boat people would end.

The CPA was designed to be a test project; if it succeeds in Southeast Asia, it will be tried with other refugee communities throughout the world. The Indochinese CPA has been hailed as a political success, since it has caused the exodus of boat people from Viet Nam to cease. But it has been criticized for inconsistencies and delays in screening. There also have been allegations of massive corruption in the screening process in several countries of first asylum. And from the point of view of the children who fled, it was a shattering experience that will haunt them for years.

Our book, *Voices from the Camps: Vietnamese Children Seeking Asylum*, documents in detail what happened to these children. We are not the only ones who have observed the abuses of these children. For years, experts on child development, human rights activists, social workers, health care professionals, and virtually everybody not officially responsible for these children, have charged that they were grossly abused and neglected. Officials deny this or say that the abuses were corrected, or claim that the abuses were "exceptional." We doubt it. These children were allowed to sit for two to five or more years neglected in detention camps, whose crowded conditions often violated internationally accepted conventions for space allotted to prisoners. Camps were enclosed by high steel-plated and barbed-wire fences, or by massive stone walls, or they were on islands, remote areas, or in highly dangerous locations. All of these camps throughout Southeast Asia were controlled by armed guards who often were hostile to the asylum seekers. In the camps, the children were brutalized and devastated by the harsh treatment of guards, overcrowding, inadequate food, physical violence, sexual abuse, little or no

education or job training, and nothing to do. These violations of children's rights occurred despite the fact that, in theory, guidelines were in place to prevent such abuses.

The voices of the children contradict official assurances that they were protected. We heard children say, "I was so afraid; I never went outside after 6 p.m." "We were always hungry." "I simply lost control; I couldn't stand living in the camp, so I beat a boy badly." A volunteer whom we sent to work in one camp relates this child's remark: "I want to kill myself, but my religion says it is wrong. So I pray that I die in my sleep." While children suffered, officials dithered, with apparent unconcern for the damage that was being done.

LIVING AND DYING AT DONG REK, SITE 2, SECTION 19

"Nobody wants them. Not America, not Canada, not France. They had their chance; we asked them to move, but they refused. Now they are stuck. They may sit forever without a solution. It's painful to sit ten years in a camp, but the humanitarian solution is the return them to Viet Nam."

With these words, Guy Ouellet, the UNHCR Deputy Representative in Bangkok, concluded his interview with us on December 30, 1991. We had inquired about the plight of the Vietnamese land refugees, also known as Platform persons, who were languishing in Dong Rek, Site 2, one of the several isolated camps on the Thai-Cambodian border. Between 1982 and 1986, these asylum seekers had escaped from Viet Nam, traveling overland through Cambodia to Thailand. Along the way, they had weathered attacks by Vietnamese soldiers, Khmer Rouge soldiers, and bandits, while also avoiding the many mines along the Cambodian border. Only 10% survived the journey. Once in Thailand, they were placed in Site 2. All other Vietnamese who arrived in countries of first asylum during this period were resettled; only those in Site 2 remained. And as far as Ouellet was concerned, they deserved to be there.

Until they were finally closed in 1993, Thai border camps such as Dong Rek were among the most brutal in Southeast Asia. In the 1980s, Vietnamese troops in Cambodia frequently shelled the camp. Mrs. Do Thanh Hue, a survivor of the camp now living in Milpitas,

California, recalls those days. "In some months, shelling went on continuously, day after day. It was an indescribable horror: we would hear the screams and cries of the wounded; bodies were everywhere, and blood was all over the streets. We were terrified; our family simply huddled together, embraced one another, and cried."

For Mrs. Hue, the nights were even more terrifying. That's when the Cambodian bandits would come down from the hills and enter the camp. "They shot people, they raped women, and they took whatever they wanted; clothes and rations, especially rice. We were completely unprotected. We would hide in a corner and hope they did not find us."

But the greatest danger, says Mrs. Hue, came from the Thai camp guards. "They killed, raped, and beat people whenever they wanted. Almost every youngster was hit on the head with rifles two or three times. Once, the guards stopped three Vietnamese young men who were talking with a Lao girl. They cut up and down the arms of the young men until blood flowed freely; then they poured vinegar on the wounds to cause the young men great pain. After that, the guards buried the three of them alive. I saw that. And I was there when they stopped a Cambodian woman from selling fried bananas in the market. She was not permitted to do that, so the guards took the boiling oil from her pan and poured it on her head. Her two eyes blew up and she died instantly, right in front of her two small children."

Mrs. Hue says, "You cannot imagine what it was like to be there, the horror of it was beyond description. I wrote to my relatives back in Viet Nam, 'Do not escape.' With the never-ending hunger, the shelling, the Cambodian bandits, the Thai guards, the continuous fear of death and torture at any moment, the dirt, the lack of privacy, the exhaustion, the disease, and the uncertainty of what was to happen to us, we were easily swayed by rumors that we would be sent back to Viet Nam. We did not know whom to believe or what to do. We were always in a panic; we were not in a clear mind to make decisions."

In 1992, when we visited the camp, the shelling had long ceased, but Dong Rek remained a dangerous place. The camp was so vulnerable to attack by bands of Cambodian bandits 70-80 strong that by 4:00 p.m., outside of a handful of Thai guards, all other

government officials and international relief workers fled in car caravans to their homes in or near Aranyaprathet, some 50 miles southwest of Site 2, abandoning the camp inhabitants to the terrors that night brought. The bandits also attacked Thai villages near the camp, kidnapping the inhabitants, holding them for ransom, and sometimes killing them. North and West of the camp, the roads and villages were controlled by bandits day and night. Travel along these roads was highly dangerous. To reach the camp safely from that direction, as we did in January 1992, required a caravan, an armed escort, and a bit of luck. From time to time the Thai High Command would launch campaigns against the bandits, but with little success. Even after the border camps were closed in 1993, the area remained dangerous.

Because we had provided assistance to the Vietnamese children of Section 19 at Site 2, the people of that section had invited us to visit them. At that time, Site 2, an area of sprawling camps, was home primarily to 250,000 Cambodians, who were considered 'displaced persons' temporarily residing in Thailand. Because free elections were held in Cambodia in May 1993, these people were sent back to their homeland.

The people we visited in Section 19 were Vietnamese citizens of Vietnamese, Chinese, Cham (a Vietnamese minority), and Khmer Krom (Cambodian) ancestry. The exact number was difficult to document, since some people from Cambodia had mixed in with them in the hopes of being resettled rather than repatriated. The number registered at that time was 947, of whom over 600 were Vietnamese citizens. Tensions were high and violence frequent between the Vietnamese and the Cambodians, who are historic enemies. The worst single incident occurred in July 1991, when a large grenade, thrown into an evening gathering, killed 26 people.

THE ABDICATION OF RESPONSIBILITY

Why were the Vietnamese land refugees not resettled for so many years? The answer points to one of the most bizarre bureaucratic foul-ups, misunderstandings, personal vendettas, and cover-ups in the troubled history of Southeast Asian refugees.

On October 14, 1988, the land refugees requested that the UNHCR help to resettle them in another country as refugees, as had

been done with Vietnamese in other camps. Three weeks later, Jens Bruhn-Peterson, UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer in Bangkok, responded with a letter that was as unsympathetic to their plight and protection as it was contradictory.

“Since Site 2 camp is not under UNHCR mandate our office is not in a position to assist you.” The UNHCR refused to help them because they were in a section of the camp run by the United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO). As long as they remained there, they would be treated not as Vietnamese refugees elsewhere, but as Cambodians—displaced persons who were not granted refugee status and did not have UNHCR protection.

The letter continued, “I have forwarded a copy of your letter to the International Committee of the Red Cross who is currently undertaking the resettlement efforts for the Vietnamese in Site 2 ... until their transfer to Ban Thad camp. As you may know, residents of Ban Thad camp are, according to the policy of the Royal Thai Government, not released for resettlement processing.”

Ban Thad was a part of the Site 2 area. When they requested resettlement, the Platform Vietnamese were told to move to a part of Site 2 that was a closed camp where resettlement was not allowed. Bruhn-Petersen’s letter was written while the UNHCR was changing policy towards Vietnamese asylum seekers, developing the CPA.

In 1988 and 1989, knowing that the CPA would soon be in place, not only the UNHCR, but Thai officials and representatives of several embassies, including the United States, counseled the Vietnamese land refugees to move to Ban Thad. Some went, including a number of Cambodian citizens who bribed their way out, but several hundred Vietnamese land refugees refused, despite being warned that they would be treated as displaced Cambodians if they did not move. Their ethnicity would be determined, not by themselves, but by officials who used ethnic designation as a threat to coerce them to move.

Why didn’t many of the land refugees move? The accounts are confusing and contradictory, as were the decisions of the people. Bruhn-Petersen’s letter clearly misled them. Some ten leaders among the land refugees persuaded people not to move. One of them, a monk, convinced people to give an oath before the Buddha that they would not move to Ban Thad. An American teacher who

worked in the camp urged them at first to demonstrate against moving, but then inexplicably urged them to move as their only chance at resettlement. Some land refugees interpreted this to mean that he was forced to change his true opinion. At the last moment, seven of the ten resistance leaders went to Ban Thad; they have since been resettled, some in the United States. Some people moved because they trusted the international relief workers or Jesuit priests who urged them to do so; others, unsure of whom to trust or influenced by rumors and their own leaders who abandoned them, refused to leave. Their state of mind was similar to Mrs. Hue's when she lived in Site 2.

In December 1988, the Platform people staged a month-long protest demonstration against the move to Ban Thad. Accounts of the events are contradictory: some people allege that Thai guards set fire to many houses; others that the land refugees themselves did it. But the result was that the Thai cut their food rations and moved them to a new part of the camp, Section 19. Several months later, when the CPA was signed, the Thais would not allow them to be interviewed for resettlement. Two years later, in March 1991, the Thai Government informed the embassies of several countries that they could now interview the land refugees if they wished to resettle them.

Now, however, the UNHCR refused, claiming that because they had not been registered in a UNHCR camp by the cut-off date, the land refugees, like others who failed to reach the camps in time, did not qualify as pre-cut-off date asylum seekers, even though some of them had been in Thailand since 1982. The UNHCR expressed this verbally, but not officially in writing.

One person we interviewed claims that a particular UNHCR officer not only made the original error of neglecting to put people on the registration list, but then, to cover it up, blamed the land refugees. This official is said to have remarked, "As long as I am here, they are not going." If they wished to be resettled, the land refugees would have to be screened, along with all post-cut-off date asylum seekers. A few people from Section 19 agreed to this; they moved the Sikhiu camp, where they were denied refugee status and recommended for repatriation to Viet Nam.

Mrs. Hue recalls that to survive during their escape through Cambodia, Vietnamese land refugees frequently destroyed their

identifying documents. When these people were rejected for refugee status, they cried all day, and some committed suicide. Mrs. Hue had also destroyed papers that would have qualified her for refugee status. The communists had confiscated Mrs. Hue's business and had sent her to a new economic zone, where she had dug holes for sugar cane with her bare hands, which became crippled. Mrs. Hue was one of the lucky few; a relative in Austria had sent a document about her husband's previous occupation proving that he and his family were likely to be persecuted. "Without that document," she said, "we could never have left Site 2."

OPPOSITION TO THE UNHCR POSITION

The UNHCR had decided to block the efforts of the land refugees to resettle some 18 months before they announced it. During the period that the Platform people were not allowed out by the Thais, the UNHCR led some relief agency people to believe that the land refugees would be moved to another camp for resettlement.

When they found out otherwise, many international relief organizations privately objected to the UNHCR's treatment of the land refugees, as did some embassy and United Nations officials. They observed that the land refugees need not have been excluded, since their earlier arrival dates in Thailand had been well documented, along with their ethnicity and their citizenship. Nevertheless, until 1993 the UNHCR stood firm in its opposition to the Platform people, and it was supported by the U.S. State Department, which feared that declaring the land refugees to be pre-cut-off would jeopardize the entire Comprehensive Plan of Action. In responding to a query about the land refugees by U.S. Representative Stephen J. Solarz, Janet G. Mullins, Assistant Secretary of Legislative Affairs for the U.S. Department of State, wrote that considering the land refugees pre-cut-off would require a redefinition of the pre-cut-off population. Furthermore, all of the land refugees would have to be considered Vietnamese although many were ethnic Cambodian; and others were warned that they would be treated as displaced Cambodians if they did not move when told to do so. Finally, many had been interviewed and denied refugee status by the INS, so they couldn't get into America anyway.

Father Pierre Ceyrac, in 1992 a vigorous 78-year old Jesuit priest who for nearly ten years had worked tirelessly on behalf of the Vietnamese land refugees, assailed these decisions as both unfounded and inhumane. In our interviews with him at Site 2 and at Aranyaprathet in January 1992, he observed that nowhere in the Comprehensive Plan of Action did it state that asylum seekers had to be in a UNHCR camp to qualify for pre-cut-off date status. He wrote letters both to the UNHCR and the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok. In one of them, he charged: "I went carefully through some of the texts of the CPA, and nowhere did I find any mention of 'UNHCR camps'. The text I am referring to speaks only of 'temporary asylum camps.'" The text also states, "a multi-year commitment to resettle all the Vietnamese who have arrived in a temporary asylum camp prior to an agreed date." He asked: "Was not Site 2 a temporary asylum camp? And if not, why did not that camp, which is monitored by UNBRO, qualify for that category? There is also a clear statement, without any restriction or qualification, that all Vietnamese having arrived prior to the agreed date would be covered by the agreement. I fail to see how a mistake (or mistakes), however grievous they may be, could change the nature of things. Whether we like it or not, the people of Section 19 have arrived before March 14, 1989, and nothing can alter this fact of history."

The response to his probing queries was to give him the run-around. Father Ceyrac recalls his frustration, "In Bangkok, Guy Ouellet of the UNHCR told me that the official decision of the land refugees would be made in December 1991 by the CPA Steering Committee in Geneva. So I went to Geneva. Alan Jury, the U.S. representative on the Steering Committee, asked my why I had come. When I told him, he said, 'I don't think it's for us to decide. It should be done in Bangkok. I think it already has been done. The Platform people were determined to be post-cut-off.' Jamshid Anvar, Chairman of the CPA Steering Committee and UNHCR Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and Oceania, would not admit me to the meeting; he told me to return to Bangkok. These officials don't pay for their own plane tickets. I traveled several thousand miles at my own expense, only to be told this."

For years, Father Pierre Ceyrac had been an advocate for the land refugees. In 1991, he was joined by many nongovernmental

organizations throughout the world who sent letters to the CPA Steering Committee calling for fair and humane treatment for the people of Section 19. Responding to this groundswell of bad publicity, the UNHCR, still denying it had a problem, sent Jamshid Anvar to explain their position.

In April 1992, at an international forum on the Comprehensive Plan of Action in Washington, Anvar praised the work of his organization, "UNHCR is satisfied with the fairness of the system. If it errs, it does so more in favor of recognition of refugee status than refection. You will have to take our word for it. UNHCR has no interest in denying protection to someone who is in need of it. The organization was created to protect refugees and that remains the basic reason for its continuing existence."

Later that year, when we told her of Anvar's remarks, Mrs. Hue vigorously disagreed. She echoed the remarks of numerous asylum seekers. "Sometimes I have nightmares. I think I am back in the camp. Suddenly I wake up afraid. I panic. When I recall what I went through, I get a headache. I cannot forget. And when I hear that my people are still in that camp, it breaks my heart."

After his talk, we asked Anvar about the situation of the people of Section 19. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "[t]he die is cast." Such remarks hardly inspired confidence in UNHCR's ability or commitment to protect people, such as those in Section 19, caught in the bureaucratic mess created by the UNHCR.

Humaneness clearly did not lie in sending people back to Viet Nam after their ten years of hell in a detention camp. "The die is cast" did not constitute a justification for perpetuation of the UNHCR's oversight in leaving the Platform people off the pre-cut-off list, for the UNHCR's sending these people a misleading letter, and for punishing them when, under these highly stressful and confusing circumstances, they refused to do what the UNHCR wished. The obvious and documented historical fact that the Platform people arrived in a camp of first asylum years before the cut-off date could not be dismissed over the verbal quibble of which United Nations camp they were in. Either the UNHCR protects asylum seekers or it does not. It cannot claim to do so while denying them protection.

Also unjustifiable was arbitrarily changing a person's ethnicity or their refugee eligibility to suit the convenience of officials.

Contrary to the UNHCR and the U.S. State Department view at that time, an ethnic Vietnamese did not become a Cambodian because that person refused to move from one camp to another. Similarly, a Vietnamese citizen of Cambodian ancestry did not become a Cambodian citizen because a U.N. or U.S. official said so. Except as a punishment, a pre-cut-off date person did not become a post-cut-off person because of refusing to move, even after being warned to do so. Such actions reflected instead the insensitivity of officials to the confusion they caused and to the conditions of abuse, terror, and an uncertainty such as those Mrs. Hue described, under which the Vietnamese land refugees had to make their decisions.

The people of Section 19 numbered less than 1,000; half of them were children, who certainly were not responsible for what had happened. They did not deserve to be punished as criminals, denied the opportunity to be interviewed for resettlement. There was no reason these long suffering persons could not be dispersed among several countries, where the burden they present would be slight.

For years, Father Ceyrac had pleaded with UNHCR authorities to resettle the victims of Section 19. In September 1992, we published a newspaper article on the plight of the Land Refugees, the first mass-media exposé of the cover up. The U.S. Catholic Conference, whose team had visited Section 19, also published an account of the cover up and demanded action. No longer could the embarrassment of Section 19 be kept a secret.

RESOLUTION OF THE CRISIS

The UNHCR never admitted wrongdoing nor a change in policy. The U.S. Department of State also did not announce a shift of direction. But near the end of 1992, the 965 detainees in Section 19 at that time were relocated 'for their safety' to Phanat Nikhom camp, away from the border. This action coincided with the preparations to repatriate Cambodians. By April 1993, as Cambodians returned to their homeland, Site 2 and other border camps were closed. By the end of October, many of the Vietnamese Platform Refugees had been recommended for resettlement. Edward H. Wilkinson, a U.S. Embassy official in Bangkok, informed us that 239 Platform Refugees were headed for the United States; another

75, who had relatives in America, were being considered for admission. Some 215 had been accepted by other countries. Of the remaining 436, another 100 were being considered by the U.S. government.

In January 1994, Werner Blatter, who replaced Jamshid Anvar as UNHCR Director of Regional Bureau for Asia and Oceania, spoke in San Jose, California, defending the CPA and the performance of the UNHCR. No longer was the die cast against the Platform refugees. With no reference to the UNHCR's years of opposition to the people of Section 19, Blatter proclaimed: "It has been unilaterally determined that all Platform refugees should be seen as pre-cut-off date."

Dong Rek, the site of so much agony, now lies empty and silent, the walls of the huts fallen, the wood bamboo and all usable materials stripped and removed by the local inhabitants. Cows, buffaloes, and a few Thai villagers wander over fields where once stood buildings and streets, until 1993 home to over 250,000 people.

CONTINUING CONCERNS

This paper has shown what happens to vulnerable people such as asylum seekers when the UNHCR, an institution historically committed to their protection, turns against them and abandons them. The people of Section 19 were virtually helpless. Had it not been for the actions of Father Pierre Ceyrac, who first called attention to their plight and worked to save them, they would have had no voice and no means to let the world know what was happening to them. They would have been abandoned, forgotten, and silently repatriated to Viet Nam, even though by definition they clearly were entitled to refugee status and resettlement elsewhere.

What happened to them was not simply the fault or oversight of a couple of individuals, nor was it simply an accident. Had that been so, the misunderstanding could have been corrected quickly and easily. The problem was systemic. The root of the problem was that Vietnamese asylum seekers continued to flee Viet Nam, but other countries did not want to accept them. The UNHCR was caught in the contradictory situation of trying to protect these asylum seekers while responding to the pressures of countries of first asylum and of resettlement to send them back. To complicate

matters, until July 1993 for unaccompanied minors, and mid-March 1995 for adults, Viet Nam would not allow asylum seekers back into the country unless they chose “voluntary repatriation,” and many refused to return. With refugee crises occurring all over the world, the UNHCR was understandably keen to rid itself of ‘hard core’ screened-out adults and minors who refused to repatriate, preferring to turn to issues that they considered more pressing. The result was that the UNHCR increased the pressure to persuade screened-out detainees to repatriate. And the UNHCR approved, or at least did not object, when countries of first asylum introduced coercive negative incentives ranging from reducing food rations to suddenly and frequently moving people from one camp to another without notice so that the detainees would not develop a sense of ‘permanence.’ The UNHCR applied principles in general while disregarding their effects on particular persons. As a result, the UNHCR resisted dealing with any situation that might look exceptional, fearing that this might give ‘false hope’ of resettlement to other screened-out asylum seekers.

Within the UNHCR, officials are frequently transferred from one post to another. Officials rarely stay with or are knowledgeable about long-term problems. Furthermore, those who are responsible for decisions rarely remain to witness the consequences. To question UNHCR decisions or policies, or those in the country in which one is posted, is to jeopardize one’s career and risk being transferred. In addition, the UNHCR is extremely reluctant to admit error.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work under contract to the UNHCR become dependent on the UNHCR’s will. NGOs come to understand that the UNHCR does not want to hear about the failures of particular cases or disagreements with its decisions. Areas of frequent contention include inconsistent or unfair refugee determination decisions, inaccurate reports, the abuse and neglect of children in camps, and excessive delays extending into several years in determining the best interest of unaccompanied minors. Employees in some organizations claim that their contracts were not renewed because of such disagreements. Whether true or not, such beliefs have a chilling effect on NGOs, who learn not to rock the boat in that they want to continue to work with the UNHCR.

For years, critics have assailed the UNHCR because of the alleged failures mentioned above; they also claim that the UNHCR favors the repatriation of Vietnamese asylum seekers. Because of these issues, the credibility of the UNHCR as a protector of asylum seekers has declined among camp detainees. Officers of the UNHCR have consistently denied all of this, arguing that its decisions are fair, that its primary mission is to protect refugees, and that, although they have no mandate to protect screened-out non-refugees, they are committed to their protection until they are repatriated.

On March 16, 1995, at the Sixth Meeting of the Steering Committee of the International Conference on Indochinese Refugees, the UNHCR announced that it would help to send back Vietnamese asylum seekers, thus breaking with its tradition of opposing forced repatriation. A joint declaration by thirty countries, including the United States, further supported the UNHCR about-face: "There is no option for these people other than repatriation." Critics say that the UNHCR finally is advocating openly what it actually has been doing indirectly for years. All pretense of protecting the Vietnamese asylum seekers is now gone, ending the twenty-year saga of the Vietnamese boat people and one of the last remaining legacies of the Vietnam War.

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13

ENCOUNTERS WITH GHADAR

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Dedicated to the memory of Kartar Dhillon, 1915-2008

A few years ago, I sat with Kartar Dhillon in her modest home in Berkeley, California. Kartar, who has lived a very full political life, told me about her brother, Budh. In 1924, twelve-year-old Budh marched down to 5 Wood Street in San Francisco to a building known as the Ghadar Ashram. There he volunteered to join a *jatha* to go and liberate India, a country that he had not yet visited. It was the homeland of his parents, and he told his sister that unless this country was free, their lives in the United States would not be pleasant. People would treat them as ‘coolies’ as long as India remained in British hands. Along with another teenager, Daswanda Singh Mann, Budh joined the Freedom for India Mission and set off across the Pacific Ocean. He did not get to India. En route, through the young Soviet Union, Budh got distracted. The route into India was closed, so he enrolled in the University of Toilers of the East and learnt a little bit about Marxism. Budh Dhillon returned to California and spent the rest of his life as an active militant for freedom and justice for all people.

Of such souls was the Ghadar Party made. In 1913, veteran Indian nationalist Har Dayal used the two thousand dollars he had raised from Indian workers in California to buy a house in San Francisco. This house, then called the Yugantar Ashram, became the Ghadar Ashram, and it was from this base that Har Dayal began to publish a paper (initially twenty five thousand copies in Urdu). He named the newspaper *Ghadar* (Revolt), and its first issue

(November 1, 1913) signaled its political views:

Wanted: Brave soldiers to stir up Ghadar in India.
Pay: Death.
Prize: Martyrdom.
Pension: Liberty.
Field of Battle: India.

A British intelligence agent who had his eyes on Har Dayal reported that by early January 1914, Indian students at Berkeley hoarded arms (twenty revolvers and sixteen Winchester rifles). In 1922, the British Consulate in San Francisco reported, "California is gaining the reputation of a nursery for Revolution and Revolutionary agitators."

When World War I broke out, Indians from along the western coast of North America went as if in an exodus toward India to fight British rule. Three Ghadar leaders, Ram Chandra, Bhagwan Singh, and Maulvi Mohammed Barkatullah toured the west coast to urge men to join the jathas and cultivate a revolution. A Ghadar song testified to the courage and the idealism of the returnees:

The time for prayer is gone.
It is time to take up the sword.
Empty talk does not serve any purpose.
It is time to engage in a fierce battle.
Only the names of those who long for martyrdom
will shine.

The bulk of the Indian farmers and students who lived along the west coast of North America had deep-set grievances against the British. Their families in India still suffered the indignities and extravagances of British rule, and these exiles continued to feel the stigma of exclusion and racism. It was the British Isles that ruled the bulk of the colonized world, and in particular, a large share of the Indian subcontinent. Indian nationalists in the United States made common cause with Irish republicans. Agnes Smedley, who worked for the Friends for the Freedom of India, wrote of her participation in New York's main Irish nationalist celebration in 1920, "We are in the St. Patrick's Day parade. All the Hindus in the city,

practically, will wear native costume and turbans and march. We had the Indian republic flag and banners demanding independence.” Both Ireland and India were held in thrall. The longest finger was pointed toward Britain.

Of the eight thousand emigrants who returned to India, the British arrested four hundred immediately, while they interned two thousand five hundred more in their villages. Their uprising did not come. Some of their best comrades (291 of them) stood in the dock in the Lahore Conspiracy Case—the bulk of them went to the gallows, or were sent to the Andamans or to the Lahore jail. Idealistic, they came to inspire the Indian army against their British masters. One among their lot, Prithvi Singh Azad, recalled their ethos: “The leaders of the Party in the U.S.A. were badly lacking in political awareness. We, a handful of people, plunged headlong in the field of action and had no mass support. We knew not how to gain mass support and never worked for that. We had been impelled by the impulse to free the nation from foreign yoke. I had been under the sway of a powerful passion to liberate my enslaved nation.” Marxism was not available to them in a serious way, neither in India nor in the United States. The Anarchists and Syndicalists inspired many of these emigrants. Har Dayal’s close confidant, for instance, was the Anarchist leader Emma Goldman, and many of the radicals worked alongside the International Workers of the World. They wanted to conduct spectacular acts, not organize the bulk of the population for a better world.

This was Bhagat Singh’s milieu: people like Prithvi Singh Azad and Sohan Singh Josh. Josh came from Chetanpura, Punjab, the same town as Surat Singh Gill. Both Gill and Josh had tried to go to the United States, but whereas Gill got a visa (and became Kartar Dhillon’s husband), the U.S. embassy denied Josh. Josh grew up around Ghadarite radicals (and as a Communist leader he would write an early history of the movement). It was through Josh that a young Bhagat Singh learned the history and theory of communism and Marxism. Ghadar, via the Soviet Revolution, played a central role in the dissemination of socialist ideas among Punjabi youth.

Only marginally did the Ghadar workers turn their attention to the role of U.S. imperialism and of Canadian complicity with British imperialism. The United States and Canada allowed the Indian radicals some space to work, although the governments also

allowed British intelligence to follow their activities (our reconstruction of their work is made possible by these intelligence reports). When World War I broke out, and many Indian radicals decided to make common cause with Germany, the United States and Canadian governments went after them (M. N. Roy, for instance, fled to Mexico as a result of this pressure, where he helped found its Communist Party; he was the Mexican delegate to the Comintern meetings where he debated Lenin). The repression provided the opportunity for some among the radicals to write in praise of the United States that at the very least it had an ethos of republicanism and anti-colonialism—something Britain lacked. For example, Taraknath Das, Har Dayal's associate, wrote an essay for the Calcutta-based *Modern Review* entitled "American Diplomacy at its Best," which extolled U.S. foreign policy.

The members of the Ghadar and other like organizations were well aware of U.S. imperialism. One of Har Dayal's close comrades was John Barry, a leader of the American Anti-Imperialist League (San Francisco branch) and of the Socialist Radical Club. The League was formed in 1898 to oppose the U.S. annexation of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines. "We hold that the policy known as imperialism is hostile to liberty and tends toward militarism, an evil [from] which it has been our glory to be free," the League declared in its 1899 platform. "We regret that it has become necessary in the land of Washington and Lincoln to reaffirm that all men, of whatever race or color, are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (American Anti-Imperialist League 1898). Whereas the League took a strong position against imperialism, it promoted a grave illusion about the American Republic: that it had no prior history of expansionist activity. Forgotten in this was one of the causes of the 1776 War of Independence, for the settlers in the original Thirteen Colonies to expand westward. When they did, these settlers and their new state annihilated or pacified the Amerindian residents and annexed large parts of Mexico. Only when this proximate colonization was over did the U.S. state exercise its right to the Western Hemisphere (through the 1823 Monroe Doctrine) and outward into the Pacific (the Hawaiian islands and the Philippines).

If Har Dayal and others observed what was ongoing in Central America, they would have seen the future tendency of planetary

imperialism. The U.S. government from 1915 onward began to absorb some Caribbean islands (the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Cuba) and Central America (Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Panama) into its economic orbit by frequent military interventions and by the seizure of the economic sovereignty of these small countries. They were not ruled directly by the U.S. government, but their local satraps paid tribute to U.S. power (including to U.S. corporations, such as the United Fruit Company). No longer was imperialism identical with colonialism (for the extraction of resources and the creation of dependent markets); it had now morphed its tentacles into all areas of social life and economic accumulation. Foreign direct investment into Central and South America created a cumulative stock of investment, which in turn generated a return flow of earnings, as the U.S. Marxist Harry Magdoff (1969) argued. Nothing short of a broad, planetary united front against the structures of this form of imperialism would be adequate.

In 1915, the African American radical W. E. Burghardt DuBois, a close friend of many Indian nationalists, wrote an insightful essay, "The African Roots of the War." In this essay, DuBois pointed out that the growth of monopoly capitalism alongside liberal democracy in Europe and North America led to the creation of a large quantum of surplus, some of which was turned over to the white working class (which became an aristocracy among labor). The uneven union of the white working class with their capitalist masters led, DuBois argued, into an intra-national fight over the world's spoils, mainly the "darker nations of the world—Asia and Africa, South and Central America, the West Indies and the Islands of the South Seas" (DuBois 1915:709). "The present world war," DuBois continued, "is, then, the result of jealousies engendered by the recent rise of armed national associations of labor and capital whose aim is the exploitation of the wealth of the world mainly outside the European circle of nations. These associations, grown jealous and suspicious at the division of spoils of trade-empire, are fighting to enlarge their respective shares; they look for expansion, not in Europe but in Asia, and particularly in Africa" (DuBois 1915:711). This argument would appear two years later, with slightly different emphases, in Lenin's (1917) *Imperialism*. DuBois was greatly interested in developments in India, but his own writings were not to be read by either the

Indian political thinkers or by the Indian radicals in the United States.

Only later, in the 1940s, would an Indian radical in the United States develop an understanding of the growth of U.S. imperialism. Kumar Goshal (born 1899) came to the United States in 1920, and after a stint in Hollywood, became an ardent proponent of Indian independence (he was also close to leaders of the Communist Party in the United States). After 1947, Goshal became a main correspondent for the *Courier* (an African American paper in Pittsburg), where he wrote an important three part series in December 1953, "People in Colonies Versus the American Colossus." Here, Goshal laid out the contours of U.S. imperialism:

To enlarge their empire during and since World War II, U.S. industrialists and financiers have knifed partners when partners were unable to retaliate; brought up or influenced governments through grants and loans; arranged 99-year leases for military bases on foreign soil; signed trade treaties giving U.S. capital "equal treatment" with weak domestic capital in economically backward countries; acquired air and naval bases in countries with weak or unpopular governments. No country is too small to escape the eye of U.S. corporations roaming the globe for more profits. (Goshal 1953)

Not only did the United States put its considerable power and influence behind U.S.-based corporations, but it also found willing allies in the 'darker nations' to do its bidding in the name of 'modernization' and 'democracy.' U.S. imperialism was always smarter and more flexible than that of its European forbearers, who quickly became 'American' in their own relationship to the rest of the world. Goshal was not known in India, but his line of analysis is not different from those Communists who had few illusions about the Indian bourgeoisie and its tepid commitment to national sovereignty and to national development.

We now live under the dispensation of an 'American' imperialism, although the U.S. government is simply the leader of an assault for the planetary turbo-elite (including sections of the

dominant class in India). The United States is now a hollowed out entity (for this one has to take seriously the dramatic effect that 'jobless growth' has had on the social lives of the U.S. poor, who now number around 37 million). The U.S. economy has major structural problems, exemplified by the United States' current \$9.5 trillion deficit. The deficit is currently buoyed by the Chinese and Saudi purchase of U.S. Treasury bills. In time, creditor firms and banks will turn from T-bills to purchase U.S. capital stocks. But the United States has one major comparative advantage: its military force. Military power will be the major export to help cover its deficit. Militarism—as DuBois, Lenin, and Goshal indicated—is a fundamental aspect of imperialism. To end militarism, one has to work to abolish the nature of capitalist accumulation.

Spectacular acts of violence or particular rage at the United States is equally misleading. The structures of imperialism make themselves manifest here and there, but not entirely. Broad social and political change is the order of the day, not the removal of this or that regime alone. Bhagat Singh's Naujawan Bharat Sabha wrote a far-sighted manifesto in 1928 that far exceeded the tactical struggle ongoing among these young people, inspired by Ghadar. "Without going into details," they wrote, "we can safely assert that to achieve our object, thousands of our most brilliant young men, like the Russian youth, will have to pass their precious lives in villages and make the people understand what the Indian revolution would really mean. They must be made to realize that the revolution that is to come will mean more than a change of masters. It will, above all, mean the birth of a new order of things, a new state."

Three years later, from Lahore Central Jail, Bhagat Singh wrote his letter to political workers. He asked them to form a Communist Party and to begin their ceaseless work among the masses to create a popular will for socialism. In this brief essay, Bhagat Singh returned to the origins of Punjabi radicalism, the Ghadar. "One of the fundamental causes of the failure of the efforts of the Ghadar Party (1914-15)," he wrote, "was the ignorance, apathy and sometimes active opposition of the masses. And apart from that, [an organized party] is essential for gaining the active sympathy of and organizing the peasants and workers." By "ignorance," Bhagat Singh did not mean stupidity as much as lack of access to a broader analysis of oppression and exploitation. This

is what an organized movement in constant struggle against power can produce; struggle is, in his own words, “a school for the masses.”

As Bhagat Singh waited in jail, a second group of Ghadar Party radicals entered India. They came with a different purpose. Harbans Singh Basi, Bhagat Singh Bilga, Iqbal Singh Hundal, Chanan Singh, Gurmukh Singh, Prithvi Singh, Teja Singh Swatantar, and others came from Moscow not to conduct individual acts of violence or to hope for an uprising in the army. They returned to build the Indian Communist Party.

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14

FROM HOME TO DIASPORA: JOURNEYS OF AN INDIAN POET

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Ved Prakash Vatuk's literary journey has been unique. When he began writing in India, the younger generation of Hindi poets was in the middle of a movement called *navī kavītā*, or 'New Poetry.' With Agyeya (1911-1987) leading the movement, *navī kavītā* challenged all existing norms of poetry writing and paved the way for a modern sensibility in this genre. This was not the modernity of the early period, when simply writing in *kharī bolī* (modern standard Hindi) was considered a modern phenomenon. Rather, it was the modernity of the later period, that of Stephen Spender (1909-1995) and T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), when poetry embraced the ugly along with the beautiful and challenged traditional aesthetics. Poetry also became a vehicle of the common man's desires and aspirations, his day-to-day travails and frustrations, and the changing ethos of human life in the industrialized and mechanized world.

AT HOME

Vatuk, like his contemporaries, identified with the ideas espoused in this new modernity and was comfortable among the major poets of the movement. But his uniqueness lies in the fact that he carved for himself a very different path from these other new poets. His expression is very different in both style and content. In contrast to the nationalist poetry of figures such as Makhn Lal Chaturvedi (1889-1968) and Maithilisharan Gupta (1886-1965), Vatuk does not sing the praises of the nation; on the contrary, he is critical of

politicians for betraying the people. For instance, in his reflexive essay “Still Dreaming,” Vatuk (1998) argues that the “freedom” secured by the Indian state was something altogether different from what he and his fellow activists had dreamed of:

... [It] was not a dream of merely changing ruler’s color, caste, class, or creed or flying a different flag over the prison walls behind which thousands of our martyrs like Bhagat Singh had been hanged. It was not a dream of even changing the form of government at the center. It was a dream to get rid of bureaucracy at all levels—from the village patvari and patrol to district magistrate, a dream to get rid of the corrupt and abusive police force, a dream to eradicate exploitation by moneylenders, zamindars, and mill owners. It was a dream to establish a *kisan-mazdur raj* (peasant–worker rule) which was to be based on social justice, equality, and freedom from wants. (Vatuk 1998:31)

Vatuk is bitter about the failure of this dream: “For millions and millions nothing seemed to have changed. Neither swaraj nor suraj has come to them. The dream was far away, like the pie in the sky” (1998:32). What Indians instead received in the so-called independence movement, as Vatuk aptly expresses in his poem “*Yah sab hamē hī bhognā thā*” (We were the ones who had to suffer all this), was disillusionment with the nation’s own leaders¹:

yah sab hamāre hī nasīb mē thā
 ki jhīr-jhīr kar dē
 śahīdō ke kafan,
 tukṛe-tukṛe kar dē
 manīṣiyō ke vacan,
 vicārō ke śav,
 noc lē boṭī-boṭī,
 unke sapne, unke ādarś,
 bāṭ lē cutkī-cutkī
 unke nāmō kī rākh,
 pahan lē cunāv-cihnō-sī
 unkī phaṭī ṭopiyā, lagōṭiyā,
 bhunāyē unkā har kām, śahādat,

banāyē dām.
(Vatuk 2007a:194-195, Poem 108)

We were the ones who had all this in our fate:
They would tear into pieces
the shrouds of martyrs,
They would dissect into garble
the words of seers,
They would peck morsel by morsel
at the corpses of ideas,
of their dreams and their ideals,
They would distribute among themselves
the ashes of their names,
They would wear as election symbols
their torn *topis* and *lungotis*,
They would cash in their every deed and martyrdom
to make money.

The political situation only became worse with time. Vatuk returned to India during Indira Gandhi's Emergency Period of 1975-1977. His elder brother, Sunder Lal (1906-1988), was in prison as a result of his political activism, and Vatuk was not even allowed to meet with him. It was during this time that Vatuk wrote three poetry books that addressed the Emergency: *Kaidī bhāī, bandī deś* (Jailed brother, imprisoned nation); *Āpat śatak* (One hundred poems of the Emergency); and the English publication *Between Exile and Jail (Poems of Emergency)*. The first of these, *Kaidī bhāī, bandī deś*, is a collection of poems that Vatuk wrote and sent to his brother while he was in prison. His brother had fought tirelessly for India's independence, and he continued to fight for political reforms long after this fight was won.

Vatuk's poetry expresses a great deal of disappointment and anger at the continued deterioration of living conditions, not only in India but also around the world. In his poem "*Koī bhī jagah surakṣit nahī hai*" (No place is protected), Vatuk expresses this sentiment overtly:

deś kī jantā kī,
viśva kī mānvatā kī
draupadī kā ho rahā hai cīrharan
roz-roz sareām

par zimmedār nahī hai keval duhśāsan,
zimmedār hai sattā par baiṭhā har dhṛtarāṣṭra,
sabhā mẽ baiṭhā har kṛpācārya hai,
dharmācārya hai
(Vatuk 2007a:184, Poem 106)

Like Draupadi,
the country, the people,
the universe, and our humanity
are all being stripped naked,
everyday in public.
But Dushasana is not the only one responsible:
Every Dhritrashtra sitting on the throne is responsible,
every Kripacharya sitting in the court,
every guru of Dharma

As Vatuk points out later in the same poem, few people want to take responsibility for the ills of the nation, preferring to escape reality like *śutarmurg* (ostriches) hiding in the sand:

aur ant mẽ to
zimmedār haī
viśva ke kone-kone mẽ phaile
mānav nām ke
arbō napuṃsak
jo śutarmurg kī tarah
ret mẽ gaṛāye haī
apne nayan
aur soc rahe haī kahī
kuch nahī ho rahā
kyōki vināś kī koī lapāṭ
abhī chū nahī rahī hai unhē,
jo murdō se bhī pahle
ho gaye haī murde.
(Vatuk 2007a:165-166, Poem 106)

But in the end
these billions of eunuchs
who call themselves men
are also responsible
scattered to every corner of the universe

who like ostriches
 have drowned their eyes in the sand
 and are thinking
 nothing is happening anywhere
 because no flame of destruction
 has yet touched them,
 who have died
 even before death.

In the same collection, Vatuk writes about the pain of the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks in his poem *dosto!* (2007a:186-193), but he expresses equal sadness at the sufferings of Native Americans, Blacks, and other oppressed peoples throughout the world. The range of his sympathy engulfs all humanity, whether it is for the innocent people destroyed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, civilians killed in the Vietnam War and on the fields of Cambodia, or others who have died while fighting for justice. In short, Vatuk is saddened by the untimely death of humanity. His sense of justice is not confined to his Indian nationality, although much of his poetry does concern itself with the Indian scene. India is the place Vatuk knows best, but he is also intimately involved with sociopolitical issues and movements elsewhere, such as in the United States.

A point of distinction between Vatuk and other *navī kavīṭā ke kavī* (poets of the New Poetry) is that his poetry cannot be characterized as individualistic and self-absorbed, a criticism often waged at several of his contemporaries. Indeed, Vatuk combines the idealism of nationalists along with the disillusionment of the New Poets, a mixture that is transformed by a pointed use of irony. When his poems are satirical in nature, they become quite sharp, if not acerbic, as in the previously mentioned poem “*Yah sab hamē hī bhognā thā*” (We were the ones who had to suffer all this):

yah sab hamē hī bhognā tha
 ki sattā kī roṭiyā pakne ko
 bannā thā karoṛō mānvō ko
 śāsan kī dhadhaktī
 bhaṭṭhiyō kā īdhan
 (Vatuk 2007a:193, Poem 108)

We were the ones who had to suffer all this.
 In order to cook the *rotis* of power,

millions of people had to become
firewood
for the blazing ovens of the rulers

In another poem in the same collection, “*Aur maĩ likhtā rahā*” (And I kept on writing), Vatuk (2007a:157, Poem 97) despairs that even though he continues to write poems of revolution and awakening, nothing seems to change. His poems never reach, for instance, the women who are being burned by their families for dowry or committing suicide. Vatuk writes poems for peace, yet people are still being burned in the fires of communal hatred.

Vatuk often incorporates metaphors from the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Puranas* as a means of challenging their guiding assumptions. As he explains in his poem “*Bhagvān ne gītā mẽ kahā thā*” (Thus said god in the Gita), even though the gods of such texts purportedly incarnate themselves on this earth in order to change things for the better, they ultimately take refuge in the darkness, lies, and injustice of human existence. Instead of changing the world, they take part in the carnal evils of humanity. What humanity needs, says Vatuk, is not for gods to be incarnated as humans, but rather for humans to rise to the level of gods, performing actions with love, compassion, and faith:

manuj kā uddhār
nārāyaṇ ko nar bankar nahī,
karnā hogā
nar-nar ko
nārāyaṇ bankar!
(Vatuk 2007a:156, Poem 96)

Man’s salvation
will not be made by god becoming man,
it will be made
by each and every man
becoming god!

Indeed, the poem is reminiscent of Dharamvir Bharati’s (1977) poetry-drama *Andhā yug* (The blind age), which elaborates on the events of the last *parva* of the Mahabharata when the battle between the Kauravas and the Pandavas was coming to a gruesome end. In this epic poem, Bharati establishes that truth is on no one’s side:

even Krishna, Yudhishtara, and other righteous leaders of the war used lies and half-truths to win. Vatuk (2007b) has explored the question of dharma/adharma, truth/falsehood, war and peace in his latest epic *Abhiśapta dvāpar* (Dvapara—The cursed age).

Vatuk's concerns about world issues have inspired him to write directly about war. While living in the United States, he participated in anti-war movements against the war in Vietnam as well as Iraq. Although he acknowledges that humanity has made great progress in recent years, he points out that such progress is made useless by the fact that we still continue to fight, destroying all that we have built. Driven to find a solution to this problem, Vatuk looks to Indian mythology to see if it holds an answer, yet he finds that neither the *Ramayana* nor the *Mahabharata* offers any kind of viable remedy. Instead, what he finds in both of these texts are discussions only of war's inevitability. We call these wars *dharma yudh*, or 'righteous wars,' depicting them as having been fought for the protection of truth. But what truth? The Pandavas were as sinful as the Kauravas, for they lied to kill the Guru Dronacharya and their grandfather Bhishma. Likewise, Ram used deception to kill Baali as well as Shambook, the lower caste innocent. The question follows: How can these heroes possibly protect truth when they wage wars characterized by deception? The present-day use of violence is no different, whether it is the Vietnam War or President George W. Bush's destruction of Iraq. In all such cases, those who suffer are the innocent while those who benefit are the politicians, ever concerned only with their power. As Vatuk expresses in one of his most famous poems, "*Har dharmyuddh mē*" (In every righteous war):

har dharmyuddh mē
 vijay rām kī hotī hai
 mukti rāvaṇ ko miltī hai
 rāj prāpt hotā hai vibhīṣaṇō ko
 aur satya kī sītā ko
 milte haī:
 agni parīkṣā
 banvās
 aur dhartī mē samā jānā.
 (Vatuk 1977:132, Poem 100)

In every righteous war

victory goes to Rama
 salvation goes to Ravana
 the kingdom goes to Vibhishana,
 and for the truth
 that we call Sita:
 test by fire
 exile
 and absorption by the earth.

Vatuk has expressed the same sense of disillusionment in a number of poems appearing in his collection *Naye abhilekh kā sūraj* (Dawn of the new inscription). The 101st poem of this collection, “*Banvās se lautne par unke*” (Upon their return from banishment) (Vatuk 1982:72, Poem 101), relates a similar theme of disappointment after the return from *banvās* (banishment). Vatuk repeatedly emphasizes that it is the selfish motives of politicians that make them engage in wars. Similarly, in his poem “*Kursī*” (Chair), published in the collection *Kursī śatak* (One hundred poems of the seat of power), Vatuk (2000) delineates the ways in which politicians worship their political positions. Their ‘chairs,’ as symbols of power, are ultimately what motivates them, not care for the nation or its people.

Yet importantly, Vatuk’s poetry does not stop at the condemnation of war. In the epic poem *Bāhubalī* (2002), Vatuk explores Jain mythology as a means of proposing alternatives to violence. The conclusion he reaches is that the avoidance of war is not equivalent to cowardice. Indeed, for Vatuk, giving in to war is equivalent to accepting the defeat of human intelligence. I find this suggestion a challenging one to imagine—that war, as the final solution, is a defeat of both human imagination and human potential. Yet humans are not made to destroy other humans, after all, but to live in peaceful coexistence.

IN THE DIASPORA

An additional element of uniqueness was added to Vatuk’s work when he left his home country and settled abroad. This transition not only gave him a wealth of new material to write about, it also precipitated a new attitude toward his poetic subjects. His most touching poems about American life are those written at the death of his father-in-law, who died alone in an American hospital. Vatuk comes from a large and supportive family in Meerut. After he lost

his father at an early age, he received constant love and guidance from his older brothers, among them Sunder Lal, who was later imprisoned during the Emergency. Yet even though his family lived in very poor circumstances after his father's death, they sustained themselves through love and self-pride. Vatuk continued to keep strong ties with his family after he moved to the United States, returning to India to visit them on a regular basis. With these kinds of family connections and values, it is no wonder that he found it difficult to accept the condition of family life in America, where family members so often live and die in solitude.

Vatuk thus constantly questions why anyone need be lonely when family members are alive and nearby. The poems collected in *Ithās kī cīkh* (The cry of history) are dedicated to this sentiment. In the poem "Sabke hote hue bhī" (Even when we were all there). Vatuk expresses despair that his father-in-law cried and died alone when his family lived in the vicinity. Vatuk asks: Why is there such a need for individualism?

sabke hote hue bhī tum
 mare akele mẽ
 (anjānō ke bīc)
 sabke hote hue bhī maī
 bahā rahā hū akele mẽ
 śok ke āsū
 auh, kitnā viśāl hai
 amerikā kā vyaktivād
 dī hai jisne ham sabhī ko
 vyaktigat svatantratā
 akele mẽ
 dard ke ghūṭ pīne kī
 akele mẽ lene kī
 sisak-sisak
 antim sās!

(Vatuk 2000b:48)

Even when we were all there
 you died alone
 (among strangers)
 Even when everyone is here
 I am shedding tears alone,
 tears of grief

Oh, how great
is America's individualism.
It has given us all
the individual freedom
to drink alone
drop by drop
our pain
to take alone
sobbing
our last breath.

In another touching poem, "*Dakuō ke cale jāne par hī*" (Only after the dacoits/robbers are gone), Vatuk (2000b:48) questions why so many people came to the funeral to express their love for his father-in-law when they were absent at the time of his death: Why this demonstration of love when the loved one is no longer present? Why didn't his family members shower this love on him when he was alive so that he could have at the very least derived some pleasure from their presence?

Vatuk is also not untouched by the pathos, uprootedness, and disconnectedness of immigrant life, as expressed in his poem "*Astācal kī aur jā rahā hai*" (Going towards the sunset):

ātma-nirvāsan mē bīte
van-van bhatkate din
gṛha-vihīn
sārā jīvan hom karke bhī jahā
ham rahēge padesī hī
(Vatuk 2007a:151-152, Poem 95)

In self-banishment,
wandering for days in the forest,
homeless,
where after spending my whole life,
I will remain an alien.

Yet interestingly, the dislocation and disconnection typical of immigrant poetry does not form a large part of Vatuk's creative world. In contrast, he remains most connected with his Indian self, which is constituted by a deep relationship with both his older brother and his parents. His poetry and short stories repeatedly

reflect the warmth of those relationships. His brother's memory, in particular, surfaces throughout his writings. For instance, his short story "The Fair" (1991) references an older brother in jail who lives on stone-filled *roti* with only the floor to sleep on. The protagonist of the story, a small boy, wishes to go to the village fair, but because his father is dead and his brother in jail, there is no money for the family's subsistence. The mother manages to give the boy three *paisa* so that he can go to the fair with friends. While the boys who accompany him purchase expensive gifts for themselves, Vatuk's protagonist is so concerned about his brother in jail and his mother and sister at home that he is unable to spend a single *paisa* on himself, instead choosing to spend what little money he has on gifts for his brother, mother, and sister. The story is touching, of course, but what it leaves us with is a compelling sense of sacrifice, one that simply does not exist in most societies today. Vatuk does not cry over his misfortunes; on the contrary, he takes strength from them.

CONCLUSIONS

From New Poetry to immigrant poetry—or rather, in Hindi, *navī kavītā se pravāsī kavītā tak*—Ved Prakash Vatuk has undertaken a long journey. He has written profusely in Hindi, publishing almost twenty collections of poetry and folklore. Although his sentiments are closely allied with the school of New Poetry, his incorporation of various genres and styles of poetry make him unique. He has written mostly in free verse, yet he has also experimented with *gazel* and other meters. He has an extremely keen sense for capturing realities invisible to the naked eye, yet at the same time, his ambitious idealism nourishes and feeds this realism. Critical of society's inhuman elements, he also sees the greatness in human suffering.

Most critically, Vatuk's uniqueness stems from the fact that he writes—to put it somewhat bluntly—from his guts. Although we may attempt to categorize him as either a "New Poet" or an "immigrant Hindi poet," his work does not readily fit into either of these categories. Vatuk is independent and has a very powerful voice—a voice that emerges from a fire that is burning inside him. I choose to identify him here as a "rebellious poet" who raises his voice against social injustices across the world. Although it is true that his main writings have been concerned with India and Indians,

Vatuk is more generally concerned with the poverty and suffering of all peoples in their struggle for *swaraj*, real independence, and freedom. This is where his heart is.

The fire that drives Vatuk comes from his immediate environment: his family. Their direct involvement first with the independence movement and later with the political world of independent India have been an inspiration for him. Indeed, this involvement is the source or reservoir from where his poetry flows. His family's enthusiasm for a democratic nation—their concern for the pain and suffering of its people and their disillusionment with the decisions of its leaders—are staple themes in Vatuk's poetry.

Vatuk's journey from home to diaspora has taken him through a torrential change of values. Yet although progressions of time and place challenged the belief systems of his youth, Vatuk still held on to the values that were dear to him, even when he knew that they no longer existed. His poetry expresses sadness and sorrow over the demise of those values, at times tending toward bitterness and sarcasm. But his belief in human goodness, which he holds on to like a candle against the storm, never fades. Indeed, his belief in these values is so strong that he even challenges others to be accountable for the times that they have failed to abide by them. In his epic *Uttar rāmkaṭhā* (The later life of Rama), Vatuk (2003) seeks to introduce a diverse readership to the importance of these values by incorporating and questioning formative myths from Hindu mythology.

Vatuk is so deeply immersed in Indian values and mythology that it is hard to imagine that he has spent most of his adult life in the United States. It is true that he has been involved in American life right from the beginning, as is apparent from his English language book about the Vietnam War, *Silence is Not Golden* (1969). He is also the father of four adult children who are fully American, a fact that further uproots him from India. But in his heart, Vatuk is still an Indian. When I asked him recently about his national allegiance, he told me that he still holds an Indian passport and that he knows more about Meerut, his hometown, than he does San Francisco, where he has lived for several decades. Perhaps because he came to America not for the American dream but for marriage, he has always held true to his own dream of returning to India and doing something significant for his homeland. His poetry, uniquely informed by political issues at home and abroad, has done precisely this.

NOTES

¹ The Hindi poems included in this article were translated into the English by Kira Hall.

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15

GLOBALIZATION AND THE THIRD WORLD: WORKINGS OF THE IMF AND THE WORLD BANK

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Globalization is the buzzword and ruling philosophy of today. We have even started thinking of the world as a 'global village.' Revolutions in information technology and transportation compel us to conceptualize planet Earth as a small, homogeneous place. Globalization may be characterized as a process in which the world economy is fully integrated by the free interplay of market forces. The market determines the mobility of capital, finance, trade, and technology. Multinational corporations (MNCs) and international financial institutions have become major players, a development facilitated by the revolution in information technology. Yet the mobility of labor has been tacitly excluded from existing definitions of globalization. National states have been called upon to act as facilitators in the process. The unleashing of these economic forces has begun to impact practically all aspects of social existence the world over, with far reaching implications for the future of human society. In this chapter, we examine the workings of multilateral international institutions in shaping the world economy, among them the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, with a

focus on socioeconomic progress in underdeveloped countries.

After World War II, most of Europe and Japan lay economically prostrate while the United States and Canada, as major industrial centers, suffered no destruction of their industries, agriculture, or other productive resources. While the industries of Europe and Japan were destroyed during WWII, American industry grew and thrived as a result of the United States' position as the major supplier of war material, food, clothing, and other goods to Allied fighting forces. In addition, because of great political-economic upheaval prior to and during WWII, a considerable amount of gold from European countries was transferred to the United States for safe-keeping. Thus, after WWII, the economic and military predominance of the United States was absolute, making it the only feasible source of loanable funds. In July 1944, the would-be victorious powers of WWII met in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, to decide the trade and economic course of the post-war world, where competitive market forces would operate freely, unhampered by government interference. Forty-four countries participated in Bretton Woods. Most of them came from industrial Western countries; only eight were from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. At the conclave, the institutions of the World Bank (or the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were set up. Groundwork was also laid for a third institution, which later became the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT).

At its inception, the stated aim of the World Bank was to provide capital for reconstruction and development of the world economy, particularly to war-torn economies. Decision-making in the World Bank was unlike the United Nations, where each country has one vote. In the World Bank, one dollar equals one vote; that is, the number of votes a country has depends upon the number of dollars it has contributed towards the World Bank. At the time of its founding, the United States held over 37% of its voting power (Payer 1982:22-23), therefore having much more power than any other country in dictating the organization's day-to-day operations. Although procedural matters or matters of constitutional amendment required 85% of the votes, the United States was able to veto anything it did not like as a result of holding this 37% share. Today, even though its voting power has been reduced to 17.5%, the United States continues to have veto power. The ten richest

industrialized countries control 52% of all votes, while forty-five African countries together control only 4% (Toussaint 1999).

The IMF was established in December 1945 and began its financial operations in March 1947. Its original membership was twenty-nine nations, which has since expanded to a present total of 182. Its overall aim was to facilitate the growth of world trade, which, it argued, would generate high levels of resources, employment, and real income. It was also to supplement the reserves of each member nation, so that countries would not be forced to curtail imports. The IMF lent money primarily to meet the requirements of short-term imbalances in balance of payments. By using such methods, it was able to prevent nations from imposing restrictions on trade. The IMF was not to fund large and persistent deficits (Chandrasekhar 1996:39-64); in fact, the IMF acts as a last resort lender for member countries. In the IMF, as in the World Bank, members vote in proportion to their monetary contribution. At the time of its founding, the United States had 36% of the votes. Because an 80% majority is required for important questions of policy, the United States was able to veto any crucial decision of policy or procedure. At present, the United States has an 18% share, but together with its allies, it still dictates its terms over all other countries. According to Noam Chomsky, "the IMF, of course, means the United States. It basically follows U.S. policy, which is not that different from England's or France's or Germany's" (Chomsky, cited in Mendonça 1999:27).

The charter of the Bretton Woods institutions provides that the principal office of these institutions shall be located in the territory of the member holding the greatest number of shares. Therefore, Washington D.C. became the location of both the World Bank and the IMF. The head of the World Bank has always been a U.S. citizen, and the head of the IMF has always been European. The World Bank, IMF, and U.S. Treasury Department work in close cooperation with each other, constituting an association frequently called the Washington Consensus. A study based on reviews of hundreds of loans and project documents from the World Bank and IMF shows that both impose identical conditions and mandates on countries that take loans from the two institutions (Lloyd and Weissman 2001). Staff from both institutions frequently participate jointly in Fund missions and reviews of loan applications, often collaborating closely in the field. In actual practice, countries

without IMF membership are not allowed admission to the World Bank, and if they do not conform to IMF rules, no development aid from the World Bank is provided. For example, in 1987 Zambia broke off its dealings with the IMF. Immediately thereafter, disbursement of money under World Bank loans was stopped (Hancock 1989:58-59). In the early 1980s, the World Bank began to grant an increasing number of loans that were conditional upon the recipient country agreeing to institute structural changes in its economy, as laid down under the Structural Adjustment Program of the IMF. Until the end of the 1990s, 65% of the World Bank lending was structural adjustment loans (50 Years is Enough 2000:13).

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAM

The IMF was intended to be at the center of the post-war international monetary system. Its objective was primarily to stabilize short-run fluctuations and to tide countries over during severe but temporary liquidity constraints. The World Bank was entrusted with tasks pertaining to long-run reconstruction and development. Yet distinction between functions began to blur when the World Bank introduced structural adjustment loans in 1980. A country with balance of payment difficulty was first expected to approach the IMF for stabilization; only then would the Bank consider long-term finance. The Structural Adjustment Facility (in place since 1986) was expected to serve the dual objective of strengthening the balance of payment situation and fostering growth. Loan packages offered by the World Bank were usually based on philosophy of supply-side reforms. Thus the Bank's primary concern was to extend 'project loans' to developing countries (for roads, irrigation, sanitation, power, etc.). Subsequently, structural adjustment loans (SALs) focused on adjustments for different sectors of the economy: tax reforms through restructuring of tax system and public expenditure, measures to increase the 'efficiency' or to support the privatization of state-owned enterprises, trade reforms, financial market reforms, and other sector reforms that come under the purview of these loans. The loans are released in tranches subject to the fulfillment of

certain conditionality, which may vary from country to country (Ray 1998:702-704).

The IMF-WB strategy constituted an economic program for economic stabilization that could preempt a collapse of the payment balance situation in the short term by reducing the deficit on the current account as much as possible and curbing inflation. Devaluation is the standard IMF-WB recipe for improving the balance of payments (Bhaduri and Nayyar 1996:30-31). As a consequence, borrowing from the government's public expenditure was reduced, curtailing its capacity to undertake economic programs for the people. Private businessmen and MNCs were encouraged to take over public enterprises, including public utilities such as drinking water supply, sanitation, roads, and power. The Structural Adjustment Program thus landed the countries of Africa and South America in a serious socioeconomic crisis and debt trap.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE IMF-WB POLICIES

The Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) was instituted by the IMF/WB in the early 1980s. This program lays down conditions and policies for the borrowing governments to follow. By the year 2000, there were, on average, 111 conditions—some as detailed as the number of lay-offs in a particular sector—that a borrowing country has to fulfill (Burns 2001:7-9; Mutume 2001; Zacharie 2000). Operationally, the salient and major conditions that have to be instituted are: (1) privatization and/or sale of public/state owned enterprises to private profit-making corporations; (2) dismantling of existing cooperatives, collectives, and people's commons; (3) direct financial aid to MNCs so that they can buy the existing public and state run enterprises for profit making; (4) institution of anti-labor/working-class policies (this encompasses policies that are against small peasants and their organizations, anti-cooperative movements, and the suppression of labor by police-military force, if necessary); (5) use of virtual bribes and coercion in underdeveloped countries to gain support for imperialist policies in the international arena; and (6) financial and institutional support for the propagation and dissemination of free enterprise and market-oriented financially imperialist ideology.

COERCION TO PRIVATIZE

One of the conditions of the WB/IMF loan to an underdeveloped country is the privatization and selling of state/public owned enterprises, even though many of them generate profits (Multinational Monitor 2001; Agia 2002:27-30). India is an example: its external debt was over \$99 billion. Although officially not a part or signatory of IMF's Structural Adjustment Program, its economic policies were laid out in conformity with the advice of the World Bank and the IMF. In the years 2001-2002 the country was coerced to sell its Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs). The government decided to sell 236 (out of more than 10,000) PSUs that were creating profit, on the plea that private buyers would not be interested in picking up loss-making units; they were then left for the government (public) to operate. Thousands lost their jobs and livelihoods (Purkayastha and Gupta 2001:9; Alexander 2002:5-6). Generally, purchasers of such enterprises were MNCs, often in conjunction with indigenous private capital. What was particularly critical for the people of the Third World was the privatization of basic public utilities like water supply, health services, and finance, which are necessary for decent living. Below are a few examples.

Water

The concept of privatizing water services has been around since Napoleon III, but only 5% of the world's population currently receives water from corporations. Despite the small percentage of water privately held, the profits, shared among only ten major corporations, are enormous. (Major water corporations include Vivendi Universal, Suez, Bouygues Saur, RWE-Thames Water, and Bechtel-United Utilities. In the United States, Vivendi operates through its subsidiary, USFilter; Suez via its subsidiary, United Water; and RWE via American Water Works; see Otis 2002). At an estimated \$1 trillion, these profits are about 40% of that made by the oil industry, and are substantially higher than the pharmaceutical sector. At the World Water Forum in the Hague in 2000, multinational water companies, backed by the World Trade

Organization (WTO), strong-armed the United Nations to define water as a “human need” rather than “human right.” Human needs can be sold by private companies for profit, but people are ensured access to human rights on a nonprofit basis. From then on, private companies had a green light to approach cities and states to enter into a consortium agreement for the existing municipal water (Barlow and Clark 2002).

The World Bank and IMF increasingly force Third World countries to abandon their public water delivery system and contract with the water giants; if they do not, then they may not be eligible for debt relief. Once privatized, the companies make a profit by charging residents every time they turn on a tap or flush a toilet. Many of the companies get profit guarantees written into their contracts. For example, if residents use less water than predicted, companies can raise rates so profits do not fall below a “predetermined level” (Godrej 2003:20-21). This started the rush for ‘blue gold’ with direct assistance from the World Bank Group. Below are a few examples.

Mozambique was forced to privatize its water and sanitation in 1999 as a condition of the provision of \$117 million by the World Bank to improve water services and as a condition for extending the country’s debt relief. SAUR, a subsidiary of the French Bouygues corporation, expects revenues of around \$9 million a year for the deal (Henderson 2000:51).

Recently, the World Bank Director for Water and Power declared that water and sanitation loans to Africa would be “out of question” unless governments complied with World Bank demands, including private sector participation. Furthermore, the IMF has suspended debt relief when governments were unwilling to privatize or to do so rapidly enough. Donor governments also exert leverage; for instance, the U.K. government was withholding \$300 million until the government of Ghana conceded to signing private concessions for the urban water system (Alexander 2002:5-6).

Since 1995, the World Bank has been pushing Ghana to privatize its country’s water services. The price of water increased sharply, particularly to fulfill the Bank’s requirement of ‘full cost recovery.’ Hand-picked World Bank consultants have been peddling this line, turning the Bank’s involvement into a front for MNCs interested in taking over Ghana’s water. In March 2002 the IMF stated that Ghana would get the next trench of its loan under

the so-called Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility only if it aimed for full cost recovery. Further, it decided that Ghana would get a loan of \$100-\$200 million if the private sector was brought in to manage the water system, but it would get only \$20 million if the system stayed under public management (Amenga-Etego 2003:20-21). Most people in Accra (Ghana's capital) do not even earn \$1 per day, and a significant number have no regular employment and thus cannot afford the increased water rates (Grusky 2001:12-13). Even extreme poverty was of no concern to those who were out to extract profits on water—a *sine qua non* of life itself.

In Bolivia, after the World Bank refused to renew a \$25 million loan unless water services were privatized, the U.S. corporation Bechtel took control and raised water rates by 35%. Bolivians earning \$100 per month were paying a monthly rate of \$20 for water. People took to the streets, staging police confrontations in which several demonstrators were killed and hundreds injured. This led to a general strike that shut down the city of Cochabamba's economy. Bechtel pulled out and sued Bolivia for \$40 million, claiming compensation for lost profits under a bilateral investment treaty (Blackwell 2002:36-37).

Health

Since the mid-1980s, the World Bank has become directly involved in health-policy planning in South America. The Bank's health spending is now three times the entire budget of the World Health Organization (WHO). In fact, it has begun the process of replacing the WHO, the international agency sponsored by the United Nations, with an organization that has strong ties to MNCs and international commercial banks. In its World Development Report (1993), the World Bank recommended a three-pronged policy for investment in health: (1) foster and enable the environment for families to improve health (that is, families should pay for health care through participation in a free-market system); (2) improve productivity/ effectiveness of government spending on health (that is, trim government spending by reducing services to a few problem-specific programs selected for cost-effectiveness); and (3) facilitate greater diversity and competition in providing health services (that is, turn most of the government's free health care

clinics and facilities over to private, for-profit doctors and businesses) (Werner 2001:22-23). Ecuador's economy was so mired in corruption and debt that six economic ministers served between 2000 and 2002. The country applied for a \$240 million standby loan from the IMF. One of IMF's loan conditions was that the country change its new law that allocates 10% of the revenues earned from oil exports piped through a newly built pipeline to health and education. Furthermore, these revenues were to be used only for fulfilling debts. The creditors who hold Ecuador's public debt, most of them external banks, will now be the beneficiaries of 90% of revenues from export of oil transported by the pipeline ("Honduras" 2002).

Finance

The WB/IMF generally comes to the rescue of large, private international banks that have run into financial troubles, generally because they have been embroiled in predatory, exploitative, corrupt lending practices in less developed countries. Brazil is an example: in 2002, Brazil's external debt was over \$250 billion. The U.S. banks Citigroup and J.P. Morgan had enormous investments in Brazil—Citigroup had \$9.7 billion in assets there. Both of these banks were facing potential repercussions, as the Brazilian economy was facing a potential collapse and default on its debt, much of which was borrowed from Citigroup and J.P. Morgan. Consequently, the IMF came to the rescue and offered Brazil a \$30 billion loan. Citigroup and J.P. Morgan stock value soared immediately after this offer was announced, because the investors knew the potential debt default had been averted and that IMF money would essentially flow back to Citigroup and J.P. Morgan as payback on their investments. Brazil was then required to follow an austerity program that required privatization of public owned enterprises, as well as the cancellation of social programs in order to cut costs and save money to pay back its IMF loan. Thus the people of Brazil—mostly poor and lower-class—are forced to pay back the financiers on terms and conditions not of their choosing (Puscas 2003).

As of 1992, the World Bank and its affiliates had supported privatization in more than 180 bank operations in several

underdeveloped countries. And the proportion of World Bank structural loans made conditional on specific privatization targets has risen from only 13% in 1986 to 59% of World Bank lending in 1992 (Avery 1994).

DOING AWAY WITH COLLECTIVES AND COOPERATIVES

Several underdeveloped countries still retain cooperatives, collectives, and commons in some form. The World Bank Group has coerced most underdeveloped countries to privatize (sell) practically all the lands under such economic arrangements. For example, when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed in 1994, Mexico was pressured by the WB/IMF and the United States to rewrite Article 27 of its constitution, thus doing away with the *ejido* system of semi-collective land ownership that was instituted in the wake of the Mexican revolution during 1910-1917. This opened up traditional Mexican territory for sale to local and foreign investors who were eager to buy up land. Eliminating *ejido* protection and privatizing traditional landholding left the marginalized people even more vulnerable than before. It is estimated that 15 million rural Mexicans have been forced out of farming and migrated to cities or to the United States (Hightower 2000:3; Witness for Peace 2001; Cypher 1990:43).

DIRECT AID TO MNCs FOR PRIVATIZATION IN UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Lately, the World Bank has increasingly loaned to and directly invested in corporations doing business in developing countries. The International Financial Corporation (IFC)—the private sector lending arm of the bank—is now the fastest growing component of the Bank Group. The IFC supports the private sector by making loans directly to corporations, investing directly in private projects, and by syndicating loans through financial intermediates. By investing its own money or making loans with government guarantees, the IFC seeks to assure private investors—both national and international—that investments in developing nation markets are a worthy risk (Cray 2001).

In the year 2000, the World Bank sanctioned a ‘mighty loan,’ along with the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) loan of £100 million, to Monsanto, a U.S. genetically engineered food corporation operating in India. This amount represents 60% of the total of DFID’s aid budget to India for the year 2000-2001. In spite of serious opposition from the peasants and the local population, both the World Bank and Monsanto pushed hard to obtain thousands of acres in the province of Andhra Pradesh on which to grow genetically modified cotton and soya (Hines 2001).

In 2002, the World Bank Executive Board approved the U.S.-sponsored Private Sector Development Strategy (PSDS). A key prong of the PSDS is to attach conditions that favor foreign investments more systematically to future loans that are meant to improve the investment climate for foreign investments in developing countries. The PSDS plan suggests elimination of rules that favor domestic industries or service providers, and/or selling off the functions of the government that have not yet been privatized—basic services like water provision, health care, and school. The IFC will give advice to private companies and will make investments in privatized infrastructure enterprises and in private health and education facilities. By placing these functions in the hands of foreign corporations and reducing the government’s role in the economy, the threat of Southern governments reasserting economic policies based on principles like redistribution, equity, or social balance will be made largely irrelevant (Tannenbaum 2002).

SUPPRESSION OF LABOR AND THE WORKING CLASS

As a loan condition, the World Bank Group requires recipient governments to reduce wages and suppress labor/working-class rights and demands. Should there be labor demonstrations and strikes, police-military force is used to control these movements so that MNCs and private companies can continue to extract profits at the cost of labor. The World Bank Group has almost always acted against the interests of working/laboring classes and peasant organizations and in favor of the capitalist classes. It is not its agenda to recommend that a factory or enterprise be taken over by government, no matter how oppressive and exploitative labor

conditions may be. It hardly recommends enforcement of labor standards or collective bargaining rights, let alone suggesting raising labor wages or providing facilities for workers such as child care (Lloyd and Weissman 2001; Hirsch 2002).

The World Bank Group also recommends using other measures against labor, namely wage reduction, elimination of severance pay when workers are laid off, elimination of the prevailing practice of giving workers permanent status after 90-180 days of employment, elimination of job training, health care and housing paid by the employer, elimination of labor unions, elimination or reduction of a minimum worker's compensation if a worker is injured on the job, and so on (Bacon 2002; Weissman 2003). For example, in the year 2000, when Argentina's government was negotiating a loan from the WB/IMF to bail out its economy, WB/IMF supported Argentina's governmental policy of dismantling labor laws that protected workers, calling it "labor flexibility." They forced the government to privatize all public services, cutting wages of government employees while making it easier to dismiss workers (Hodgson 2000).

The WB/IMF openly encourages direct armed military-police suppression of labor unions, organizations of poor and landless peasants, or the poor when they directly confront and fight against the existing exploitative economic order in their own country. For instance, in December 2000, a World Bank report concluded that Colombia's ability to receive any future large infusions of international aid would depend upon successful (military) suppression of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and other militant groups (Cockburn and St. Clair 2001).

VIRTUAL BRIBES AND PRESSURE TO SUPPORT IMPERIALIST POLICIES

If a country experiences economic difficulties, the WB group uses such difficulties to extract support of its imperialist international policies, frequently by offering bribes or rewards to beleaguered countries. Here is an example: in the year 2000, the United States was not elected to the United Nations Human Rights Commission; instead, Cuba was elected. This was a terrible blow to the United States because many of the U.S. military attacks on other countries—for example, Iraq, Libya, Cuba—have been executed in

the name of defending human rights. If the United States itself was not elected to the Human Rights commission, it would have little international credibility or support to attack other countries in the future. The United States wanted to remove Cuba from the Human Rights commission in order to make sure that it would be elected the following year. But how?

The Uruguayan factor

Since 1973, Uruguay has been ruled by military dictatorships and features the world's highest percentage of population imprisoned for political reasons (Rosenfelder 1996). Dictators borrowed billions of dollars to suppress internal leftist parties, labor, and peasant movements, while military leaders siphoned away millions of dollars for themselves into off-shore bank accounts. For the past several years, the Uruguay economy has been teetering on the verge of collapse. The government predicted an 11% decline in economic growth for 2002 and a 4.5% drop for 2003, while inflation was predicted to increase as much as 50% each year ("Uruguay: Protest continues" 2002). In the first seven months of 2002, bank deposits in Uruguay dropped by 37% and foreign currency reserves by 79%, while Uruguayan currency lost 41% of its value against the U.S. dollar. At the same time, U.S. exports to Argentina decreased by 60% and investment was down by 46%. Argentina's banks that had been closed reopened on August 5, 2002, after receiving a \$1.5 billion loan from the United States (Gaudin 2002). The United States pressured Uruguay and other countries in similar situations (for example, Mexico) to vote not only against Cuba, but also for the United States to have a seat on the Human Rights commission. The United States successfully urged these countries to corral other nations to do the same. The United States was elected, and Cuba was voted out.

Uruguay's reward was the loan it had requested. As an executive with the Amro Bank, which sanctions loans to Latin American countries, stated:

Washington's efforts were decisive in obtaining a multi-billion dollar loan for Montevideo [Uruguay] from international lending agencies ... Uruguay

has [been] receiving more than three billion dollars for its political support of the U.S. position in Geneva. As publicly stated by the U.S., that Uruguay would receive a loan due to the financial crisis in Argentina was actually “payment” by the Bush administration for Montevideo’s sponsorship of its resolution condemning Cuba for alleged human right violations ... “Money and internal help are there, but only if the country does what was asked.” (Radio Havana Cuba 2002)

On August 5, 2002, the U.S. government said that it would grant up to \$1.5 billion in short-term loans to Uruguay so that its banks, which had been closed due to financial crisis, could reopen (Oppel 2002).

PROPAGATION AND DISSEMINATION OF CAPITAL-IMPERIALIST IDEOLOGY

The WB/IMF, WTO, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), and their affiliates are repositories of neo-liberal, free enterprise, imperialist ideology that they preach, disseminate, and propagate through various media: radio, TV, websites, newspapers, books, publications, printing facilities, forums and seminars, and many more. This ideology is thrust upon every government and organization they contact. Generally, it is demanded that the Third World countries that apply for loans adopt this economic-political ideology. Also, conditions of loans are set such that a country has to institute the economic rules of neo-liberalism. A huge staff working in various sections of these institutions—economies and production, planning and development, finance and currency, commerce and trade, etc.—lay down the policy guidelines, budgetary rules, and labor and employment conditions for the governments of borrowing countries within the economic ideology of capitalist imperialism.

Personnel agents of dissemination

Some 90% of the IMF professionals working in the World Bank and IMF have Ph.D.s from universities in the United States, United Kingdom, or Canada. About 80% of professionals working in the Policy, Research, and External Affairs Department of the World Bank have been trained in economics and finance at institutions in the United States or United Kingdom (Raghavan 1998). Universities of these countries teach the ideology of free market, free trade, neo-liberalism, and privatization of public enterprises as an unquestionable ‘mantra’ for Third World development. A devotional execution of this ideology is common amongst the cadre of the WB/IMF. Even those staff members who originally came from underdeveloped countries absorb the same economic ideology and become proponents of the same ideology. When they write reports on underdeveloped countries, they exhort the governments of their own former homelands to accept the free market capitalist/imperialistic model. When they are sent on WB/IMF missions to underdeveloped countries, they enthusiastically preach the same to their countrymen.

The World Bank and IMF produce a cascade of reports, charts, statistics, graphs, and publications—conducting seminars and forums in underdeveloped countries—all to disseminate this ideology. This barrage of publications and propaganda distorts and prevaricates facts, sidetracking and ignoring the negative effects of WB/IMF/WTO policies upon the people of the Third World, such as rising unemployment and poverty, an intensification of the unequal distribution of wealth and income, the deterioration and decline of health services and hence the health of nationals, and the driving of small peasants into bankruptcies and to the slums of the cities, among others.

To propagate its pro-imperialist economic ideology, the World Bank, as a response to critics and constituents, launched its Development Gateway Internet initiative and mass electronic-mail campaign on July 23, 2001. The site is presented as a helpful store of data, with links and analysis on virtually all global issues. Although the site welcomes criticism, it has appointed ‘Topic Guides’ who censor the feedback received. The Gateway, which is trying to raise \$50 million, has a staff of twenty-five, with at least double that number acting as part-time Topic Guides (Wilks 2001).

CONCLUSIONS

Unlike the colonial (old) imperialism, the new imperialism—globalization—does not physically occupy a country for extraction purposes; rather, it colonizes through a financial stranglehold. Nevertheless, its purpose remains the same: to obtain free access to profit and raw materials. Its backbone remains the military strength of imperialist countries, which is used with impunity whenever its economic-political interests are threatened (Sharma and Kumar 2003).

The New Imperialism has created new financial and trade institutions such as the WB/IMF, IBRD, WTO and others who cajole and prod underdeveloped countries into a policy mold that sets up a profit flow to imperialist countries. For example, loans offered by financial institutions have so many conditions attached that they can hardly be met, and debt begins to accrue. Other conditions are the privatization or sale of government-, state-, and locally-run enterprises to MNCs. Also enforced is the suppression and restriction of labor rights (such as retirement and medical benefits, sick leave, etc.), and the dismantling of labor-protection laws so that profits can be made at the cost of labor. The World Bank Group financially assists MNCs to purchase public enterprises. It forces local governments to cut jobs, eliminate subsidies to farmers, remove price controls, and reduce government assistance to education, health, water supply, and sanitation so that the country can 'service' its loan. The local government, in order to pay the loan and comply with the World Bank's conditions, mistreats workers, laborers, peasants, women, and the lower classes, resulting in poverty and the deterioration of health and living conditions. To propagate and disseminate its agenda for acceptance by governments and eventually the people of underdeveloped countries, the WB/IMF/WTO and allied institutions have created a huge network of publicity and propaganda in practically every context.

Over the last decade, people have begun to assert that such an exploitative situation for underdeveloped countries must change. Several proposals have been put forth to this end. One is debt cancellation, as debt provides enormous profits to imperialist

countries and impoverishes underdeveloped countries. If the debt cannot be cancelled, then, as some underdeveloped countries have proposed, it must be repudiated, particularly when such debts have been paid many times over through interest and other extractions. Another proposal is to abolish the World Bank and the IMF, the organizations that are the root of this financial enslavement. Few retain hopes that the WB/IMF and allied institutions can be reformed from within. Therefore, other lending institutions must be supported and assisted—financially and otherwise—by sympathetic countries that espouse progressive social policies.

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16

JAMMU AND KASHMIR: IN THE SHADOW OF IMPERIALISM

Maharaj K. Kaul

On the eve of freedom from colonial rule, India was divided into two political and administrative groups: British India (the Provinces ruled directly by the British Crown through the Secretary of State for India in London and the Governor General and Viceroy in India) and the 562 local kingdoms called the Princely States.

The basis for the relationship between British India and the Princely States was governed by the Doctrine of Paramountcy. This doctrine made the Princely States subservient to British India but allowed the rulers local autonomy in civil administration and taxation policies. Defense and foreign relations rested with the British Government of India; few States were allowed to have their own armed forces. The relationship between the British Crown and the Princely States replaced the older Doctrine of Lapse, an aggressive annexation policy put forward by Lord Dalhousie, the East India Company's Governor General of India during 1848-1856. Dalhousie's policy legitimized the annexation of any native Indian State whose ruler did not have a male heir. Half a dozen of the Princely States had been annexed between 1848 and 1856 under this policy. Feeling threatened, rulers of some of the Princely States joined the great popular uprising of 1857, throwing the biggest challenge until then to the British authority in India. After the rebels were defeated, the British Crown took direct control of India from the East India Company, and in 1858, the Doctrine of Lapse was finally abandoned in favor of the new Doctrine of Paramountcy.

Over 60% of the area and the population of India were under

British control in the Provinces of India. The Princely States ranged from small city-states to large states. Hyderabad was the largest of the Princely States in terms of population, with over 16 million residents in 1941. Jammu and Kashmir State, formed in 1846, was the largest in area, occupying over 85,000 square miles.

At the end of World War II, a considerably weakened Britain found itself facing a freedom movement in India that it could no longer suppress. The British government sent a Cabinet Mission to the subcontinent to propose the terms of its withdrawal from the subcontinent. The Cabinet Mission proposal, made public on May 16, 1946, suggested a three-tier loose federal structure for India. The structure consisted of provinces at the lowest rung, groups formed by these provinces at the next rung, and finally, a weak union at the top that controlled only defense, foreign affairs, and communication. The Princely States were advised to join any of the groups but were assured that under this three-tier arrangement they would retain considerable autonomy.

There were aspects of the Cabinet Mission Plan that neither the Congress Party nor the Muslim League liked. But it was the Direct Action Day—launched by the Muslim League on August 16, 1946—that was decisive in burying the Plan: tens of thousands were butchered in communal riots in India in its aftermath. On June 3, 1947, a new plan to partition India into two Dominions was made public. This became the Indian Independence Act of 1947. Section 2 of the Act defined the territories of the new Dominions of India and Pakistan. Section 7 of the Act terminated the relationship of the British Crown and the British Government of India with the Princely States, except that “effect shall, as nearly as may be, continue to be given to the provisions of any such agreement as is therein referred to which relate to customs, transit and communications, posts and telegraphs, or other like matters.” In other words, relationships would continue between the States and the two successor Dominions, just as they had between the States and the British Government of India. Subsection 1 of Section 2 stated that “nothing in this section [Section 2], shall be construed as prevention, the accession of Indian States to either of the new Dominions.” Together with the Government of India Act 1935, the 1947 Act provided the basis for India’s independence.

The two new Dominions, India and Pakistan, came into existence when India was partitioned on August 15, 1947. By the time the Constitution of India took effect on January 26, 1950, most of the Princely States had acceded to either India or Pakistan. But Maharaja Hari Singh, the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir State, was unable to decide which course of action to take. He entered into a Standstill Agreement with Pakistan on August 15, 1947, in order to continue relations in the areas of “customs, transit and communications, posts and telegraphs, or other like matters,” as provided for in Section 7 of the Indian Independence Act of 1947. These relations had existed between the state and the British Government of India through the western part of Punjab, which had become part of Pakistan after August 15, 1947.

However, in September of 1947, Pakistan cut off supplies to Jammu and Kashmir State to coerce the Maharaja to accede to Pakistan. Jawaharlal Nehru had foreseen what Maharaja’s vacillation could lead to. In a letter to Sardar Patel on September 27, 1947, Nehru wrote:

It is obvious to me from the many reports that I have received that the situation there [Kashmir] is a dangerous and a deteriorating one. The Muslim League in the Punjab and the N.W.F.P. are making preparations to enter Kashmir in considerable numbers. The approach of winter is going to cut off Kashmir from the rest of India. ... I understand that the Pakistan strategy is to infiltrate into Kashmir now and to take some big action as soon as Kashmir is more or less isolated because of the coming winter. (Nehru 1947, cited in Dasgupta 2002:17)

One month later, on October 22, 1947, Pakistan launched a full-scale invasion of Jammu and Kashmir State. They equipped and trained an army of tribal marauders who swept through the western part of the state, raping and massacring thousands of people, and looting and burning whatever they encountered along the way. Unable to stop this massive invasion, the desperate Maharaja— together with the most popular political organization in the state, the

National Conference—appealed to India for help. The state of Jammu and Kashmir acceded to India on October 26, when the Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession. The following day the first contingent of Indian troops was flown to Srinagar to defend Kashmir. Soon after, Pakistan sent its army into Kashmir, and India and Pakistan found themselves engaged in their first military confrontation.

Under the advice of Mountbatten, independent India's first Governor General, India took its complaint against the Pakistan-sponsored invasion on Jammu and Kashmir to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on January 1, 1948. Much to India's disappointment, the UNSC turned India's complaint into a dispute between India and Pakistan. On January 20, 1948, it passed a resolution establishing the United Nations Commission of India and Pakistan (UNCIP) to investigate and mediate the 'dispute'. The Commission passed a resolution on August 13, 1948, ordering a cease-fire and laying down the basis for the subsequent truce agreement between India and Pakistan. After the cease-fire took effect on midnight of January 1, 1949, UNCIP passed a second resolution on January 5, 1949, supplementary to their August 13, 1948 resolution, which set the terms of a plebiscite in the state. Although the resolutions were accepted by both India and Pakistan, the plebiscite never took place. Pakistan dragged its feet and refused to implement truce terms of the August 13, 1948 UNCIP resolution, which were a precondition for plebiscite. The truce terms required Pakistan to withdraw all of its troops from the state and secure the withdrawal of all tribesmen and other fighting forces that had entered the state. This never happened, however, and the cease-fire line became frozen in its January 1, 1949 location.

Pakistan's attempts to take possession of all of Jammu and Kashmir by force resulted in three more invasions of the state: first in 1965, again in 1971, and finally in 1999.

Jammu and Kashmir State has been not only a target of Pakistani military invasions since 1947, but also a victim of imperialist intrigue ever since its formation a hundred years earlier because of its location in Asia. The region is surrounded by China, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Central Asian states of the erstwhile Soviet Union. This location was important to the British during their push towards Central Asia in the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries, and later to the Anglo-American combine in their efforts to encircle the socialist states on Jammu and Kashmir's northern borders during the Cold War years.

After 1947, imperialism worked primarily through Pakistan, its most loyal ally in that part of the world. Pakistan, the most reactionary and violent state in South Asia, has since its founding been driven by the ideology of two-nation theory and pathological hostility towards India. It has been obsessed with the possession of Jammu and Kashmir simply because of its Muslim majority. In the 1980s, at the behest of the United States and funded both by it and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan put together, equipped, and trained an international *jehadi* force to destabilize the government in neighboring Afghanistan. Emboldened by its success in destroying this forward-looking country, Pakistan then turned its *jehadi* forces east towards India. In 1989, it launched a proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir State. Tens of thousands of people have since been killed, and they continue to be killed, even nineteen years after the beginning of this proxy war.

Pakistan could undertake these ventures without fearing a massive retaliation from India precisely because of the support that it enjoyed from imperialism. The current turmoil in Jammu and Kashmir is no doubt a direct consequence of Pakistan's covert and overt interference in the affairs of the state. But it also has to be understood as a culmination of imperialist meddling in the state's affairs from the time of its formation in 1846. This interference continued on through the decolonization of the Indian subcontinent and the subsequent decades in which Pakistan, together with its founding organization the Muslim League, became the tools that imperialism created and nourished to do its dirty work in the subcontinent.

FORMATION OF THE STATE AND BRITISH INTRIGUES

The state of Jammu and Kashmir, as it was called on the eve of India's freedom, came into existence with the Treaty of Amritsar on March 16, 1846. The Treaty was signed by Gulab Singh (Raja of Jammu) and Lord Hardinge (the Viceroy of India) at the conclusion of the first British-initiated Anglo-Sikh war.

Gulab Singh, a Dogra from Jammu, had risen to the position of an important general of Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Lahore. He had distinguished himself in various successful military campaigns for the Sikhs, the last of which resulted in the annexation of Kashmir in 1819, which until then had been ruled by the Afghans. (Jammu had been annexed by the Sikhs in 1808.) In recognition of his service to the Sikhs, Gulab Singh was rewarded by being made the hereditary ruler of Jammu in 1820 and allowed to have an army of his own. By 1842, Gulab Singh had led successful military expeditions in Ladakh and Baltistan in the north and brought these regions and other smaller principalities near Jammu under his rule. In the meantime, the Sikhs had also extended their control over Gilgit.

But after Ranjit Singh's death in 1839, the Sikh empire was driven by factionalism and civil war, giving the British an opportunity to intervene. The First Anglo-Sikh war was started in 1845. Sensing the course of events, Gulab Singh sided with the British. The British weakened the Sikhs and forced them to sign a treaty that included a heavy war indemnity of about 1,500,000 Nanakshahi rupees. When the Sikhs were subsequently unable to pay all of this amount, the British took away the possessions of Kashmir and Gilgit from the Sikhs and transferred these to Gulab Singh for 750,000 Nanakshahi rupees. This was the 1846 Treaty of Amritsar that added Kashmir and Gilgit to Gulab Singh's possessions and gave shape to today's undivided state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Treaty of Amritsar curtailed Sikh power in northern India. The transfer of Kashmir and Gilgit to Gulab Singh was politically expedient. Indeed, Lord Hardinge, the then British Viceroy, justifies the transfer as "the only alternative" given the great distance between Kashmir and other British outposts:

It was necessary last March to weaken the Sikhs by depriving them of Kashmir. The distance from Kashmir to Sutlej is 300 miles of very difficult mountainous country, quite intractable for six months. To keep a British force 300 miles away from any possibility of support would be an undertaking that merited a strait-waistcoat and not

a peerage. The arrangement was the only alternative. (Hardinge, cited in Raina 1988:4)

But once they occupied Punjab after the Second Anglo-Sikh war, the British set their eyes on the Gilgit region. They had succeeded in extending their control over Punjab; now they began the process of severing Gilgit from Gulab Singh's Kashmir. Because of its proximity to the Czarist Empire to the north, Gilgit was strategically important to the British. The importance of Gilgit is described by E. F. Knight in his book *Where Three Empires Meet*:

The value of Gilgit to the Kashmir State, commanding as it does the Indus Valley and the mouth of the Hunza river, and so holding in check the unruly tribes on either side, is obvious enough, but it is only recently that the great strategical importance to the Empire of this position has been fully realized. ... Our influence should at least extend to that great mountain-range [Hindu Kush] which forms the natural frontier of India. It is necessary for the safeguarding of our Empire that we should at any rate hold our side of the mountain-gates; but unless we looked to it, Russia would soon have both sides under her control. ...

Gilgit, the northernmost post of the British Empire, covers all the passes over Hindoo Koosh, from the easternmost one, the Shimshal, to those at the head of Yasin River in the west. It will be seen, on referring to a good map, that all these passes descend to the valleys of the Gilgit River and its tributaries. But the possession of Gilgit Valley does more than this; it affords us a direct communication through Kashmir territory to the protected state of Chitral, which would be otherwise removed from our influence by the interposition of countries at present practically closed to us. We now guarantee the independence of Chitral against Afghanistan, as we do that of

Afghanistan against Russian aggression. (Knight
1893:288-291)

The British thus attempted to intervene in Kashmir in 1848, only two years after the signing of the Treaty of Amritsar. Citing complaints of “mal-administration” against Gulab Singh’s rule, they tried to place a British Resident in the state. Although Gulab Singh successfully resisted this British maneuver, the British raised the question again three years later, this time citing security concerns from British visitors to the state. The Maharaja once again successfully resisted the appointment of a British resident, but he yielded under pressure to the appointment of a British Officer on Special Duty—to be under the control of the British Punjab Government—who would look after the interests of Europeans in the state. This unfortunately opened up the possibility of British encroachment. The British made another attempt at intervention in 1872, but Maharaja Ranbir Singh, who had taken the throne in 1858 after the death of his father Gulab Singh, was also able to resist the attempt.

When the Second Anglo-Afghan War broke out in 1878, the possession of Gilgit assumed increasing importance for the British in view of the advance of Russian power into Central Asia. Ranbir Singh died in 1885, and the rule passed on to his son Maharaja Pratap Singh. With the help of Pratap Singh’s brother, Amar Singh, the British wove an elaborate scheme to reduce Pratap Singh to a mere figurehead, replacing his authority by a Council of Ministers selected by the Government of India. The British then converted the position of British Officer on Special Duty to British Resident, to be under the direct control of the British Government of India. While Pratap Singh remained virtually deposed, the British created a Political Agency in Gilgit in 1889 under the control of the Political Agent appointed by the British Government of India; Col. A. G. Durand was the first Political Agent. The Gilgit Agency controlled the area to the west of Gilgit town, including all the areas from Chilas in the south to Yasin and Ishkuman in the north. Indeed, Col. Durand had at his disposal 2,000 men of the Imperial Service Troops, made up of Dogra and Gurkha soldiers, most of whose expenses were paid by the state government! Only the Gilgit

Wazarat, the settled areas around and south of Gilgit town, continued to be administered by the Maharaja.

The conspiracy against Pratap Singh, however, was later exposed by *Amrit Bazar Patrika* in meticulous detail. The newspaper presented secret documents, some of them forged, which had been obtained through an Indian employee of the British Resident in Kashmir. The British were forced to step back, and by 1922 Maharaja Pratap Singh's earlier powers had been restored. Yet the Political Agency in Gilgit continued to exist, and its control remained with the Political Department of the Government of India.

HARI SINGH, THE LAST RULER

When Pratap Singh died in 1925, his nephew Hari Singh, Amar Singh's son, ascended the throne to the full satisfaction of the British. Yet the British soon discovered that this new ruler was not to be their stooge. Hari Singh immediately began asserting his authority, to the discomfort of the British: he replaced British Indian Army troops in Gilgit Agency with state troops, and he restored the jurisdiction of state courts over state subjects and Indian visitors. The British and the Maharaja were in confrontation.

Hari Singh additionally instituted a number of reforms in the state, progressive for his time, that put him ahead of many of the other 562 Indian princes and even parts of British India. In the social sector, his reforms included setting up a minimum age for marriage (despite opposition by a representation of Muslims in 1929 because such restrictions were at odds with Muslim Law); prohibiting the practice of older men marrying much younger girls; removing the ban on remarriage for young Hindu widows; providing untouchables with access to public services and public places, especially state owned temples (despite great opposition by temple priests); and eradicating the infanticide of girls, which was particularly prevalent among Rajputs. Reforms in education included reservations for Muslims, scholarships to make education more affordable, an increase in the number of primary schools, and compulsory education for children. His achievements in the health sector were no less significant: he made a number of improvements in health facilities; required compulsory vaccinations against small pox; set up travel dispensaries; and established a first-class up-to-

date hospital in Srinagar that could be accessed by all. In addition to these reforms in the social and education sectors, he set up wool- and silk-weaving industries; gave the peasantry concessions in the form of protection from the dispossession of land by money lenders who were mostly Hindu; established cooperative credit societies and ceilings on interest rates; and allocated government land to peasants. A state grain procurement system protected peasants from price fluctuations. The absence of a similar system elsewhere in India proved catastrophic for the peasantry during the worldwide depression of the 1930s, when prices took a steep dive.

Also noteworthy are the prohibitions that Hari Singh initiated against non-hereditary state subjects with regard to the purchase of immovable property and appointments to civil administration positions. These prohibitions form the bone of contention between supporters and opponents of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. Legally defined in 1927, hereditary state subjects were those who had settled in Jammu and Kashmir before 1885. One of the first groups to oppose this policy was the Kashmir Muslim Conference, an organization set up in Lahore in British India by communalized Punjabi Muslims who had lost their access to representation in state services. But the beneficiaries of the policy were intended to be Kashmiri Muslims, whose lack of formal education had been exploited by Punjabi Muslims. Over the years, Punjabi Muslims had replaced them in state services. A second group that lost employment opportunities in the higher echelons of state services under this policy were the Englishmen who were thinking of settling in Kashmir and turning it into a White colony, both for its climate and its strategic location.

Finally, in addition to this anti-British development, Hari Singh denied the British many privileges that they had before this point enjoyed in Kashmir. His acts of defiance were mostly symbolic, but they led to quite significant confrontations with the British. In a climactic moment, Hari Singh delivered an address on the future constitution of India to the First Round Table Conference in London in 1930, in which he identified himself as sharing the aspirations of the Indian people:

As Indians and loyal to the land whence we derive
our birth and infant nurture, we stand as solidly as

the rest of our countrymen for our land's enjoyment of a position of honour and equality in the British Commonwealth of Nations. (Hari Singh 1930, cited in Saxena 1975:110)

Throughout the address, Hari Singh stressed "the communal harmony in his state as a living example of how Hindus and Muslims could live peacefully as brethren" (Raina 1988:73). He was rightfully proud of the existence of communal peace in his state. But everything was to change after 1930, when the British began actively encouraging communal elements both in and outside of the state so as to precipitate a crisis for the Maharaja. In short, the British objective was to put enough pressure on the Maharaja to force him to cede control of all of Gilgit.

BRITISH-ENGINEERED COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

With an uncooperative Maharaja, the British found it difficult to achieve their goals easily in Gilgit. They therefore chose to use the communal weapon, having already effectively employed it in the Provinces of British India to disrupt the freedom movement led by the Congress Party. In their efforts, they found a willing ally named Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah.

Abdullah, who was to become the leader of Kashmir, had just returned home after completing his education at Aligarh. Abdullah belonged to the new breed of educated Kashmiri Muslims who began to appear in the late 1920s. He represented the aspirations of this emerging class in many respects, especially as many of them hoped to obtain positions in the upper echelons of the state civil service. Despite new policies of the Maharaja that recognized the need for increased representation of Muslims in various branches of government, change was slowed by the lack of competent Kashmiri Muslim candidates and an entrenched and reluctant bureaucracy. In 1930, Abdullah founded the Muslim Reading Room in Srinagar, which became a forum for this emerging class in Kashmir. In the Jammu region of the state, another organization similar to the Muslim Reading Room of Srinagar—the Young Men's Muslim Association—functioned to articulate similar demands for educated

Jammu Muslims. Both organizations worked under a communal banner.

The atmosphere in Jammu and Kashmir around this time had already been communalized through propaganda distributed by Punjabi communal Muslims. By 1930, the All-India Kashmir Muslim Conference, founded in Lahore under the leadership of Mohammad Iqbal, had been active for a few years. Besides Iqbal, prominent individuals associated with this organization included the leader of the Qadianis, Mirza Bashiruddin Ahmad Mahmood (who was its President), Sir Fazal Hussain, and Sir Mohammad Shafi. None of these people had at any time been associated with anti-colonial freedom struggle or any non-sectarian mass struggle in British India. Indeed, the Qadianis were avowedly pro-British and communal, and they worked through Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and the Muslim Reading Room in Kashmir. 1930 was also the year when Sir Mohammad Iqbal, in his Presidential Address to the annual session of the All India Muslim League at Allahabad, proposed the idea of a Pakistan that would include Kashmir. This fired the imagination of all pan-Islamist communalists in northern India and did not leave Kashmir untouched, as mass movements of Muslims there came under increasing communal influence.

The first impact of this Punjab-originating communal virus was felt in Jammu. On the Muslim holy day of Id on April 29, 1931, two minor incidents involving Muslims, one in Jammu and another in a village 25 miles south of Jammu, took place. In the Jammu incident, the Maulvi leading the prayer was asked by the police to refrain from making a political speech at a religious event; and in the village incident, police made a precautionary intervention to prevent a possible fight over the ownership of the tank in which Muslims were having ablutions. Both of the events were blown out of proportion. Muslims across the state raised the battle cry of "Islam in danger." Inflammatory posters were prepared by the Jammu-based Young Men's Muslim Association; the Muslim Reading Room in Srinagar lent additional support to their activities. When a series of public meetings were held in Srinagar at various mosques, a rapid succession of events followed that ultimately led to a confrontation between state authorities and a violent mob on July 13, 1931. Six people died on the spot as a result of police firing. In retaliation, the mob of Muslims carried their dead into the

heart of the city and incited people to loot and burn Hindu-owned homes and businesses. Rioting followed in various Srinagar localities, and Hindu residents were attacked.

The next day, on July 14, 1931, the Maharaja announced the appointment of an Enquiry Commission, headed by a Parsi, Chief Justice Mr. Barjor Dalal, and including as official members two State High Court judges, one of whom was Hindu and the other Muslim. From the testimony of various important witnesses, it became clear that the communal disturbances were encouraged and facilitated by a key member of the Maharaja's Council of Ministers: G. E. C. Wakefield, the Police Minister responsible for law and order and the only English Minister in the Maharaja's State Council. The revelation led to Wakefield's dismissal. He settled in Murree, Punjab, where he organized the European Friends of Kashmir and continued financing Abdullah-led communal disturbances through Qadiani President, Mirza Bashiruddin Ahmed Mahmood.

By the end of September, order had been restored in Srinagar. But the British Resident nevertheless issued a twenty-four hour ultimatum that indicated that he "took a very serious view of the situation and feared widespread outbreaks in the Punjab." It demanded, among other things, that "a European, Indian Civil Service officer, be appointed as the Chief Minister" (Bamzai 1962:659). The ultimatum, as a lesser punishment, is reported to have been negotiated by Nawab Hamidullah of Bhopal, Tej Bahadur Sapru, and K. N. Haksar, in conjunction with Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy. The British had actually planned to strip the Maharaja of all his powers and appoint a British Administrator for the state (Ramusack 2003:121). By dismissing key government officials and agreeing to the appointment of a British Prime Minister, the Maharaja saved himself from being deposed.

Although peace seemed to be returning to Srinagar, a series of events unfolded in Jammu and the western areas of the province that led to large-scale violence against the Hindus and Sikhs of these regions. Communal Muslims from Punjab were again responsible for precipitating these events. Intense communal troubles, much more severe than Srinagar had witnessed, flared up in Jammu province. The trouble started first in Mirpur, located in the southwest of Jammu on the border of Punjab. But it quickly spread to neighboring Rajauri, Kotli, and Bhimber. Aroused by hate

speeches delivered in mosques, Muslim mobs rampaged for about three months. Hundreds of Hindus and Sikhs were killed, and many were converted to Islam under death threats. Hindu and Sikh shops and businesses were looted or burnt down. Hundreds of villages in the area were plundered. Temples, Dharamshalas, and Gurudwaras were burnt or desecrated. By the end of January, over 4,000 residents had fled to Jammu city or sought refuge in Tehsil headquarters.

Hari Singh was unable to control this new outbreak of communal violence and sought British help. This was the opportunity that the British had been waiting for. They dispatched British troops to the state and quelled the rebellion. When Lt. Col. E. J. Colvin, an Indian Civil Service Officer, was appointed as Prime Minister of State on February 22, 1932, the Maharaja was finally brought to his knees. Within the next four years, Maharaja Hari Singh signed a Deed of Lease of Gilgit to the British government, which brought an end to the state's control of all of Gilgit, relinquishing both Gilgit Agency and Gilgit Wazarat to the British. The sixty-year lease was signed on March 26, 1935, and one year later, Col. Colvin, with mission accomplished, relinquished his position of Prime Minister. The British control of the area where 'three empires meet' had at long last been achieved. An intrigue that lasted ninety years had finally borne fruit. Thereafter, British pressure on the Maharaja eased and Hari Singh had only the popular movement to contend with. But once the British abandoned the movement, it shed its communalist color, and by the late 1930s, it had begun to turn secular in outlook and functioning.

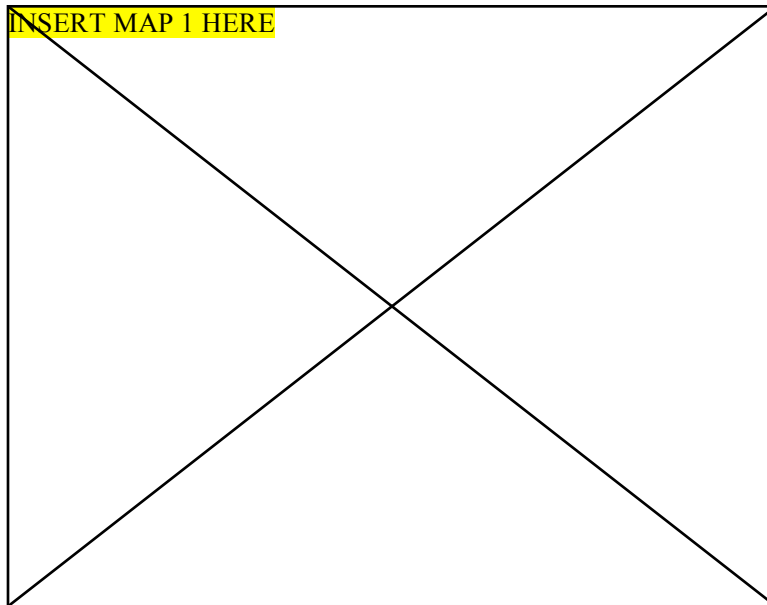
RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Gulab Singh's state of Jammu and Kashmir was made up of three main geographical regions: Ladakh-Gilgit province in the north and north-west; Jammu province in the south; and Kashmir Province in the middle (see Map 1).

The northern area of the undivided Jammu and Kashmir state—the Greater Gilgit and Tribal Areas and the Ladakh-Baltistan region—is a high-altitude region with Leh in the east at an elevation of 11,000 feet, dropping along the path of the Indus river to an

elevation of 5,000 feet in Gilgit to the west. The southern part of Jammu is at an elevation of 1,000 feet, providing a transition between the high mountain ranges in the north and the plains of Punjab in the south. Sandwiched between the northern and southern areas is Kashmir, with a flat valley in the middle known as the Valley of Kashmir. Constituting an area of approximately 2,000 square miles, Kashmir is drained by the river Jhelum and has an almost uniform elevation of 5,500 feet.

The ethnic diversity of the state mirrors its geographical diversity to a large extent. In the eastern part of Ladakh-Baltistan-Gilgit, the regional people are by and large of Tibetan stock and are Buddhists or Muslims by religious persuasion. Muslims are divided into Shias (predominant in Purik and Baltistan); Ismaelis, another

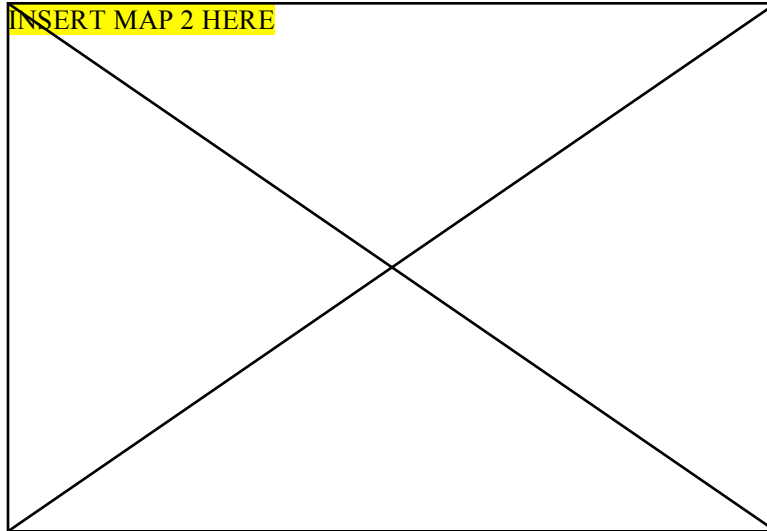


MAP 1: The Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir at the time of the partition of India in 1947. Three geographical regions (Ladakh-Baltistan-Gilgit, Kashmir, and Jammu), major rivers (Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab), and prominent towns are shown.

sect of Shia Islam (predominant in northern Gilgit and Ghizer district); and Sunnis (predominant in the southwest in Chilas and Astore). The main Gilgit town and surrounding valleys are thickly populated with Shias, while Buddhists tend to reside in Central Ladakh in the Indus Valley and surrounding areas. The languages spoken in this region are Balti, Bodhi, Borushaski, Chitrali, Hindko, and Shina. In Jammu and to its immediate east, the population is predominantly Hindu, while the western parts of Jammu are predominantly Muslim. The languages spoken in this region are Dogri, Gujari, Pahari, Pothwari, and Punjabi. In addition, the eastern section of Jammu houses pockets of Pogli-Kashtawari (Kashmiri) and Bhadrawahi, as well as sub-pockets of Siraji and Rambani. Residents of the Valley are Kashmiri-speaking and primarily Muslim, either Sunni or Shia, though a small percentage are also Hindu, Sikh, or Christian. Straddling the Kashmir Valley and the foothills of Jammu is the abode of the Gujjar/Bakarwal tribes, the shepherd community of the state who speak Gujari, a kin of Rajasthani Hindi. They are generally Muslim.

The 1947 war between India and Pakistan led to the division of the state, with Pakistan occupying western Baltistan and the Gilgit region (which Pakistan calls the Northern Areas) and the western parts of the Jammu and Kashmir regions between Muzaffarabad and Mirpur (which Pakistan calls Azad Kashmir). The line separating the Pakistan-occupied area and the remainder of the state, which is part of the Indian Union, became the cease-fire line on January 1, 1949 (see Map 2). Later, at the July 2, 1972 Simla meeting between the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan, the cease-fire line was renamed and converted to the Line of Control (LoC). In addition to these developments involving Pakistan, the Chinese occupied the uninhabited eastern part of Ladakh during the 1950s to enable them convenient access to Tibet, which they had earlier forcibly occupied. In 1963, Pakistan ceded the area of the Shaksgam Valley (near the Siachen Glacier) to the Chinese. By late 1963, then, Jammu and Kashmir State, which had acceded to India's control in 1947, was divided and under illegal occupation by both Pakistan and China, a situation that has not changed since.

The breakdown of the state's current population, according to the 2001 Census of India and the 1998 Census of Pakistan (extrapolated to 2001), is given in Table 1.



MAP 2: Jammu and Kashmir State in 2008

The killing and expulsion of all Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (henceforth called PoK) destroyed much of the state's religious diversity, though the state continues to be ethnically diverse.

Diversity in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (JKI)

The remainder of the state that is a part of the Indian Union (henceforth called JKI), maintains religious as well as ethnic diversity. Muslims continue to be a majority in JKI: they constituted about 75% of the population of an undivided Jammu and Kashmir in 1947 and make up approximately 67% of JKI's current population. The population of JKI, according to the 2001 Census, is 10.14 million. Table 2 shows the areas of three distinct geographical regions of JKI and their respective populations.

TABLE 1. *Geographical regions and population of the undivided state of Jammu and Kashmir*

<u>Region</u>	<u>Area</u> (Sq. Miles)	<u>Population</u> 2001 Census (Millions)
Ladakh	22,836	0.237
Jammu	10,152	4.430
Kashmir	6,158	5.477
	<i>39,146</i>	<i>10.144</i>
Northern Areas	25,026	0.945
'Azad' Kashmir	5,134	3.194
	<i>30,160</i>	<i>4.139</i>
Aksai Chin	14,500	0.000
Shaksgam	2,000	0.000
	<i>16,500</i>	<i>0.000</i>
Total	85,806	14.283

TABLE 2. *Proportion of area and population for different regions of JKI (in percent of total)*

<u>Region</u>	<u>Area</u>	<u>Population</u>
Ladakh	69.95	2.33
Jammu	18.93	43.68
Kashmir	12.42	53.99
Total	100.00	100.00

Population percentages in the table are based on the Census of India 2001. The table does not take into account the exodus of the Hindu religious minority from Kashmir to Jammu that occurred in and after 1990, which involved about 2.5% to 3% of the population of the state.

The linguistic composition of JKI is shown in Table 3. The numbers, based on the 1981 Census of India (Warikoo 1996), are percentages of the total population of the state. There is also a

correction for the migration of Kashmiri-speaking religious minorities from Kashmir to Jammu in the 1990s.

Finally, the regional, ethnic, and sectarian makeup of JKI is given in Table 4.¹ The population of Muslims is divided along the lines of sect and ethnicity because these divisions illuminate the population source of separatist sentiment in JKI, which derives its strength from the various groups of non-pastoral Sunnis of the Kashmir Valley. Among these separatist groups, the most vocal is the middle-class urban group concentrated in Srinagar and its immediate environs. Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Christians, regardless of their ethnicity or caste division, stand unequivocally for union with India. (Besides the groups listed in these tables, there are a number of other smaller ethnic groups, such as Pothwari-speaking Muslims and non-Muslims, Chibalis, and Gaddis.)

TABLE 3. *Regional breakup of different linguistic groups in JKI (in percent of total population)*

<u>Language</u>	<u>Kashmir</u>	<u>Jammu</u>	<u>Ladakh</u>	<u>Total</u>
Kashmiri	41.37	7.98	0.02	49.37
Dogri	0.05	24.24	0.00	24.29
Gujari	7.26	12.82	0.00	20.08
Ladakhi (Bodhi)	0.01	0.02	1.17	1.20
Balti	0.01	0.00	0.78	0.79
Punjabi, Pothwari, Shina, etc.	1.16	2.85	0.26	4.27
Total	49.86	47.91	2.23	100

The largest religious sect in JKI is Sunni Islam, whose followers constitute about 44% of the state's population and about 32% of the Valley's population. The largest ethnic group is Kashmiri-speaking: Kashmiri speakers in the Valley alone account for approximately 41% of the state's total population. Those who belong to both of these groups—i.e., Sunni and Kashmiri-speaking—constitute about 25% of the state's total population. Valley-based Kashmiri-speaking Sunni Muslims, as the largest of all of these groups, have dominated

the politics and administration of the state, playing a critical role in shaping the events that have led up to the present turmoil.

TABLE 4. *Regional breakup of religious groups in JKI
(in percent of total population)*

<u>Region</u>	<u>Ethnicity/Language</u>	<u>Shia</u>	<u>Sunni</u>	<u>Others*</u>	<u>Total</u>
Ladakh	Balti	0.78			0.78
	Bodhi, Shina, etc.	0.25		1.20	1.45
					2.23
Jammu	Gujjar/Bakarwal		10.64	2.18	12.82
	Other Muslims	1.25	1.60		2.85
	Others			32.24	32.24
					47.91
Kashmir	Kashmiris	16.77	24.60		41.37
	Shina, Balti, etc.	1.18			1.18
	Gujjar/Bakarwal		7.26		7.26
	Others			0.05	0.05
					49.86
Total		20.23	44.10	35.67	100

(*) *Others are Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Christians*

REVISITING 1947

The appointment of E. J. Colvin as the Prime Minister of the state in 1932 was welcomed by Abdullah since he saw it as an indication of continued support for his activities. But Abdullah failed to realize that he had only been a tool for British hands and that his utility was to end with Colvin's appointment. When the British subsequently abandoned him, Abdullah found it difficult to compete with other communalist contenders who were vying for leadership of the state's Muslims. His tactics of making inflammatory communalist speeches, which had earlier catapulted him into a leadership role, now evoked a strong punitive response from Colvin. For the next few years, he found himself in a kind of political wilderness. But in 1935, Abdullah met with Congress leaders and subsequently teamed

up with Prem Nath Bazaz, a politically prominent Kashmiri Hindu. Abdullah began to experiment with secular politics, presenting his new ideas at the 1938 annual session of the Muslim Conference, a communal party he had founded in 1932. A year later, the Muslim Conference was renamed the National Conference and opened its membership to all, regardless of religious persuasion.²

The National Conference became a genuine mass party after Kashmiri communists joined it in 1942. It announced a revolutionary New Kashmir Program, which the party formally adopted at its annual session in 1944. The program was highlighted by three charters: one for workers, one for peasants, and one for women. Abdullah, in his introduction to the New Kashmir Program, wrote:

In our times, Soviet Russia has demonstrated before our own eyes, not merely theoretically, but in her actual day to day life and development, that real freedom takes birth only from economic emancipation. The inspiring picture of the regeneration of the different nationalities and peoples of the U.S.S.R., and their welding together into the united mighty Soviet state that is throwing back its barbarous invaders with deathless heroism is an unanswerable argument for the building of democracy on the cornerstone of economic equality. (Abdullah 1944, cited in Saxena 1975:401)

The first step towards equality was to come from the revolutionary land reforms and cancellation of usurious rural debt that had become the hallmark of National Conference politics during its early years. The program found an admiring supporter in Jawaharlal Nehru and other progressive members of the Congress Party; Jinnah and his feudal and pro-imperialist Muslim League were openly opposed to it. It was this program that endeared the National Conference to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. For this simple reason, the two-nation theory found its graveyard in Kashmir Valley, despite the preponderance of Muslims there.

The Valley's overwhelming support for the National Conference and its fraternal Indian National Congress was evident in their response to the 1947 Pakistan-sponsored invasion of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan had been making sporadic military forays into the state during the months of September and October. Finally, Pakistan-assisted raiders launched a large-scale invasion on October 22, 1947. The raiders proceeded with lightening speed towards Srinagar, after looting and pillaging Muzaffarabad, Rajouri, Poonch, and Baramulla. In a matter of days, they killed thousands of civilians, as well as raped and kidnapped hundreds of women. N. N. Raina, a Kashmiri Communist Party of India activist working with the National Conference and witness to the events of 1947, recounts the response of the Kashmiris to the raid in his book *Kashmir Politics and Imperialist Manoeuvres*:

The invasion did not come as a complete surprise to the National Conference leadership, nor did they fumble for ideas, or get shell-shocked by its suddenness. In fact the reactionary purpose of the Mountbatten Award, its disruptive consequences for the people's movement, were nowhere grasped with greater clarity, even by the rank and file workers, than in Kashmir because of the political experience gained, almost as soon as the Partition Plan was announced, and also it being the central arena of imperialist conspiracy against the people's liberation.

The movement had been under pressure since the communal riots of March 1946 in Punjab, and they did their best to hold the virus on the other side of the border, and successfully prevented its crossing the border. ...

As the riots spread in mid-August, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh refugees from Sialkote, Rajauri, Mirpur, Muzaffarabad, Rawalpindi and Hazara – all found haven in Kashmir. By the time the invasion came in October 1947, there were some 23,000 of them

in this oasis of communal peace in a raging hell-fire all around it. ...

Meanwhile some influential refugees from the NWFP with close personal contacts among the Pathan elite, reached Srinagar in the second week of October. They had personal knowledge that Khan Bahadur Kuli Khan had been recruiting tribes in the Swat Valley for invasion of Kashmir. The communist group in the National Conference issued a handbill on the 14th or 15th of October warning that an invasion was being planned to take place before the onset of winter. (Raina 1988:150-151)

The invasion did come as expected and was followed by fast-moving events. On October 22, the raiders entered Kashmir at Garhi on the border with Pakistan and quickly advanced to Uri, wiping out 4 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles at Domel and a Medium Machine Gun Dogra picket north of Muzaffarabad. The state forces, spread over the long border with Pakistan, were stretched thin. Brigadier Rajinder Singh, the Officiating Chief of Staff of state forces, assembled a group of 150 men who faced 4,000 raiders at Uri. He held the raiders at Uri until October 24. That night his depleted forces withdrew to Mahora but successfully held their positions for two more days. On the night of October 26, they withdrew towards Rampur then to Baramulla, fighting and stalling the raiders until all of them were killed.

The raiders sacked Baramulla on October 26. Robert Trumbell, the *New York Times* correspondent who visited the town after the raiders were driven out by the Indian Army, issued the following report on November 10, 1947:

The city had been stripped of its wealth and young women before the tribesmen fled in terror, at midnight Friday, before the advancing Indian army. Surviving residents estimate that 3,000 of their fellow townsmen including four Europeans and a retired British Army Officer, known only as

Colonel Dykes, and his pregnant wife, were slain. ... A former town official said: 'the raiders forced 350 local Hindus into a house, with the intention of burning it down. The group of 100 raiders is said to be holding another five as hostages, on a high mountain, barely visible from the town. Today 24 hours after the Indian army entered Baramulla, only 1,000 were left of a normal population of about 14,000. (Trumbell 1947, cited in Brecher 1953:28)

Two days preceding the Baramulla raid, a desperate appeal had been received in New Delhi from state authorities. Abdullah fled to Delhi with his family on October 25 and appealed to Mahatma Gandhi to send Indian troops to Kashmir. The next day the Defense Committee of India met and considered the response to the Pakistan-sponsored invasion of Kashmir. V. P. Menon was dispatched that night to Srinagar to give his assessment of the situation. He flew back out of Srinagar Airport in the early morning hours of October 26, 1947, with no night facilities. The people who held pine torches to light the runway were the senior leaders of the National Conference: Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq, Syed Mir Qasim, and D. P. Dhar (Jha 1998:Appendix I).

On October 26, the Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession to India, and India promptly dispatched its first contingent of troops under the command of Lt. Col. D. R. Rai to Srinagar. Considering the immediacy of the threat to Srinagar, the 200-mile road link from Jammu to Srinagar could not be relied upon for a timely response. The road passed through a tunnel at 9,000 feet elevation through the Banihal Pass in the Pir Panjal mountain range, which receives about thirty feet of snow in the winter and was at that time almost impassable. The troops had thus to be flown into Srinagar on October 27.

Over a hundred civilian aircraft were immediately mobilized to fly troops, equipment and supplies to Srinagar. ... The ferry service to Srinagar

continued unabated up to November 17, during which time 704 sorties were flown from Delhi.

Seldom in the history of warfare has an operation been put through with no previous planning and with many handicaps, not the least of which were almost non-existent lines of communications and a complete lack of intelligence of enemy dispositions.

There was widespread jubilation among the citizens of Srinagar and the inhabitants of neighboring towns and villages. For five anxious days they had carried on the normal life, kept the essential services going, and maintained a strict discipline. Their morale was high, they did not give way to panic, and they organized bands of volunteers to maintain law and order and keep a strict watch on strategic points. For five days they faced manfully the alarming reports of the raiders' advance and their eyes were constantly cast to the skies in the hope of seeing the first Indian plane coming with sorely needed help and relief. They had collected all motor-vehicles and kept them ready to carry the first troops to the front. Local drivers were at the wheels ready to risk their lives in defending their land. (Bamzai 1962:682)

The National Conference took over the *de facto* administration of the state and organized a 10,000-person Kashmiri Peace Brigade in Srinagar to stall the invasion, prevent infiltration, and protect critical installations. *Mohalla* (neighborhood) committees were organized in Srinagar, night patrols were put into place, and all night one could hear their slogan: "*Hamla Awar Khabardar, Hum Kashmiri Hain Tayyar*" (Beware the invader, we Kashmiris are ready [to fight]).

In the meantime, in Baramulla, a thirty-five year old National Conference activist Mir Maqbool Sherwani

began working behind the lines, keeping up the morale of the besieged villages, urging them to resist and to stick together regardless of whether they were Hindu, Sikh or Muslim, assuring them that the help from Indian Army and People's Militia was on the way. Three times by skillfully planting rumours he decoyed bands of tribesmen and got them surrounded and captured by the Indian infantry. But the fourth time he was captured himself.

The tribesmen took Sherwani to the stoop of a little apple shop in the town square of Baramula, and the terrified townspeople were driven into the square in front of him with the butts of rifles. Knowing Sherwani's popularity with the people, his captors ordered him to make a public announcement that joining Pakistan was the best solution for Muslims. When he refused, he was lashed to the porch posts with ropes, his arms spread out in the shape of a cross, and he was told he must shout, "Pakistan zindabad: Sher-i-Kashmir [Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah] murdabad."

It was a curious thing that the tribesmen did next. I don't know why these savage nomads should have thought of such a thing, unless their sight of the sacred figures in St. Joseph's Chapel on the hill just above had suggested it to them. They drove nails through the palms of Sherwani's hands. On his forehead they pressed a jagged piece of tin and wrote on it: "The punishment of a traitor is death."

Once more Sherwani cried out, "Victory to Hindu-Muslim unity," and fourteen tribesmen shot bullets into his body. (Bourke-White 1949:210-211)

That was November 7. The next day Baramullah was liberated. When the first squadron of armored cars reached Srinagar by the

200-mile perilous road through Banihal Pass on November 5, 1947, there was jubilation in Srinagar. The whole convoy route in Srinagar was lined with cheering crowds waving the Indian tricolor flag.

The brutality of the Pakistani hordes in Kashmir Valley was surpassed in the Jammu region. Rajauri, liberated by Indian troops in mid-April 1948, suffered much more than what Baramulla experienced in the Valley. A town of only 15,000 people, Rajauri had fallen to the raiders in November 1947 and experienced its first massacre then. Pakistan held the town for about six months, until Indian troops liberated it on April 12, 1948.

The atrocities committed by the hostiles in Rajauri put Baramulla in the shade. Our troops expected a warm welcome from 5,000 refugees as well as local inhabitants. When they entered the town, they were appalled by an eerie silence. Rajauri was a city of the dead and dying.

Before the hostiles departed, they had carried out a general massacre of the non-Muslim population. Heaps of rubble, mass graves and decomposing corpses told the tale. So did the sword and the hatchet wounds and burns on the person of the survivors, who slowly trickled back to their destroyed homes.

Of the 600 houses in town, half had been destroyed, some by fire and others by picks and shovels. In the bazaar, all that was left were a few pots and pans and some cooked chappaties left behind by the raiders in their haste to get out. This was the second massacre that Rajauri had witnessed. The first was staged when the raiders entered the town in flush of victory. (Bamzai 1962:690)

Indian troops rescued about 1200 to 1500 refugees, around 500 of whom had been lined up to be shot. The troops found three gaping

pits full of corpses, each fifty square yards in area and fifteen feet deep. More mass graves were later discovered by patrols. Many women had been kidnapped, and some had even committed suicide rather than be captured. The town had been decimated.

The invasion had been planned at the highest levels of the Pakistan government. One of the participants in its planning and organization, Akbar Khan, details the conspiracy in his 1970 book *Raiders in Kashmir*:

Nehru called us raiders. He did so in a derogatory sense. But what he did not know that raiding is, nowadays, an accepted and very highly developed branch of the art of war. ... So we can, I think, without indignity, retain the name raiders. ... Besides, as raiders, we may perhaps also qualify for sitting in that distinguished gallery of personalities like Chingiz Khan, Timur Lang, Mahmud of Ghazni, and even Alexander, whom some historians called raiders. (Khan 1970:Preface)

The massacres, rapes, and kidnappings in which these Pakistani hordes engaged definitively earned Akbar Khan a place in this “distinguished galley of personalities,” along with the military he represented and his civilian superiors, all the way to up to Liaqat Ali Khan and Jinnah. The first two names alone in this gallery—Chingiz Khan and Timur Lang—account for the slaughter of “around 30,000,000 Persian, Arab, Hindu, Russian, Chinese, European, and other men women and children” (Rummel 1994).

Pakistan was to repeat what Khan identifies as its “highly developed branch of the art of war” later in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) in 1971, where according to some estimates as many as 3 million people were slaughtered and over 10 million terrorized into neighboring India. In the 1980s, it was Afghanistan’s turn. In a decade-long fundamentalist war in Afghanistan, 2 million were killed and 6 million turned into refugees. In the 1990s, it was again Kashmir, with a death toll of 40,000 and rising as the Pakistan-sponsored *jehad* continues there, claiming new victims every day.

THE BRITISH ROLE IN THE 1947 WAR

After retreating from the subcontinent, Britain desired to maintain friendly relations with both India and Pakistan. But when the two newly created Dominions of the subcontinent went to war in 1947, the British chose to placate a feudal Pakistan willing to work as an imperialist outpost in Asia rather than take the side of the aggrieved party, the anti-imperialist India. This became possible because Britain still exercised considerable control over the new states.

The first effect of continuing British control in the subcontinent was felt in Gilgit in Jammu and Kashmir State. The region, which had been leased in 1935 to the British for a sixty-year period, had reverted back to the Maharaja on the lapse of Paramountcy. The British officers who were in control now reported to the Maharaja and were expected to defend the region when the Pakistan-sponsored invasion was launched on Jammu and Kashmir in October 1947. But soon after Jammu and Kashmir decided to accede to India, these British officers switched their loyalty to Pakistan and engineered a series of military revolts in Gilgit by Gilgit Scouts (under Major W. Brown with the help of his adjutant, Capt. Mathison), followed by similar revolts in Chitral, Hunza, Dir, and Nagar. Ultimately, almost the whole Gilgit-Baltistan region was gifted by the British and Britain-supported rebels to Pakistan.

Britain's continuing control over the new states was obvious during the 1947 war. The Governor General of India, Lord Louis Mountbatten, was a Briton, and even though he was supposed to be only a titular head, he became the Chairman of the Defense Committee of India, a role that he used to advance British interests at India's expense during the war. The Supreme Commander of the military forces of both India and Pakistan was Field Marshal Claude John Auchinleck until November 30, 1947, when the Supreme Command was dissolved at India's insistence. Auchinleck had incurred the hostility of Indian leaders for his partiality towards Pakistan in the division of military stores and his role in the Junagadh affair. The Commander-in-Chief of the Indian forces was General Rob Lockhart until January 1948 and then Roy Bucher; the Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistani forces was General Douglas Gracey. All of them were Britons. Lockhart resigned under pressure

when Nehru learned that he had failed to inform the Indian Government of the impending invasion of Jammu and Kashmir that Gracey had communicated to him. Lockhart's replacement, Roy Bucher, was no better. He overruled Maj. General K. S. Thimayya when the latter proposed air strikes against a large concentration of Pathan invaders in the Poonch Sector in 1948 (Chopra 1990:53).

British sympathies lay with Pakistan, a likely future military ally. As a result, even though India was militarily in a position to throw out the Pakistani army and Pakistan-supported raiders, it did not do so because of the subversion within. For instance, India could have taken the war to West Punjab. Nehru had considered this option on October 27, and India ultimately did exactly this in 1965 in order to wipe out Pakistan's military advantage in Jammu and Kashmir. But India chose not to do so at that time and instead settled for a Pakistani-dictated and British-supported division of the state. A letter written by Gracey to Mountbatten at that time warned:

if Pakistan is not to face another serious refugee problem with about 2,750,000 people uprooted from their home; if India is not to be allowed to sit on the door step of Pakistan, likely to enter the rear and on the flank ...; if civilian and military morale is not to be affected to a dangerous extent; and if subversive political forces are not to be encouraged and let loose within Pakistan itself, it is imperative that the Indian Army is not allowed to advance beyond the general line Uri-Poonch-Naushehra. (Brecher 1953:45)

In other words, Gracey was advocating the division of the state along the Uri-Poonch-Naushehra line, which ultimately did become the cease-fire line between India and Pakistan. The possibility of such division had been predicted by TASS correspondent O. Orestov, who was in Srinagar in November 1947. Orestov had pointed out that the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), which was still under Congress rule, bordered Muzaffarabad in the west of the state. But the capture of Muzaffarabad by Indian troops would

not have been to Pakistan's liking, and the British in India ensured that it did not happen (Raina 1988).

EXIT BRITAIN, ENTER THE UNITED STATES

With Britain weakened after World War II, the United States began to take over the major tasks of imperialism worldwide. Indeed, this shift had already begun during the War to some extent: for instance, Major Loren Tutell, Commander of the Fifth Combat Camera Unit in the Pacific, and Nicol Smith, an Intelligence Agent with OSS who had served in France, India, Siam, Ceylon, and China, had explored Kashmir and surrounding areas for a "level spot for a landing," i.e., an area for an air base (Chopra 1990:23). In August 1946, the American Red Cross opened its office in Srinagar. Around the same time, the National Geographic Society of America sent its photographer Volkmar Wentzel to Kashmir. In 1947, an American, Russel K. Haight, participated in the tribal invasion of Kashmir and is reported to have served as a Brigadier-General in the Pakistan-organized tribal army. Americans chose for some time to defer to the more experienced British in matters of strategy in this part of the world. The British had long been engaged in their Great (Central Asian) Game of containing Russia and later the Soviet Union. This containment had assumed increased importance after 1919 when Amanullah Khan canceled Afghanistan's Alliance Treaty with the British and established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Britain had succeeded in 1935 in obtaining control of Gilgit and gifting it to Pakistan in the 1947 war. Other British accomplishments in which Mountbatten played a very crucial role include the partition of India, the 1947 war in Kashmir, and India's reference to the United Nations Security Council in 1948. In short, the British knew this part of the world much better than the Americans. The Americans, therefore, had to rely on Britain as facilitators for their work in South Asia. The nature of the relationship between the United States and Britain with respect to policy in South Asia was succinctly expressed by the British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin in a conversation in London with Loy Henderson, who was on his way to India after being appointed U.S. Ambassador in December 1948: "There is a country where we must keep together, although you must let us be in the shop

window” (Bevin 1948, cited in Brands 1991:198). In essence, Henderson and Bevin jointly proposed a common U.S.-British front for dealing with the government of India that would not give the impression that the two were in collusion.

But by the end of 1949, the situation in Asia had dramatically changed and so did the American strategy. Chiang Kai Shekh’s forces had been routed, and mainland China came under the control of the communists, who quickly joined with the Soviet Union in a treaty of alliance and friendship. Additionally, the Soviet Union had made an amazingly quick recovery from the devastation of World War II and had also broken the American monopoly on the atom bomb. Britain had been considerably weakened by the war, and even though the United States and Britain continued to coordinate their work, the Americans began to take a leading role in the affairs of South Asia.

The overriding goal of both Britain and America after 1949 was to engage aggressively in the ‘containment’ of China and the Soviet Union. It was this strategic goal, together with a desire for unfettered access to Gulf oil and India’s refusal to be part of this Anglo-American game that dictated U.S. policy towards India, Pakistan, and Kashmir. On August 14, 1948, the *Economist* outlined these conflicts in the following manner:

Apart from the fact that Pakistan is the largest and perhaps the most influential Muslim state, Karachi provides an excellent harbour, commanding the approaches to the Persian Gulf with its oil installations, while the NWFP and West Punjab are situated only a few hundred miles from the highly industrialized areas of Russian Turkistan. ... How then does India fit into this picture? ... The answer seems to be that India does not fit at all. (Raina 1988:174)

An important goal of Anglo-Americans in South Asia thus became to wrest control of Jammu and Kashmir from India. This would secure access to the northern regions of Gilgit, Baltistan, and Ladakh, thereby extending the American reach to the borders of the Soviet Union and China. Jammu and Kashmir’s independence could

easily be bought by U.S. dollars, enabling Americans to establish military bases in the state, monitor the countries that surround it (i.e., Soviet Union, China, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan), and facilitate subversion and military intervention in the region.

India's complaint against Pakistan to the United Nations in 1948, at Mountbatten's insistence, provided the Americans a much wanted opportunity for direct intervention in Kashmir. The United States, with the help of Britain, turned Kashmir into a dispute between the aggressor and the aggrieved, and then pretended to be an honest broker in the 'dispute.' Anglo-American maneuvers in pursuance of this goal included the appointment of Admiral Chester Nimitz as the Plebiscite Administrator over Indian objections; the insistence on the constitution of an 'interim' Kashmir government, which amounted to the dissolution of the popular government of the National Conference; the dissolution of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan after its Third Interim Report in which the Czechoslovakian member, Dr. Oldrich Chyle, presented a dissenting view that took Britain and the United States to task for interference in the Commission's workings; and the appointment of many mediators afterwards. With the formation of the Peoples' Republic of China in 1949, it became important to win over India in furtherance of American policies in that part of the world. But the United States viewed a number of India's actions as hostile, such as Nehru's criticism of the American role in the Korean war. Moreover, India had refused to sign on to the U.S.-imposed peace treaty with Japan, even though it had been signed by all American allies including Pakistan (India ultimately signed a separate peace treaty with Japan). Finally, India had insisted that the People's Republic of China be admitted into the United Nations. Indeed, even the *New York Times* called Nehru "The Lost Leader" and "one of the greatest disappointments of the post war era" (Raina 1988:191).

INDEPENDENT KASHMIR AND THE U.S. ROLE

When everything else failed, America turned to Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, the leader of the 1940s movement against autocracy in Jammu and Kashmir, which had been won with India's support. After returning from Lake Success in 1949, Abdullah began

distancing himself from Kashmiri communists, who had played a key role in the anti-Maharajah movement and helped the National Conference draft its New Kashmir Program of land to the tillers, workers' rights, and women's rights. Discussions began to take place among Abdullah loyalists within the National Conference on a 'third way' to the resolution of the 'Kashmir problem.' In an editorial on July 13, 1950, the National Conference's own newspaper, *Khidmat*, wrote: "We could easily arrive at a settlement with the Americans but for the communists" (cited in Raina 1988:210). A full one-year campaign followed that sought to purge progressive elements within the National Conference. This witch hunt was one of the factors that killed the democratic core of the National Conference movement and strengthened communalist and opportunist elements in the party.

When Ambassador Loy Henderson met Sheikh Abdullah in September 1950, he brought up the idea of an independent Kashmir. This precipitated an immediate and marked change in the attitude of the Western Press towards Sheikh Abdullah. *The Daily Telegraph*, the *Washington Post*, the *Manchester Guardian*, and the *New York Times* all began showering praises on Abdullah's leadership (Raina 1988). When the Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir was convened on November 5, 1951, Michael James reported in the *New York Times*:

Hints have been made that once the Constituent Assembly begins to function, there is a possibility of creating an opposition to accession to India and the creation of what will be a popular independence movement. (Raina 1988:214)

The ambitious and unprincipled Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah—a communalist in the early 1930s and a vacillating supporter of unity with a progressive India in the 1940s—fell in the 1950s to the temptation of an independent Kashmir supported by the United States.

In 1952, Chester Bowles, the U.S. Ambassador to India, visited a number of groups in Srinagar and is reported to have stated that UN armies should be brought into Kashmir to secure the stability needed for independence. According to the Italian

newspaper *Avanti*, Bowles asserted that “the task of these armed forces consists in ensuring in the future a stable internal situation for the independent state of Kashmir, a stability which will naturally be closely bound up with the political, diplomatic, and military interests of the Americans in Central and South Asia” (*Avanti*, cited in Raina 1988:219). Moreover, soon after Eisenhower’s election in November of the same year, John Foster Dulles, Harold Stassen, and Adlai Stevenson planned similar visits to India. Stevenson visited Srinagar in May 1953 and talked with Abdullah for three days (May 1 to 3); the last day’s meeting lasted seven hours. *The Manchester Guardian* reported that “On his world tour Mr. Stevenson visited Kashmir, and seemed to have listened to suggestions that the best solution for Kashmir could be independence from both India and Pakistan” (cited in Raina 1988:219).

Just three weeks after Stevenson’s visit, Abdullah placed before the Working Committee of the National Conference his plan for an independent Kashmir. The Working Committee meeting stretched to three weeks; ultimately, the independent Kashmir proposal was rejected, and accession to India was endorsed by a vote of 15 to 4. But that did not deter Abdullah. In a public meeting at Ganderbal on July 31, 1953, he hinted at his idea of an independent Kashmir. But what turned out to be the last straw was when he demanded the resignation of one of his Cabinet Ministers. This action turned the rift in his five-member Cabinet into a crisis. Three Ministers of his cabinet asked for his dismissal. On August 9, Abdullah was served dismissal notice as well as a warrant of arrest.

America’s interest in Kashmir during this time period is best summed up by Ambassador Bowles himself in his book *An Ambassador’s Report*:

When I was in Kashmir in the fall of 1952, some two-thirds of the officers on the cease-fire line were Americans, and not all of them handled themselves with discretion. The last negotiator appointed by the United Nations was a distinguished American, Frank Graham, and the administrator, who was selected by the United Nations to take charge of the plebiscite, if and

when it was conducted, was still another American, Admiral Chester Nimitz. Despite the high caliber of these men, and all the good will in the world, the UN effort to achieve a Kashmir settlement inevitably took on the character of an American operation. (Bowles 1954:254)

Imperialist meddling worsened in the mid-1950s as Pakistan joined various military pacts in the imperialist camp. The Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement between Pakistan and the United States was signed on May 19, 1954. This was followed by Pakistan joining Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in September 1954 and the Baghdad Pact (later known as the Central Treaty Organization, or CENTO) on September 23, 1955. India knew that by these actions imperialism had strengthened a belligerent and hostile state in its neighborhood. This had a direct impact on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

At the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the Kashmir issue was debated year after year from 1948 through 1952. Various mediators appointed by the Security Council, whose work continued through 1958, kept Kashmir on the front burner. With the backing of imperialism, almost every event of any significance in the Valley was picked up by the Pakistani media and politicians and given extensive publicity in international forums, including the UNSC. In 1957, for instance, when the Constituent Assembly in JKI ratified Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India, Pakistan promptly protested and brought it to the notice of the Security Council.

A subsequent controversy regarding the disappearance of a Holy Relic in Srinagar in 1963 likewise became an opportunity for Pakistan to raise the Kashmir issue in the Security Council. The Relic, believed to be the hair of Prophet Mohammed and kept at a mosque in Srinagar, disappeared on December 26. Although the Relic was recovered shortly thereafter, approximately 15,000 Hindus lost their lives in East Pakistan two weeks later from communal savagery inspired by the incident. Half a million minorities fled to India. But Z. A. Bhutto, rather than expressing regret for the communal carnage in Pakistan, brought up the Holy Relic incident in the Security Council. In response to Bhutto's long speech, a disgusted M. C. Chagla, who represented India, wondered

why the Security Council was convened and observed that the Security Council had become a forum for Pakistan “to carry on its agitation against my Government and my country.” A new Prime Minister, Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq, took over in JKI in early 1964. This too became another opportunity for Pakistan to raise the Kashmir issue. But by this time, India was fed up with Pakistan’s rituals and refused to participate in the discussions.

This diplomatic war against India was supplemented by a covert war of sabotage, aimed at undermining the government authority in Jammu and Kashmir and obstructing the state’s integration with the Indian Union. Unable to achieve its goals, Pakistan invaded Jammu and Kashmir a second time in 1965. The invasion failed, but Pakistan would not give up. By 1971 terrorist cells had been planted in the Valley, and one of the first terrorist acts was committed by a new organization established in 1968, Al Fateh. An Indian Airlines aircraft was hijacked to Lahore in 1971, where Z. A. Bhutto personally greeted the hijackers at the airport. The aircraft was destroyed by Pakistani authorities. Towards the end of 1971 came another war between Pakistan and India. After a near-genocide of the Bengali population of East Pakistan, Pakistan lost its eastern half. Despite this major setback, Pakistan’s subversive activities in the Valley continued through the 1970s.

Then followed the 1980s’ fundamentalist war in neighboring Afghanistan, orchestrated by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Funding was provided by the United States and Saudi Arabia, weapons by the United States, and the driving *Wahabbi* ideology by the Saudis. Pakistan provided training and management. *Jehadi* culture, unknown to South Asia in its extent and intensity until then, spread and became a dominant industry of the region. Flush with the success of its *jihad* in Afghanistan, the military-*mullah* establishment of Pakistan then turned these terrorist forces east towards neighboring India. Hundreds of terrorist training camps were set up in PoK and Pakistan. Thousands of terrorists crossed over every year to engage in murder and mayhem in the state, while the officials of the Clinton Administration kept on denying the existence of Pakistan’s support of terrorism.

In 1993, Robin Raphael, the Assistant Secretary of State, South Asia Desk in the Clinton cabinet, went so far as to question the legality of Jammu and Kashmir’s accession to India, reviving,

not too subtly, the Dulles-Stevenson era desires of the United States for an independent Jammu and Kashmir. However, with the establishment of U.S. military bases in Central Asia and Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11, as well as recent changes in Indian foreign policy, the independence of Jammu and Kashmir has now lost its relative importance. Yet the idea of an independent Kashmir under U.S. control guided American policy for almost six decades.

FROM SEPARATIST BLACKMAIL TO *JEHAD*

The significance of the imperialist push to sever Jammu and Kashmir from India was not lost either on the separatists or on various political leaders of the Kashmir Valley. The separatists, who had been an insignificant minority in 1947, realized the power of their demands because any public expression of separatism invited international attention. So did opportunistic political leaders. The seeds for this variety of politics were sown by Abdullah after 1949, when he began to use secession as a weapon to intimidate and bully the Central Government into yielding to his demands.

One of the crucial demands fulfilled by the Central Government as early as 1952 was to allow a level of autonomy to the state that bordered on virtual independence. This was embodied in Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. It gave Abdullah dictatorial powers, which he abused by suppressing the development of democratic pluralism in the state. He continued to play this game until his tactics back-fired, causing a serious split in his own party and leading to his removal from the political scene in August 1953. With Abdullah's expulsion from the National Conference, the leadership of the party passed to Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed. Bakshi's administration brought immediate and long-term benefits to the people, made possible by the lavish generosity of the Central Government, which rushed in with liberal aid. This generosity was not accompanied by the normally expected oversight, because Article 370 of the Indian Constitution simply prohibited it. The lack of this oversight led to widespread corruption, nepotism, and cronyism, criminal waste of resources and development funds, and manipulation of elections.

Bakshi too had seen India's vulnerability, but he was much shrewder in playing the game than Abdullah, whose inflated ego and hot-headedness had caused his downfall.

[Bakshi] knew that if the elements, who were struggling against India, turned weak it would result in weakening his power which could end also. Conscious of it he kept financing, though secretly, some people of the Plebiscite Front and the Political Conference. Some other Pro-Pakistani elements too received liberal financial help from him. He told me many times "existence of such elements was necessary otherwise New Delhi will do here anything it liked." (Butt 1981:69-70)

Indeed, the political leaders of almost all shades in the Valley understood that the "existence of such elements" was essential to maintain the flow of unrestricted Central funds into the state.

The policy was effective. Between 1950-51 and 1987-88, the proportion of Central Revenues to the total revenues of the state increased from 3.71% to 72.04% (Misri and Bhatt 1994:54). Among the seventeen largest states of the Indian Union (excluding the Union territory of Delhi) in 1970-71, the net per capita income of JKI ranked twelfth. By 1981-82, it had improved its rank to sixth, a rank which it maintained until 1985-86. JKI was thus ahead of industrial West Bengal at rank 7, Karnataka at rank 8, Andhra Pradesh at rank 9, Kerala at rank 10. U.P. and Bihar were far behind, at ranks 15 and 17, respectively. The state also improved its literacy rate from 5% in 1947 to 54% in 2001, with 66% male literacy. The 1998 infant mortality rate, at 45 per thousand, was the lowest of all other states except Kerala. The 55th Round of the National Sample Survey (2000) reports the poverty rate in 1999 in JKI at 3.5%, which was the lowest of all the states in the Indian Union except Delhi. This compares with a poverty rate of 14.1% for Gujarat and 25.0% in Maharashtra, the two states considered to be the most economically advanced states in the Indian Union. Indeed, Central funding and other support has been so massive that these impressive indicators of progress were made possible despite pervasive corruption. A 2005 survey, conducted by Transparency

International India along with the Centre for Media Studies (2005), found that of the nineteen largest states of the Indian Union with population of over 10 million, JKI is the second most corrupt state in India, after Bihar.

Among the fourteen districts of the state, Srinagar district stands ahead of the rest, as measured by various development indices. On the Social Index, Srinagar scored 58, on the Infrastructural Index 137, and on the Economic Index 91. The lowest scores for these Indices were 18, 48, and 11, respectively, in two districts in the Jammu region (Misri and Bhatt 1994:63-64). Yet it is from Srinagar district—with its non-pastoral urban Sunni elite who have controlled the state's politics and administration since 1947—that separatist voices emanate. The separatist sentiment in the Valley serves this corrupt elite well for it directs popular anger for state's misgovernance at Delhi. Separatism has thus been deliberately and assiduously fostered by the corrupt and wealthy in Srinagar to escape the wrath of the population. Such tactics take Islamist colors and therefore receive Pakistan's support as well as imperialist backing. Separatism thus also has an international dimension, in which Pakistan has been a critical link.

CONCLUSIONS

Had the imperialist interest in Jammu and Kashmir and the accompanying international attention been missing, the utility of the secessionist card would have been lost. The democratic process in the state would have been strengthened: Kashmiris would have yielded a proportionate share of political power and administrative authority to non-Kashmiri communities in the state, who would have received equitable representation, attention, and development funds; and the state would have developed a secular culture. The Center's largesse would have been dictated by economic criteria rather than by political considerations. Interference by Pakistan may have been an irritant but could have been effectively kept in check. However, the geographical location of the region was too important for the imperialists to ignore.

In 1975, Abdullah was back at the helm in JKI and stayed there until his death in 1982. This period of Abdullah showed him in full communalist regalia. He strengthened fundamentalist forces

in the state: hundreds of places, villages, and towns were stripped of their pre-Islamic names and given new Islamized names; more Jamat-i-Islami schools were opened; a medical college reserved for Arab students was constructed; and many overtly communal policies were put into effect. By allowing Friday prayers in Government offices, the state administrative machinery was steadily Islamized. Pakistani and Saudi money, which began to arrive in large quantities, accelerated the process. This was Abdullah's parting gift to Jammu and Kashmir.

While imperialism was wreaking havoc in neighboring Afghanistan in the 1980s and laying foundations for the institution of *jihad*, Abdullah had already prepared a receptive ground for *jihad* in Kashmir. In the mid-1980s, *jihad* was successfully steered east. Islamized Kashmiri youth, fed romantic fantasies of an independent Kashmir or of *Nizam-e-Mustafa* (the system of Prophet Mohammed), became the earliest carriers of this *jehadi* virus and became cannon-fodder in Pakistan's proxy war. They were soon replaced by hard-core Islamists from within and without Kashmir. Kashmir was no longer Gandhi's "shining example of secularism," as he had named it in 1947. In 1990 alone, the year *jihad* began in the Valley in full fury, most of the 300,000 minority Hindus were driven away by Islamist terrorism while hundreds more were killed. Over the next two decades over 40,000 civilians, terrorists, and security personnel were killed.

The major blame for Jammu and Kashmir's steep decline into intolerance and terrorism rests with imperialism. Pakistan, who partnered with imperialism and was its tool, contributed to this degeneration in a direct way, but it could not have succeeded without the support and encouragement of imperialist powers. Pakistan is America's gateway to the riches of Central Asia and will remain the United States' key ally in Asia in the foreseeable future. In fact, the United States has already declared Pakistan to be a major non-NATO ally. In other words, Pakistan has a license to continue its *jihad* in Jammu and Kashmir until the time it begins to subvert U.S. goals in the region. Even if *jihad* stops or is decisively defeated, it will take years, if not decades, to rebuild the secular and democratic institutions in Jammu and Kashmir that have undergone continuous erosion over the years as a result of imperialist meddling

and Pakistan's proximity. Until that day dawns, the agony of Jammu and Kashmir will continue.

NOTES

¹ These numbers are best estimates, based on previous Special Censuses or demographic studies (Warikoo 1996; Om 1999:54-63). For instance, there are conflicting estimates regarding the proportion of the Gujjar population in Kashmir province; the difference between the most extreme of these estimates is about 6%. The figures reported in Tables 3 and 4 represent the average of these estimates, which puts the Gujjar population in Kashmir at a little over 7%. Any other demographic changes after 1981 are expected to have an insignificant impact on the percentages reported in these Tables.

² The Muslim Conference was revived in 1940 as an appendage of the Muslim League, dominated by non-Kashmiris. It was given a new life, albeit an anemic one, by Jinnah during his 1944 visit to the Valley.

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17

THE WORLD-SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF ECONOMIC HISTORY

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In that Empire, the Art of Cartography reached such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied a whole city and the map of the Empire, a whole Province. In time those Enormous Maps no longer sufficed and the Colleges of Cartographers raised a Map of the Empire that was the size of the Empire and coincided with it exactly ... the Following Generations understood that the expanded Map was Useless, and ... relinquished it to the Inclemencies of the Sun and ... Winters. (Jorge Borges 1960:143-144)¹

Historians are often asked to review books whose contents overlap to some extent with works they published earlier. Since the appearance of my *Before European Hegemony* (Abu-Lughod 1989a), three such books came to me for review. One, by Jim Blaut (1992), 'confirmed' many of my views about Eurocentrism and world systems, although I thought the author was *too* extreme in his critique of conventional scholarship, which he dismissed as pure Western intellectual bias.² The other two were more unsettling to my confidence, because they were so sincere and temperate, while viewing 'my period' through such very different optics.

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The first, by historian Alan Smith (1991), was yet another entry into the debate about why the West ‘rose’ and how Europe transformed the ‘rest of the world’ after 1400. It joined the enormous literature about the European-centered world system, primarily from the sixteenth century onward. His opening three chapters, however, examined the pre-sixteenth century world-system, asking “why the wider world was unable to sustain the momentum it once generated and [to] maintain the lead over Europe it once enjoyed” (Smith 1991:231). Despite Smith’s attempts to make his book less dismissive of Eastern accomplishments, he ended with a commonly encountered explanation: that Eastern cultures lost their dynamism because they failed to develop Western-style capitalism, a thesis refuted in my *Before European Hegemony*, which Smith could not respond to because it came out after he completed his text.³

This was disconcerting, to say the least. How had we reached such different conclusions? Smith tended to accept the existing ‘line’ of many Western historians on the pre-sixteenth century period, buttressing his discussion chiefly by references to their secondary sources, whereas I had questioned this received wisdom. Stimulated by doubts and alternative hypotheses, I had therefore examined far more (and somewhat different) secondary sources and had spent much more time examining primary sources, at least those that were available in French, English, and German translations. The end result was a narrative that reconceptualized the period. Who is right? I don’t know. But the discrepancies between his account and mine are great. Blaut would have dismissed Smith’s book as just another example of Eurocentric ‘tunnel vision,’ but I am less sanguine about this ‘easy way out.’

The second book—with a with a very different optic and one that clearly cannot be dismissed as Eurocentric—was Jerry Bentley’s (1993) *Old World Encounters*, which I consider a sound and even exciting addition to the growing literature on the premodern world system. Bentley and I share a commitment to examining world history through more than Western eyes⁴ and an assumption that any attempt to write global history must treat the parts of the world as interconnected and interactive. And yet, the basic variables we used to trace such interconnectedness and subsystem integration differed drastically.

For the sake of simplicity one can think of the process of globalization as taking place along three related dimensions: the political, the economic, and the cultural, although these are always intertwined (see, e.g., Sklair 1992). In this explanatory trinity of 'causes,' Bentley's *Old World Encounters* comes down squarely in the cultural camp. Paying special attention to ideological, religious, and other cultural forces, Bentley reconceptualizes the global system between roughly 800 and 1500, arguing convincingly and with copious examples that the world's 'great' religions played central roles in spreading and channeling not only cultural patterns but trade and political alliances in the premodern world. Using paths of religious conversion and selective migratory movements of traders, jurists, and priests as his most powerful explanatory variables, he reminds us secularists that we cannot afford to ignore religious factors if we are to understand the causes and consequences of the specific geographical expansions that gave shape to global patterns over centuries of fluidity and change.⁵

In contrast, until fairly recently global histories of premodern times were heavily focused on political and military empires, which may account for the error Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) makes when he claims in *The Modern World-System*, Volume 1, that before the sixteenth century, there were only world empires—not world economies making up a singular world system in which trade and the division of labor yielded an increasingly globalized economic system. It has been the task of other scholars to support the primacy Wallerstein gave to economic factors, but to argue that such world economies were also found much earlier and in non-European places (e.g., Ekholm 1980; Curtin 1984; Abu-Lughod 1989a; Frank and Gills 1993). Their works demonstrate that a number of times and places in the premodern period, complex interregional, if not international, trading systems developed whose range far exceeded that of any empire. While acknowledging the significance of military power and cultural affinities, these works tend to make economic variables central.

So—who is right? Or is that the wrong question? If we grant that, as the epigraph reminds us, a map of the world as large as the world would be useless, then some principles of selection and interpretation are necessary to organize the materials. However, this leaves open a number of 'right paths.' I want to argue in this essay

that multiple visions can be enriching, even though fraught with difficulties and confusion.

METATHEORETICAL DILEMMAS

The more I work in the field of global history, the more convinced I become that definitive answers to historical questions are impossible, and the more intrigued I have become with the process of ‘making history.’⁶ And my *crise de conscience* has now begun to spread alarmingly to all of the social sciences as well. My concerns are, of course, not new. In his 1931 review of Werner Sombart’s *Die Drei Nationalökonomien*, Robert Park, taking a much more philosophical and sanguine position than I can manage, readily acknowledges that:

Historical knowledge is based on, and limited by, experience and insight; the insight of the man [sic] who writes, but also the insight of the man [sic] who reads. Therefore, as has been frequently pointed out, history has to be constantly rewritten to make it intelligible to each new generation. The social sciences are more or less in the same situation as history. (Park 1992[1931]:190-195)

The issue, then, is not about ‘making’ history, but about ‘remaking’ it. However, that moves us no closer to a resolution, especially when the passage of time alone does not account for the discrepancies.⁷

I am not taking a radical ‘postmodernist’ position that leaves readers without criteria for discriminating among different accounts of history. Radical hermeneutics has gone too far, in my opinion. While we must all modestly acknowledge the limitations of knowledge, I do believe that some accounts are ‘more credible’ than others, and that while there is no absolute metric against which to measure ‘truth’ in interpretation, there are certainly some guidelines governing methodological integrity and responsibility, and some ways to strengthen reflexivity in a writer (see Clifford and Marcus 1986). If we did not believe something of this sort, we would have to give up all hope that ‘progress’ is possible in the rewriting of

history. I find support for this belief from those very philosophers and epistemologists whose writings have sometimes been cited to buttress discussions of the relativity of knowledge. Gadamer's (1989) immunizing prescription, which I will follow for the rest of this essay, is reflexivity (see also Wachterhauser 1986).⁸

But before that, let me begin with the obvious point that all narrative is 'constructed' by an author, or to play with Marx's phrase, "men and women make their historical narratives, but not entirely as they choose." This statement is less controversial when applied to the narratives of fiction writers, so we might first present some quotations from practitioners of the art of fiction before proceeding to 'historical science.'

The first quotation I take from novelist Jeanette Winterson's book, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*:

Of course that is not the whole story, but that is the way of stories; we make them what we will. It's a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained ... Every one who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently ... People like to separate story-telling which is not fact from history which is fact ... Very often history is a means of denying the past. Denying the past is to refuse to recognize its integrity. To fit it, force it ... to such out the spirit until it looks the way you think it should. We are all historians in our small way. (Winterson 1987:93-94)

The second quotation comes from Richard Wright's preface to *Native Son*.⁹ Wright says that every imaginative novel:

Represents the merging of two extremes; it is an intensely intimate expression ... couched in terms of the most objective and commonly known events ... at once something private and public ... Confounding the author ... is the dogging knowledge that his imagination is a kind of community medium of exchange: what he has

read, felt, seen, thought, and remembered is translated into extensions as impersonal as a worn dollar bill. (Wright 1940:vii)

Wright's statement is as applicable to history writing as it is to fiction, although social scientists may be more comfortable with the term *vision* than *imagination*.

Historical narrative, however, is not the same as fiction. It is far more dependent upon the collective scholarship of others, and requires judgment, 'objectivity,' scholarly integrity, and a lot of hard work in dusty archives and libraries. But *significant* historical narrative also involves something else which is extremely 'personal.' It requires, in addition to immersion in what scholars have come to 'know,' a partial disengagement from and questioning of that collective enterprise. If disengagement did not take place, we would be condemned always to repeat the same plot, in an endless no-exit loop.

Some analysts have focused on the creative role that new 'facts' (anomalies) play in forcing us to recast our narratives.¹⁰ But this is not the only, nor even the most important source of change. Although to some it may sound mystical, the real 'way out' is synthetic imagination or vision. Certainly, the element of vision is very strong in writers whose global histories precede those of Smith and Bentley—among others, Eric Wolf, Eric Hobsbawn, Lefton Stavrianos, Philip Curtin, Charles Tilly, and, above all, William McNeill. Without vision one cannot write global history, because otherwise one is lost in a morass of details, many of them accidentally preserved, and incompletely codified.

I became more and more convinced of the significance of imagination or vision when trying to write synthetic history in *Before European Hegemony*. After spending five years absorbing an enormous amount of what was in the historical 'community medium of exchange' on the thirteenth century, I stopped researching when I found a pattern that made sense to me. Once that private vision took hold, albeit mysteriously generated not only out of all the sources I had read but everything I had thought about over decades, I stopped researching. But personal visions may be inspired by others. For me, the crucial influence was Wallerstein's vision conveyed in the first volume of *The Modern World-System*, a book that appeared in

1974. His approach unlocked a perspective I had long sought, one adumbrated in earlier work by Fernand Braudel (1972)¹¹ but brought more clearly into focus in his *Civilization and Capitalism* (1982-1984). Because of this, I am often referred to as a “world-systems” person. I presume that is why I was asked to give a paper on this approach at the World History Conference. But I shall not try to defend Wallerstein’s particular vision, in *strictu senso*, because I believe a global perspective is broader and more flexible than the one adopted by Wallerstein. Its chief value lies in its search for explanations beyond the narrow confines of historical specialization in a given time and place. It is a vision that gives depth of perspective in historical (re)construction.

I became increasingly absorbed with the problem of how historians or social scientists arrive at such visions. This in turn led me to explore on what grounds new visions might either be reflected as too imaginary, or at least provisionally accepted as somewhat more credible than their predecessors. In arriving at my own interpretation of the global system in the thirteenth century I tried to exercise scholarly diligence and strove for integrity in the process of reaching it. That I did not always succeed is, of course, a given. One part of diligence was that, in every sub-area in which I was trying to reconstruct history, I found many careful historians who had been trying to reach partial conclusions. My dilemma was this: I had to evaluate their partial syntheses even though I actually possessed *less* concrete information on the particulars than they had. Was this legitimate? How much did my judgment enter into this process?

In thinking over how I culled material from secondary sources, the first thing I note is that I came to ‘trust’ certain historians more than others and turned to those ‘trusted informants’ for further guidance and additional bibliography. Perhaps something like a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ was at work; such choices gradually foreclosed access to other potentially competing forms of explanation.

How did I reach such judgments about relative trustworthiness? In part, I was impressed with the degree of mastery over known sources which ‘good’ historians seemed to command. Second, however, I was also affected by their comprehensive coverage of what I considered to be important ‘variables.’¹² At the

same time, I came to distrust explanations advanced by some locale-centered historians. I felt that out of ignorance they sometimes neglected non-local causes which, it seemed to me, were patently responsible for local events. At other times, again from tunnel vision, they seemed to emphasize the unique aspect of a given local occurrence, without recognizing that almost identical processes were taking place simultaneously in other parts of the world.¹³

As a consequence of a process of criticism, trust, acceptance, and rejection, a parallel process of closure inevitably began to occur in my mind. It is this latter process that particularly interests me. And this returns me to Gadamer, who called for reflexivity and self-conscious awareness, not as a way of guaranteeing objectivity (which is neither possible nor, if I read him correctly, desirable),¹⁴ but as an antidote to hubris. In what follows I shall try to be faithful to Gadamer's prescription.

It seems to me that writing synthetic history is really not very different from writing any other type of social science analysis, even an 'ethnography' in which, presumably, one has greater (and less biased) access to 'what is happening' than one has to the accidental residues of the past with which historians must work.¹⁵ I mentioned this to a colleague who appreciated the problem immediately and suggested I look at Kurt Wolff's (1976) book, *Surrender and Catch*.

In brief, "surrender" refers to an initial stage of true openness, a certain self-restraint that a researcher needs to exercise to prevent premature interpretation. *Bracketing of prior knowledge* might be an appropriate term here. Those of us who have done sociological fieldwork recognize in this one of its cardinal rules.¹⁶ At the early stages of research one wants, as much as is humanly possible, to 'bracket' the cultural-and-idiosyncratic apperception mass that observers carry with them to 'make sense' of the world (see Burawoy 1991). In the beginning, one also engages in 'thought experiments' and the search for 'counterfactuals.' Paul Deising (1991), in a recent book, emphasizes how important a role counterfactuals play in guarding against false cognition. Since social psychologists have found that "subjects are apparently not aware of their own cognitive processes," the only way to guard against a confirmatory bias is through counterfactuals, where one tries to prove the opposite. In history, the testimony of 'the other'

constitutes a starting point for the location of counterfactual interpretation.

But although we can accept the theoretical importance of absolute openness, we also know that it is psychologically impossible. In William James's "big booming confusion" of the world, one will always be somewhat selective, if only to keep one's sanity. All that "surrender" requires, then, is a self-conscious effort to avoid premature closure.

However, one cannot suspend closure forever—nor could one ever write anything in its absence. Closure, however involuntary, is what I think Wolff meant by "catch." In ethnography and other social science research, we often use the term *redundancy* to operationalize that moment. We tell our graduate students that they have gone to enough meetings, made enough observations, interviewed a sufficient sample, and so on, when they sense that they are no longer 'learning anything new.' The same thing happens in historical research.

That makes it sound as though the process were an objective one. Quite the contrary; it is highly subjective. Once we have 'caught'—or more accurately, 'been caught by'—an explanation that makes sense to us, our receptivity declines precipitously. The "catch" phase is what psychologists would call the apprehension of a gestalt or pattern. Good historical and social science writing is distinguished from dull and uninteresting work exactly by the presence of this pattern recognition (some call it vision) and by the ability of the writer to narrate it in a way that 'convinces' readers and influences them to 'see' the patterning in the material which, admittedly, has thus been selected to substantiate it.

Where does that gestalt come from? I would suggest that there are three necessary (but not necessarily sufficient) sources of that 'catching' of patterns:¹⁷ *eccentricity*, *ideology*, and *idiosyncrasy*. I have intentionally selected terms that to most practitioners of science have very negative connotations. They are the antithesis of the presumed ideals of scientific inquiry, namely: objectivity (in the sense of being uninfluenced by the perspective of the observer); value- or at least interest-free (in the sense that predilections or biases of a non-scientific sort do not enter the observations); and intersubjectivity (in that scientific findings are strengthened when they are reproducible, rather than idiosyncratic).

I want to demonstrate that these three 'sins' are not only inevitable but in some ways highly creative. It is they that yield the unique gestalt of a project which then becomes part of the apperception mass of later scholars. Each new gestalt enriches the collective enterprise of constructing narratives. While reflexivity can minimize the distortions that the three 'sins' introduce, such 'distortions' are part and parcel of creativity. They are 'new seeings' that grow out of that strange combination of the personal and the collective that Richard Wright makes the central desideratum of an imaginative novel. In that sense, they are not so much sinful as enabling. How does one strike a balance between these two?

Eccentricity

Eccentricity is the mirror image of ethnocentricity. By ethnocentrism I refer to the natural embeddedness of observers in their own time and place and to the cognitive maps to the world and their discipline according to which they have learned to organize their materials. Gadamer refers to this as the observers' historicity. Language codes are only a part of this, albeit an important part. My way of attempting to deal with this was to try to examine not only documents from my own time and place, but to enlarge the range of the collective dialogue by reading primary documents (albeit in translation!) from as many different places in the thirteenth century world system as I could, attempting *verstehen* while also treating these texts as evidence not for what happened, but for how what happened was selectively crafted into a narrative that both revealed and concealed. Where possible, I tried to put texts from different perspectives in dialogue with one another: for example, I self-consciously paired accounts of the Crusades as described by Christian and Muslim writers, or descriptions by port officials and by the merchants themselves of what happened to foreign traders in Chinese ports. I was trying to de-center accounts, to view them ex-centrally. A world-system perspective helped me to do this.

Ideology

However, I could not help but select from the non-Western accounts those elements that seemed to me to be significant and meaningful. And I could only judge evidence as significant and meaningful when it fitted into my culture's definitions of evidence¹⁸—and thus into my culture's 'ideology.' By ideology, then, I mean deep sets of beliefs about how the world works. Some of my colleagues at the New School call this 'theory,' whereas Kuhnians tend to call it a paradigm. But it is important to recognize that, even here, there is opportunity for creativity. While certain forms of explanation are eliminated by ethnocentrically determined parameters, every culture's ideological repertoire includes a range and variety of often mutually exclusive positions, from which culture-bound historians and social scientists select.

Certain cynics dismiss what I am calling *inevitable ideology* as mere irrationality. Thus, David Faust (1984) seems to suggest that a Kuhnian paradigm serves mainly as a *nonrational aid* to scientific judgment. A paradigm tells us mostly about cognitive processes, rather than about the 'real world.' Deising (1991), who does not necessarily agree with the radical view that paradigms are merely codified biases or irrational beliefs, cites Faust as arguing that everything is ideology, in the sense I am using the term. Paraphrasing Faust's position, Deising says:

Given the complex and contradictory data available in any scientific field, scientists are likely to nonreason every which way and produce a great variety of incompatible theories almost at random. But a striking paradigm channels their thinking (availability bias) and produces nonrational agreement. The result is a scientific community sharing a single (arbitrary) theory. This is precisely what Lakatos [Lakatos and Musgrave 1970] called "mob psychology" in his (mis)interpretation of Kuhn, except that he didn't like the idea; he assumed that scientists are rational. Similarly, Nisbett and Ross [1980] observe that the effect of scientific evidence is to polarize opinion, since

supporters of each theory interpret the evidence to fit their theory and become convinced that they are right and everyone else is wrong. (Deising 1991:247)

There is some truth in this. As a political economist I believe that political and economic factors play a central role in shaping world history. Others may proceed from an ideology with a different foundation. I accept the fact that persons with intellectual integrity, but whose deep belief system or ideology is different from mine, will write a narrative that differs from mine, as did Bentley. We seem not to be able to convince one another, but I am willing to acknowledge that our narratives can enrich one another. My responsibility is only to guard against naively deducing ‘reality’ from my ideology, and that can be accomplished to some extent by reflexivity and an exposure to other competing ideologies.

I also do believe in chaos theories—in nonlinear irregularities that may conceal regularities, and in trajectories where similar starting points can lead to perfectly reasonable, *but different* and therefore not completely predictable outcomes. I also believe in the systematic quality of the world, which means that there is no simple unilinear relationship between ‘independent’ and ‘dependent’ variables. In fact, I believe so strongly in this paradigm that I literally cannot see how a historian can operate with a different set of beliefs about the world.¹⁹ But note that a predilection for approaches and a sensitivity to specific types of evidence do not give me answers, only a terrain for preferential investigation. Once on my terrain, I still must keep my eyes open. But what I see is partially idiosyncratic.

Idiosyncrasy

Idiosyncrasy is the easiest ‘sin’ to define and yet the hardest to defend against. It is the personal—what makes us individuals, what gives to any author his or her ‘voice,’ and I would add, almost everything that makes books different from one another. The biography of an author (whether of history or ethnography) does make a difference in the gestalt the author will “catch.”²⁰ It seems not at all accidental to me, then, that many of the major

transformations in how we think about the world have come from persons at the margin of a discipline.

Non-historians are more likely to produce novelty than very well-trained ones. Non-specialists may see things quite differently from the 'outside.' And scientists must often undergo a process of forceful 'unseeing' before they can be captured by a new gestalt. When one reads the biographies of the major figures who have contributed to chaos theory, for example, one learns that they have all 'withdrawn' and 'rejected,' as their first steps in exploring new ways of seeing. The discontinuities of their professional careers are striking. It is as if they *need* to bracket what they know in order to know something else. And in this, biography plays a surprisingly major part. Similar characteristics emerge when one examines the lives of individuals who have contributed to artificial intelligence and other new fields of investigation (see Johnson 1992).

In short, eccentricity allows one to escape from the ethnocentrism of accumulated wisdom, ideology gives the necessary focus for any investigation, and idiosyncrasy, rather than something to be extirpated, is the major source of new vision. But from where can this new vision come? From idiosyncrasy, in the sense of the unique process of accumulating within a single mind an atypical accretion of training, information, and experiences, all of which must with considerable struggle be arranged in a coherent pattern. That struggle often takes place below the level of full consciousness. We know only that, out of a massive chaos generated by the interaction between our 'material' and ourselves, at some deep level we have a series of visions and experience closure—often quite suddenly after sleep, but only after long periods of steady 'data gazing.' And we are caught.

FINAL COMMENT

Therefore, although eccentricity, ideology, and idiosyncrasy have traditionally been viewed as 'sins' in conventional epistemology, my argument is that not only are they inevitable, but, if treated with caution and complexity, they can also be enabling. In this essay I have stressed 'hermeneutical' issues. But please do not misunderstand me. I do not intend to substitute these elements of creativity for *criteria* of scholarly excellence or even 'correctness.'

Thus far my discussion has been a bit mystical and disembodied, as if 'scholarship' were detached from the 'real world' and insulated from the social forces that produce it. It would be misleading to leave the reader with such a partial view. First, under 'ideology' I have assumed throughout the more conventional wisdom of a more standard 'sociology of knowledge,' one that acknowledges that the struggle for truth is a fundamentally political matter.²¹ As feminist theorists have recently stressed (coming after a long line of other 'dissident' thinkers, of which the most noted is Gramsci), control over the determination of 'truth' is the real power in this world. Hegemony in the power to define is what all scholars seek, whether they acknowledge this or not. Thus, after "surrender" and "catch" comes the rhetoric of convincing. But might does not make right, either for orthodoxy or dissent. *La luta continua.*

My most fundamental assumption, however, is that there is a real world out there, even if human frailty prevents its full knowledge and understanding. So long as one recognizes that all knowledge is only tentative, and that closure is only temporarily attained in that ambiguous space between 'evidence,' with its connection to the real world, and 'rhetoric' with its connection to the power structure within which reality is struggled over, we can take courage and continue our work.

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NOTES

¹ I am indebted to Dr. Steven Hutchinson for providing me with this translation taken from Argentine novelist Jorge Borge's *El Hacedor*. This work, which purports to be a seventeenth century account attributed to Suarez Miranda's *Viajes de varones prudentes* (Lerida 1658), Fourth Book, Chapter 45, is, of course, a wise satire on, *inter alia*, science's attempt to 'reflect' the world accurately.

² Blaut's thesis is that the 'West' did not rise before its ability to harness the bullion, and then the resources and labor of the 'New World.' He goes to the opposite extreme of Eurocentered historians by granting no intrinsic value to Western culture.

³ Unbeknown to each other, Smith and I had evidently been researching our books roughly at the same time, although I infer from the frequency distribution of publication dates of sources he examined, he began and ended his research a few years before I did. Not unexpectedly, we were consulting many books and articles for the time period covered in *Before European Hegemony*. Indeed, a glance at his bibliography revealed that we had read at least fifty sources in common for that period. Despite our overlapping sources and our similar questions, however, we came out with entirely different interpretations and narratives.

⁴ Bentley's approach is exemplary in its non-Eurocentrism. This allows him to give the Mongols, the Arabs, the Ottomans, the Indians, and the Chinese credit for their accomplishments and permits him to reconceptualize the period between 600 and 1000 AD as more active than any previous period in history.

⁵ My major criticism of his works is that in the concluding pages of the last chapter, when Bentley steps beyond the boundaries of his period, he actually undermines the theoretical premises he has worked so hard and so eruditely to establish by attributing the 'rise of the West' in the post-fifteenth century to two factors: technological superiority and biological immunities. These are clearly inconsistent with his earlier arguments giving primacy to culture and religion. One would have expected a more Weberian interpretation.

⁶ I contributed an article to a book entitled *Remaking History* (Abu-Lughod 1989b). It was a revised version of a paper delivered at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association that year (see note 7). At that time I was less concerned with the issues raised in this current essay, or perhaps more 'self-righteous' about the superiority of my approach.

⁷ The title of both an article of mine, "Remaking History: The Thirteenth Century World System," and the book in which it appeared (Abu-Lughod 1989b).

⁸ My understanding of Gadamer's argument has been greatly enhanced by a paper given by philosophy professor Gail Soffer

(1992), "Gadamer, Hermeneutics, and Objectivity in Interpretation," to the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research.

⁹ Wright's work is now experiencing a long-overdue revival in American literature, I suspect because in the post-Soviet period his Communist party association is no longer considered a threat.

¹⁰ This, of course, is one of the major strains in Thomas Kuhn's (1962) argument in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. It is important, however, to acknowledge a second and not quite compatible strain in his work, namely, the recognition that academic 'power politics' also plays its role in the struggle for paradigmatic privilege.

¹¹ Namely, his two-volume work on the Mediterranean, which appeared in English translation just at the time I was researching my book on Moroccan urbanization (Abu-Lughod 1980). I had found that it was impossible to study Moroccan history without paying detailed attention to the linkages between the Maghreb and the other side of the Mediterranean, as well as those between the Maghreb and Africa south of the Sahara. Thus, I was already a "world-system" person before I ever met Wallerstein. The third volume of Braudel's (1982-1984) *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*, entitled *The Perspective of the World*, was even more significant, even though I did not know about it until the English translation appeared in 1984.

¹² For example, Smith's (1991) book struck me as having failed to pay sufficient attention to the influence of wars on the changes in the world system. Furthermore, he had a tendency to back up into individual regions and subsystems for his explanations, rather than address the global system itself.

¹³ I am not alone in this 'prejudice' for systematic explanation. A good justification for this approach can be found in Sklair (1992:93). Leslie Sklair argues forcefully for the distinction between attention to parts and focus on the system itself, or what he calls transnational practices. Failure to pay attention to the impingement of the world on any of its subregions is also critiqued by George Marcus (1986).

¹⁴ See especially the English translation. In this section of the paper I am indebted to Soffer (1992).

¹⁵ *Writing Culture*, edited by James Clifford and George Marcus (1986), addresses itself to some of the issues my essay tried to raise, although I have my quarrels not only with some of what it contains but with what it fails to address.

¹⁶ This is why we insist that students ‘write down everything’ in their field notes—even items and events that appear at the time to have no ‘meaning’ or significance. In fact, we caution them against attributing meaning even to events and items that appear to have *prima facie* significance and self-evident meaning.

¹⁷ Obviously, I take for granted an earnest effort to apprehend the ‘real’ world!

¹⁸ For example, if the outbreak of disease was viewed, in an ‘exotic’ source, as being evidence of God’s displeasure at moral failures, I might note this but tend to ignore it in favor of an epidemiological explanation for the operation of contagious diseases. My favorite quotation comes from a medieval exchange between a religious Muslim and a more ‘scientific’ inquirer. “The thing you ask of me is both difficult and useless. Although I have passed all of my days in this place, I have neither counted the houses nor have I inquired into the number of inhabitants; and as to what one person loads on his mules and the other stows away in the bottom of his ship, that is no business of mine ... God only knows the amount of dirt and confusion that the infidels may have eaten before the coming of the sword of Islam ... O my lamb! Seek not after things which concern thee not!” (quoted in Abu-Lughod 1989a:26). The trouble was that these were exactly the things my ‘ideology’ alerted me to seek.

¹⁹ Again, this idea is not new. Recall Carl Becker’s (1973[1932]) compelling argument in *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*.

²⁰ For me, that biography included following my (then) husband to Cairo in 1958, where I became enamored of history. Who could resist history in a country with a civilization as old as Egypt’s? In the ten years I spent researching and writing a book on the history of Cairo (Abu-Lughod 1971), I became convinced that the periodicity of European narratives was fatally flawed with respect to ‘the rest of the world’ (what I came to call, with irony, TROTW, the regions of the globe containing 80% of the world’s population), and that there were many more connections in a preexistent international system than European medievalists seemed to acknowledge. That

work planted in me deep seeds of disaffection for one of the ‘gods’ of sociology, Max Weber, and left me with an unquenchable interest in the high cultures outside of Europe. Travels to many countries, museum visits, and books I subsequently read, among others the corpus of William McNeill and, even before its publication, the outlines of the world-systems approach which Wallerstein had presented in an early lecture at Northwestern around 1972, deepened my commitment to rethinking the premodern period. All of these lay germinating until 1982 when I began more systematic work on what eventually became *Before European Hegemony*.

²¹ It is interesting that critics of Wallerstein’s world-system work have felt free to ‘minimize’ his achievements *because* they appeal politically to third-world scholars, without recognizing the equally ‘political’ agendas of Max Weber’s corpus, not to mention those of other ‘Orientalists.’ Thus, in an otherwise fair article evaluating “Periodization in European and World History,” William Green notes, a bit condescendingly to my mind, that “Wallerstein’s ... model ... was warmly embraced in the Third World ... [where scholars] seek explanations for their dependency, for their poverty, for the decimation of local institutions, traditional values, and collective self-esteem ... [from this theory] that assigns moral culpability of the West” (Green 1992:47-48).

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18

MODERNITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN INDIAN POPULAR CINEMA

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Until recently the scholarly approach to Indian cinema was to regard it as what M. Madhava Prasad has termed “not-yet-cinema” (Prasad 1998:2), a bastardized variant of Western cinema that failed to achieve the realist aesthetic of Western cinema which, according to the developmentalist logic of the nation-state, all ‘modern’ nations must produce. Indian cinema was thus understood largely in terms of a dialectic between modernity and tradition, with ‘tradition’ staged either as a sign of the ‘failure’ of Indian modernity or as a means of preserving Indian culture against the modernizing nation-state.¹ In his seminal work on the ideology of the popular Hindi film, Prasad argues that the only way to challenge such an assumption is to place cultural production within the economic and political framework of the Indian nation-state. The ideological form of Hindi cinema that emerged in the 1950s, Prasad argues—what he terms “the ideology of formal subsumption” (Prasad 1998:6.)²—is a product of the incomplete nature of the passive revolution in India, of an economic and political system in which bourgeois hegemony remains absent and capital has taken charge of the production process but not transformed it.³ Although the ideology of formal subsumption served to disavow modernity, this ideological disavowal coexisted with a contrary drive to modernization (the project of passive revolution) which, while conflicting with the ideological and political condition of formal subsumption, was also advanced by it. Such conflict meant that the form of the state

remained a site of contestation, in cultural as well as political processes. The ideological form of Hindi cinema is therefore an aspect of this ongoing struggle over the form of the state.

Prasad offers valuable insights into the role of political economy in shaping cultural production in India. His Marxist approach leaves him prey, however, to viewing Indian modernity precisely in terms of the developmentalist logic that he critiques, namely as an 'incomplete' or failed version of Western modernity. It is only in the past decade, his argument seems to imply, that Indian society is undergoing the transformations—thanks both to globalization and the expansion of the political spectrum—necessary for Indian modernity to become 'complete.'⁴ Yet while such sociopolitical changes have led to a transformation and fragmentation in the ideological form of Hindi cinema, in particular a concerted attempt to resolve the tensions between the project of passive revolution and the ideology of formal subsumption, such resolution (and with it the triumph of bourgeois hegemony) is largely regarded in contemporary Hindi cinema either as an impossibility or as ultimately *unnecessary* in order for India's modernity to become complete. In order to understand the rationale behind these contending conclusions it is necessary to analyze various theoretical approaches to Indian modernity. Drawing both upon theories that regard Indian modernity as an 'incomplete' or 'failed' version of Western modernity and upon those that argue that India's modernity is instead distinct, this article will analyze two recent Hindi films that are proponents of the ongoing project of passive revolution. They offer, however, divergent interpretations as to the nature of Indian modernity, and with it the possibility of the completion of the ongoing project of passive revolution and the realization of social justice for all of India's citizens.

INTERPRETING INDIAN MODERNITY

Until relatively recently modernity was envisioned as an homogenous process that could be traced to a causal principle, such as the rise of capitalist commodity production or the rationalization of the world. Whether viewed as a single process or as a number of distinct processes that emerge in the same way, the end result, in most theories of modernity, was that these resulted in one

homogeneous and distinctly *Western* modernity. In what Sudipto Kaviraj (2000) has referred to as a functionalist model of modernity, modernity was thus perceived to have spread from the West to the rest of the world and produced societies similar to those of the West. With the collapse of the European colonial empires after the Second World War and the creation of dozens of new nation-states, this theory was given a new flip by modernization theorists, who argued that not only was there only *one* version of modernity (namely a 'Western' one), but that through a process of 'guidance' all societies would eventually succumb to being, or transform themselves into, 'modern' societies. Modernization theory was thus essentially the civilizing mission of colonialism in a new, more scientific and intellectual guise.

This homogenization thesis has been challenged by theories of the existence of alternative or multiple modernities. Scholars working on colonial contexts such as India, in particular, have argued that this view of modernity is flawed, for while modernity introduces a radical rupture in colonized societies, aspects of the new modernity may have already existed in them. The modern way of doing things, in other words, is not written on a clean slate—indigenous traditions, institutions, philosophies, and discourses of knowledge inevitably transform modern knowledges from the West.⁵ Furthermore, since modernity is constituted by a plurality of processes and “an unfolding set of relationships—cognitive, social, and intellectual, as well as economic and technological” (Wilson 2000:158) that are constantly being made and unmade, contested and reconfigured—the sequence in which these occur and the manner in which they are interconnected in each context means that the conditions of modernity differ in each society. Western modernity cannot, therefore, simply be 'imposed' on colonized societies; it needs to be translated and adapted. Such translation and adaptation was limited, however, by the nature of the colonial state, which operated through what Partha Chatterjee has referred to as a “rule of colonial difference” (Chatterjee 1994:10), namely the reproduction of difference between colonizer and colonized, which meant that the colonial state was incapable of fulfilling the criterion of representativeness necessary to produce a copy of Western modernity or even a reflection of it. What was therefore produced, as Chatterjee and others have illustrated, was a hybrid modernity.⁶

Rather than simply constituting a break with ‘tradition,’ as the creation of a foundational moment that constitutes a major rupture with the past, modernity is thus an ongoing, uneven, and particularized project.⁷

But what was the nature of the hybrid thus produced? Can it be understood as an ‘Indian’ form of modernity, or did colonialism make the production of a distinct or alternative form of Indian modernity impossible? This question has been subject to considerable contestation, revolving largely around the nature of the postcolonial state. According to Chatterjee (1994), Indian nationalists had initially attempted to create a nationalism and with it a modernity that was anti-Western through selectively appropriating certain aspects of Western modernity while splitting the domain of civil society and declaring the ‘spiritual’ domain (that of intellect, language, culture, education, and the family) as its sovereign territory from which colonial power and Western culture were excluded. This ‘spiritual’ domain then became the nation’s civil society, a space that could be fashioned as distinctly ‘Indian.’ For Chatterjee, Indian nationalists failed, however, to create a distinctly Indian modernity because they ended up ‘surrendering’ to (or being unable to imagine an alternative to) the modern, Western liberal democratic nation-state (and with it the blueprint of modernity, namely ‘progress,’ ‘modernization,’ industrialization, and internationalism) and suppressing alternative forms of imagination and community (based on language, religion, caste, and so on).⁸ Other aspirations to community are therefore only able to justify themselves, Chatterjee contends, through “claiming alternative nationhood with rights to an alternative state” (Chatterjee 1994:238). Furthermore, the absence of bourgeois hegemony in the new post-colonial state (brought about by the fashioning of an alliance between the bourgeoisie and feudal elites to effect a passive revolution) meant that the postcolonial state would prove unable to undertake any radical transformation to the structures of authority set up during colonial rule, nor to those of pre-capitalist elites.⁹

Other scholars, however, have argued that far from negating India’s difference, the Indian nation-state instead served to both represent and foster such difference. This was inevitable, according to David Scott (1995), since discontinuities within colonialism (namely different political rationalities and

configurations of power) and the distinctions between earlier and later forms of colonial rule meant that the colonial state was not a monolithic, homogenous, and static entity that Indian nationalists simply inherited wholesale.¹⁰ Nor, as Gyan Prakash contends, was there a fundamental opposition between the inner, ‘spiritual’ realm of the nation and the outer realm of the nation-state—the latter was simply “the former’s existence at another, abstract level” (Prakash 1999:202).¹¹ Saurabh Dube goes a step further and argues that even articulations of community that are ostensibly anti-modernist, anti-individualist, and anti-capitalist rework “the disciplinary imaginings of the state within the communal as part of the fashioning of a colonial modernity” (Dube 1998:148).¹² Thus, far from erasing alternative social imaginings and aspirations to community, the Indian nation-state was instead a reflection of these, and it was through the state that a distinctly Indian modernity came into being.¹³

MODERNITY, THE PASSIVE REVOLUTION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: AN ANALYSIS OF *KHAKKEE* AND *NAYAK*

How, then, do these debates play out in contemporary Hindi cinema? I would like to begin by analyzing a film that seemingly upholds Chatterjee’s understanding of the nature of Indian modernity. Rajkumar Santoshi’s *Khakee* (2003) depicts the story of a middle-aged police official, Anant Srivastav (Amitabh Bachchan), whose honesty has barred him from advancement within the police. He is called upon to put together a small police team to bring a notorious Muslim terrorist and ISI agent, Akbar Ansari (Atul Kulkarni), from a small town in Maharashtra to Bombay to stand trial for initiating a communal riot. The mission, they are told, is extremely dangerous, since the ISI is anxious to get Ansari back, and as the massacre of eight police officers guarding Ansari has already made clear, they will stop at nothing to release him from police custody. During the course of their epic journey through rural Maharashtra to Mumbai, the team discovers, however, that the real terrorist is not Ansari, an innocent Muslim doctor, but the state, which propagates communal violence to consolidate its authority, and which is willing, moreover, to sacrifice its own servants

(namely the police) and pit them against each other in order to secure its ends.

Corruption is a result of the failure of the passive revolution and the consequent harnessing of communitarian interests by the state, but rather than seeing community as its enemy, as Chatterjee's theory implies, the state deploys violence in order to align itself with particular communities against others. The formation of these alliances changes, however, over time. The state also serves to fracture community through pitting class over caste or religious identity in order to secure its ends. In a move that is actually targeting the bourgeoisie but is disguised as communal, the state aligns itself with both Hindus and lower-class Muslims against the Muslim bourgeoisie, whom, since it cannot co-opt them, it accuses of waging a "proxy war" on behalf of the ISI. As Ansari declares, he is labeled a traitor, ISI agent, and Pakistani because he is paying "the price for being an honest Hindustani." Such targeting entails not only a loss of individuality, but also the subsumption of community identity into that of the individual. As Srivastav tells Ansari when they first meet, "Because of a few selfish men like you, your entire community is maligned"—a sentiment echoed by Ansari's friends, neighbors, and community, who turn their backs on him and refuse to come to his aid even when an irate mob burns down his home, killing most of his family.

But the state is not solely responsible for the failure of the passive revolution. So too is civil society, particularly the media, which serves the state instead of representing the nation and which uses the aura of the *khadi*-clad politician to orchestrate fear of 'others' within (namely Muslims) and without (the ISI). The media thus serves to silence 'others' within so that they literally have no voice—in the face of his frame-up and torture by the police and his vilification by a media that "labeled me a terrorist without even getting to know the truth," Ansari refuses to speak since his "death is inevitable." Since the media, like the state, therefore represents the collective at the cost of the individual—dividing the nation, communities, neighborhoods, and even families—it is up to the individual to seek the truth, for in refusing to see the truth they are being made to sacrifice their individualism for communitarian ends.

In the films of the 1970s such as *Zanjeer* (Mehra 1973), which starred a younger Amitabh Bachchan, "the figure of the inspector

with an unreconciled history stands,” according to Prasad, “for the existence, within the field of law, of a fund of transformative will. It heralds the possibility of a reform of law to make it serve the needs of the dispossessed and marginalized” (Prasad 1998:143). While khaki retains its iconic value as a symbol of duty and justice (Srivastav swears repeatedly “to honor the khaki I wear”), *Khakee* clearly reveals a shift, however, from the figure of the police officer in the post-70s narratives of disidentification with the state.¹⁴ First, the Amitabh hero is no longer the proletarian hero who also represents the state but who ultimately upholds the feudal order (as in a film such as *Sholay*)—he is instead the middle-class hero fighting for a fair shake for the middle classes who have been betrayed and disillusioned by the state’s threats from above (through the corruption of the political system, which rewards caste and class rather than merit) and below (through the state mobilization of communal forces), and who have lost faith in the national ideal.¹⁵ Second, the law plays a key role in this transformation, since while the authority of the feudal order is affirmed through tradition (and in the classical Indian melodrama through divine sanction), the authority of the middle classes can only be affirmed through the law. Hence although the “whole system,” as Srivastav notes, will stop at nothing to prevent them from getting Ansari to court, the law is regarded as being outside the “system,” and thus the means through which the passive revolution can be affected.¹⁶ But while the law remains key to narrative conflict and resolution, the ‘law’ that is invoked is not that of the 1970s films, namely the entire justice system, but simply the legal framework of the state, which remains pure and just in the face of a corrupt administrative and police system.

The law is therefore an unstable source of both authority and resolution, since it cannot be separated from the state of which it is a part. While the citizen-subject seeks to do his or her duty, namely to uphold the law, since the administrative and police system is corrupt, to follow one’s duty blindly could mean to perpetuate social injustice. Duty must then be tempered by conscience, but the only way to determine if one’s conscience is right is to seek the truth. But in a system in which, in the words of the corrupt minister Deodhar, men are “buried alive” waiting for their cases to go to court, and it is the “unwritten law” of the country to uphold the aura

of the *khadi*-clad politician and to let them go unpunished for their crimes, the conviction of Deodhar and his cohorts, while ostensibly effecting social justice and narrative resolution, does not herald the advancement of the passive revolution. In the final act of narrative resolution, the incorruptible and idealistic young inspector Ashwin Gupte kills Ansari's murderer (a former cop) *after* he has been convicted in a court of law. Instead of subsuming other legal systems within the state, two parallel systems of justice ("one which is delivered by the court" and "the other which is delivered outside the court") thus continue to coexist (see Benton 2002).¹⁷

Since the state continues to recognize the rights of communities (and to deny them to others) rather than those of individuals, contestations over the state therefore tend to focus on the law and the need to uphold it. Yet since two contrary legal ideologies coexist—one based on individuals and the other on communities (a product of the state's failure to subordinate multiple legal systems within it)—the law ultimately fails to effect social justice and the passive revolution remains incomplete. Rather than subsuming the feudal family romance in narratives of disidentification with the state, as in the case of the 1970s films—in which the heroes "pursued their own desires, nostalgic for a lost harmony" (Prasad 1998:229)—the inability of the middle class to uphold the law means that it is no longer possible to produce a space in which the romantic couple, and with it the middle class, can be rehabilitated. The romantic couple is instead a chimera at the service of the state. In failing to incorporate subaltern forces into the state (Ansari can only be redeemed and accorded justice through death, and both the state and civil society remain disturbingly Hindu), the middle class is therefore unable to reawaken the law to its unfinished historical project of carrying out the passive revolution. India's modernity is thus essentially a failed modernity.

Nayak: The Real Hero (Shankar 2001) is likewise cynical about the project of passive revolution in contemporary India, but rather than regarding India's modernity as failed, as in the case of *Khakee*, it views India's modernity as merely incomplete—and is much more optimistic as to how to complete it. Unlike the hero in *Khakee*, Shivaji Rao (Anil Kapoor), a cameraman and broadcaster for a cable television station in Mumbai, is not a representative of the state. As he repeatedly protests, he is instead an *aam aadmi*, an

ordinary man and good citizen who is forced to become a representative of the state in order to transform it. When Rao publicly confronts the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Balraj Chavan (Amrish Puri), for refusing to stop a riot in Mumbai, Chavan challenges him to become Chief Minister for a day in order to experience the trials of the job. During the course of his twenty-four hours, Rao launches a major attack on corruption in both the state and civil society, which renders him a national and even global hero and leads to the collapse of Chavan's government. But it also forces him to take on the mantle of both his earthly and divine namesakes to battle the forces of corruption, which he eventually defeats as the new elected Chief Minister, and turns Mumbai into a clean, ordered, and modern city.

As in *Khakee*, state corruption is a product of the failure of the passive revolution, of a state in which the bourgeoisie is forced to govern in conjunction with semi-literate feudal elites such as Chavan, whose political practices derive from the barroom rather than the debating chamber and who promote communalism to shore up their power. Since in the face of its lack of hegemony the bourgeoisie is unable to awaken the law to its unfinished historical project, the legal system is likewise corrupt, although pace *Khakee* the authority of the law remains unquestioned.¹⁸ Not only is there a “fifteen-year backlog of fourteen lakh cases in the court,” but terrorists are also acquitted, rape victims die before their cases are heard, and while “[f]rom 1947 onwards people have brought a lot of cases against politicians,” not a single one has ever been punished.¹⁹ But rather than being simply a problem of state, corruption in *Nayak* permeates the entire sociopolitical sphere, a result of a system based on religious, ethnic, caste, and class allegiances. Thus civil society, often in league with the state, deploys communalism and casteism to enhance the status and power of particular groups. In a system in which everyone profits from everyone else and even the poor are corrupt (although out of need rather than greed), the citizen-subject is unable to do his or her duty and uphold the authority of the law.²⁰ As a result of this evasion of duty, as Shivaji informs the departmental heads of the Maharashtra State Government, “From the *chaprassis* on up, you have all become corrupt.” The mutual imbrications of the system make it impossible, in fact, for politicians not to be corrupt—as Chavan declares, he is unable to

put a stop to the riot due to the four-pronged nature of his support, namely from the party, the *jatawalay* (community), the money donors, and the party workers, the loss of any one of which would mean the collapse of his government.

In the face of the corruption of the entire sociopolitical system, the only way to complete the passive revolution and effect social justice is to combine the essences of Indianness (religion, the extended family, the village community) with particular 'translated' or 'appropriated' aspects of Western modernity (technology, order, an emphasis on time) in a new kind of harmony through a distinctly 'Indian' modern man. Shivaji Rao is an everyman, an ordinary Indian man who inhabits the Oedipal enclosure of the Indian family, seeking security in the surrender to the political power of patriarchy (which Prasad refers to as the "pre-historic" community of the mother's world versus the world of the father, the Law) and reunion with the mother's body (Prasad 1998:149).²¹ But since the law and community are conflicting terrains, the source of the internal schism of the modern state (Prasad 1998:150), such a union is an impossible disavowal of the legal order. Both the patriarchal order and the law must therefore be destroyed, not for a mystical reunion with an idealized maternal rule *within* the dynamics of fantasy, as in a classic masochistic fantasy, but external to it.²² Such a desire, as a group of *hijras* declare, produces men who are "all like us." While Shivaji is a product of tradition, Hinduism, and myth, he is also, as a member of the media, a representative of the modern, and is thus responsible for representing the nation and tying the imaginative community of the nation together.²³ Through usurping and uniting the role of both father and mother, law and community, Shivaji takes on the attributes of both his earthly namesake (through battle) and his godly one (through anointment with milk) and is transformed from everyman to Shaktiman.²⁴ In thus combining modernity and tradition (and with it the voyeuristic and the darshanic gaze), he is able to purge the old order and fashion a new one.²⁵

Instead of being polar opposites, community and state are hence necessary components for the fashioning of a distinct Indian modernity. While community must recognize the legitimacy of the state, the state itself lacks legitimacy without the appropriation of community. This is clear in the relationship between the state and

the village. Although Shivaji's desire to marry a village girl, Manjari (Rani Mukherjee), symbolizes the state's need to subordinate the village to the state, it is her desire to do her duty as a citizen-subject in standing up to and critiquing the state that demonstrates that the village already acknowledges its authority.²⁶ Rather than seeking to use the state as an instrument for its own purposes, it is therefore the state that needs the village, appropriated through the darsanic gaze of the camera, to ensure its survival (literally, since Shivaji is bitten by a snake and is saved by Manjari) and legitimacy.²⁷ Merging the two through the conjugal couple thus serves as a means to revivify both state and civil society, and to complete the project of passive revolution to fashion a distinctly Indian modernity.²⁸

In both *Khakee* and *Nayak* the failure of the completion of the project of passive revolution is a product of a state in which the bourgeoisie lacks hegemony. But as reflected in the contending theories of the nature of Indian modernity, where they most differ is on their understanding of community, and of its relationship to the state. In *Khakee* the middle class is unable to reawaken the law to its unfinished historical project because of its failure to incorporate subaltern forces into the state, which leads to the consequent mobilization of those forces by the feudal elites with whom the bourgeoisie is then forced to govern. In *Nayak*, on the other hand, it is the very coexistence of community and state that enables the completion of the passive revolution, though the two must first acknowledge the legitimacy of the other. It is this reworking of the relationship between community and state that, for *Nayak*, holds out the possibility that—in a move transcending the claims of modernity theorists—instead of being a failed, or incomplete copy of western modernity, India's modernity is not only both viable and distinct, but serves as a model for the West to follow.²⁹

NOTES

¹ For what Prasad (1998) terms the “cultural needs” school of Hindi cinema, put forward by critics such as Ashis Nandy, Satish Bahadur, and Rosie Thomas, Indian cinema is understood as an expression of folk culture, as an attempt by the Indian masses to preserve their traditions against the modernizing impulses of the

nation-state. Indian cinema, according to this perspective, is therefore a refuge from modernity. As Prasad argues, not only does such a perspective seek to falsely maintain the modern as the preserve of the middle classes, it also ignores the texts of Hindi films. While the purported tension between modernity and tradition is manifest both as a theme and an organizing device in popular Hindi films, such films also promote a desire for modernity through their moral conservatism, propagation of commodity culture, and often the “utopian aspiration to transform the social in keeping with the promises made by capitalism and the nation-state” (Prasad 1998:113).

² Prasad notes that, according to Marx, in conditions of real subsumption capital revolutionizes the production process and extracts relative surplus value, while in the case of formal subsumption capital merely takes charge of the production process but does not transform it (Prasad 1998:13).

³ Although the state form is bourgeois, the capitalist class does not have moral and cultural hegemony. The bourgeoisie is instead simply one of the partners of the ruling coalition, along with feudal elites and the professional classes (Prasad 1998:12).

⁴ Such transformations are the result of an expansion of the political spectrum through Hindu nationalism and the undermining of the ability of the state to regulate capitalism thanks to globalization (Prasad 1998:8-9).

⁵ While generally depicted as “already formed disciplines,” such knowledges, as Chatterjee has argued, do not arrive in the colony with “their objects and boundaries defined, their conceptual apparatus in place, and their authorities firmly established” (Chatterjee 1995:23); rather, they are themselves in the process of formation.

⁶ As Gyan Prakash has argued, making India ‘modern’ entailed “more than replaying on the Indian stage the European drama of modernity. It meant the dislocation of that modernity to another context and its translation into the idioms of those it sought to transform and appropriate” (Prakash 1999:6). Western culture was thus forced to adopt other guises and languages in colonial India, but these prior knowledges changed Western culture in the process of its introduction into India. Indigenous knowledges were in turn

transformed to produce “parallel authorities, parallel institutions, and parallel subject-positions ...” (Chatterjee 1995:24).

⁷ It is also extremely localized, since it is “unevenly experienced” even by individuals living within the same locality (Appadurai 1996:3).

⁸ Since the modern state is an aspect of the universal narrative of capital—which produces “both the normalized individual and the modern regime of disciplinary power” (Chatterjee 1994:234)—it cannot recognize any form of community, according to Chatterjee, except that of the nation. The problem with community is that it is not easily inserted into the narrative of capital; it marks the limits of the domain of disciplinary power and hence all other desires for community identity must be suppressed. Thus for India, Chatterjee claims, “the root of our postcolonial misery” lies “not in our inability to think out new forms of modern community but in our surrender to old forms of the modern state” (Chatterjee 1994:11).

⁹ Capital in the new post-colonial state thus sought merely to “construct a synthetic hegemony over the domain of both civil society and the precapitalist community” (Chatterjee 1994: 212). It is for this reason, according to Chatterjee, that “the search for a post-colonial modernity has been tied, from its very birth, with its struggle against modernity” (Chatterjee 1994:75).

¹⁰ Since there is no such thing as “*the* colonial state” (Scott 1995:197), Chatterjee’s “rule of colonial difference” could not have operated in the same way throughout the period of colonial rule. Such a concept also, according to Scott, singles out colonialism as being distinct from modern power, and thus positions colonialism and modernity as opposed to each other.

¹¹ “The distinction between the two,” according to Prakash, was thus “an internal one opened up by the nationalist discourse as it portrayed the one realized in the other” (Prakash 1999:202).

¹² Dube also critiques Chatterjee’s binary oppositional framework (state/community, inner/outer, modern/antimodern) for producing an understanding of community as “a premodern remnant that an absentminded Enlightenment has somehow forgotten to erase” (Dube 1998:148) and of communitarian elaborations of nationalism as a sign of the failure of the Indian nation-state to “realize itself in history” (Dube 1998:237).

¹³ This was inevitable, Prakash contends, in light of the wide range of positions contained within Indian nationalism (with Nehru at one end and Gandhi at the other)—all of which, however, rejected aspects of western modernity such as class struggle and rampant industrialism as alien to India (Prakash 1999:203).

¹⁴ In classical Hindi film there are two resolutions to the narrative crisis: “one enforced by the traditionally given authority of the exemplary subject(s) of the narrative, the other, following immediately after, and comically redundant in appearance, enforced by the agents of modern law.” While “the law has the ‘last word’ ... this is as yet only a formality, an observance of form. The terms and relations of the preceding narrative are not reconstructed in anticipation of the finality of the word of law” (Prasad 1998:218).

¹⁵ While the national ideal encourages them to join the force, such an ideal has been reduced to what the dishonorable but redeemable member of the team Shekhar Verma (Akshay Kumar) refers to as a *filmi story*, as unrealizable in reality in the face of a corrupt political system. When the new and idealistic recruit Ashin Gupte (Tushar) (who joined the force, Verma jokes, because his father “was a freedom fighter” and his mother “used to teach little children”) refuses a bribe from a man who causes a minor road accident, the man becomes outraged because he thinks that the ‘rate’ demanded by police with one star has gone up and no one has told him; he’s eventually mollified by two traffic cops who undoubtedly take their ‘established’ bribe price. Gupte thus eventually becomes corrupt—essentially a murderer—in order to effect justice in a system that denies it.

¹⁶ As Srivastav tells his team, “if we keep fighting we’ll be taking on the government. The whole system will be against us. In which case, for us to take Ansari to court will be almost impossible. Besides, supposing we take him to court, the government will certainly take revenge on us. It will suspend us. We’ll lose our jobs. We might even be jailed.” If they get to court, he tells Ansari, they can fight for justice together “to ensure that no other Ansari goes through this.”

¹⁷ As Lauren Benton has argued, while during the course of the nineteenth century most states managed to establish state-centered legal orders (through subsuming the law of ethnic and religious

communities to state law), in India the legal system remained plural (Benton 2002).

¹⁸ Thus even Chavan resorts to the law to ascertain if precedent exists for making someone chief minister for a day, although the precedents—that “someone in Bihar was made a chief minister overnight recently,” and that “when the leader in Delhi died her son was made P.M.” (references to Rabri Devi and Rajiv Gandhi)—serves instead to highlight the corruption of both the legal and political systems.

¹⁹ As Bhansal goes on to declare, “While the case is going through the courts, he’s free to enjoy himself until he dies of old age. Files are closed and left to cockroaches to lay eggs on and nothing will get done.”

²⁰ The problem of duty is three-fold: people do not discharge their duties honestly, they stop others from doing so, or they take advantage of their position and power.

²¹ As Shivaji’s father says to him as he lies in his mother’s lap: “You take my place? Fortunate guy.”

²² As Gavlyn Studlar argues, following Gilles Deleuze, “The masochistic fantasy may be viewed as a situation in which the subject (male or female) assumes the position of a child who desires to be controlled *within* the dynamics of the fantasy” (Studlar 1992:778; quoted in Prasad 1998:149).

²³ His fate (to be *mukhyamantri*) is forecast in his horoscope, the likes of which, according to his father, have not been seen since that of the great Maharashtrian lawyer, politician, and moderate anti-colonial nationalist Lal Bahadur Shastri eighty years ago.

²⁴ Shivaji is also represented as a Maharashtrian warrior king in a remarkable song number, in which the affairs of state (depicted as a giant game of snakes and ladders) persist in keeping the conjugal couple apart.

²⁵ In the voyeuristic structure of spectation, specific to western popular cinema but becoming increasingly dominant in Hindi cinema, “the spectator occupies an isolated, individualized position of voyeurism coupled with an anchoring identification with a figure in the narrative” (Prasad 1998:74). In the darsanic structure, on the other hand, “the object [generally a divine figure or king] gives itself to be seen and in doing so confers a privilege upon the spectator” (Prasad 1998:76). While the voyeuristic structure of

spectation invites identification, the darsanic allows for only a symbolic identification, although imaginary identification is enabled by the comedy track, in which more mundane, often Hanuman-like figures enact the drama of daily life. Despite the long-standing struggle in Hindi cinema for the reorganization of the film spectacle around an individualized point of view, in *Nayak* the two modes of spectatorship comfortably coexist.

²⁶ When Chavan comes to her village and is told by the local politicians that the street lights were put up a year ago, Manjari stands out from the crowd and yells “*jute bolte hai*,” and claims that they were put up only two days ago and are not connected to electricity. Shivaji experiences a *nazar* as he films her through his camera.

²⁷ The village in fact invites the state in (to give them water, electricity, and so on) and views the state not as a threat but as a source of security—hence Manjari’s father initially rejects Shivaji’s request to marry Manjari because he doesn’t have a *sarkari naukari* (government job).

²⁸ When Shivaji critiques Chavan for the lack of progress under his government, he retorts that the literacy rate in the state has risen to 64% under his government, that Maharashtra is number one in industry and business, and that there are just 35.8% of the people below the poverty line. Shivaji replies that the literacy rate in Kerala and Mizoram is 90%, that Maharashtra is number one in crime, and that the number of people living in poverty is just 11.7% in Punjab. What is key here is that, while he uses the authority of global institutions to back up his claims—the World Economic Report, Amnesty International, the IMF Report, etc.—his points of reference are all Indian.

²⁹ As Sunil Khilnani (1997) argues, the belief that India’s modernity is superior to that of the West has become increasingly prevalent in sociocultural discourse in India.

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19

GLOBALIZATION, JOB CREATION AND INEQUALITY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE OFFSHORING DIVIDE

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The topic of globalization inevitably attracts feverish attention and strongly held polarized viewpoints. This is to be expected of an economic phenomenon that has created clear ‘winners’ while its potential for broader social and economic growth in developing countries, and for those who lose out in developed ones, still proves elusive. On one hand, there are the gushing advocates of globalization who see it as a solution for many ills that beset the world today, including the curse of global poverty, a viewpoint best exemplified in a simplistic way by Thomas Friedman (2005). Although Friedman may be the most clichéd among votaries of globalization, there is a legion of believers in the seemingly limitless possibilities unleashed by a combination of technological hubris and free market-based economic optimism. Such enthusiasts have suggested that globalization is the solution for everyone’s problems, presenting it as an ideal state to aspire to even in a context where the reality often clashes with the hype. One is reminded of Gandhi’s response to an insistent reporter’s query regarding what he thought of Western civilization: “I think it would be a good idea.”

On the other hand, many commentators confound the

dislocation and concern in much of the developing world with the impact of globalization, when it is actually policies inspired by a particularly extreme form of *laissez-faire* capitalism that are inciting public ire. Local failures at the level of policies and governance are quickly attributed to global forces, and the seemingly intractable problem of poverty is laid at the feet of increasing international trade and investment. The record of globalization, however, whether in exacerbating poverty or eliminating it, is not so clear. As Pranab Bardhan (2006) suggests, globalization is neither a panacea nor a plague.

This chapter focuses on the phenomenon of offshoring,¹ which has become one of the iconic manifestations of globalization. By *offshoring*, I mean a process whereby the production of a good or service that was previously carried out domestically in an industrialized country—say, for example, in the United States—is transferred to a developing country with the primary objective of importing the product or service back into the United States. This definition serves to highlight the difference between offshoring and other standard international transactions, such as foreign direct investment for the purpose of serving foreign markets. It also underscores the one-way nature of offshoring and its politico-economic aspects. Although the offshoring of blue-collar jobs in manufacturing, mostly to countries in East Asia, has been happening for some time, recent years have seen a significant increase of this practice in information and communications technology enabled services activity, such as back office work processes, call center operations, medical transcription, accounting, legal research, and radiology jobs, among others. At present, there is increasing evidence that the offshoring model has climbed the ‘value chain’: higher-paid critical jobs in the realm of research and development (R&D) and innovative activity are now at risk in developed countries.

Initial reactions in both the United States and India—the two main economies involved in the present stage of services offshoring—ran along predictable lines, with some in the U.S. media calling for a ban on the continuing hemorrhaging of jobs and many in India celebrating their influx. However, there is now an awareness of the greater complexities involved. It needs to be mentioned at the very outset of this analysis that there should be no

dispute regarding some of the basic facts at play: first, that the number of jobs impacted adversely in developed countries such as the United States, is not huge, perhaps less than a million for the United States until recently; and second, that the process of offshoring has created a number of jobs in countries such as China and India that perhaps would not have materialized otherwise. However, it is when one goes beyond these immediate comforting facts that some of the complexities begin to emerge.

Rapid increase in global economic interdependence and technological change has now given rise to a worldwide labor market in a wide range of occupations, where workers in high-wage advanced industrialized countries compete with workers in the lower-wage developing world. Competition has been atomized, as it were: in addition to competition between countries and firms, one can now refer to competition between individual workers based in distant parts of the world.² A large number of jobs have become globally footloose. As offshoring in services activity joins in the outflow of manufacturing jobs, concerns are being raised in industrialized countries about serious future job losses, or at the very least, about healthy job creation in the future. With offshoring now reaching R&D related jobs, there is growing disquiet about the potential impact on job quality, future competitiveness of developed economies, and their standards of living (Bardhan and Jaffee, 2005).

On the other hand, developing countries are facing their own set of problems associated with offshoring. It is true that there have not been any job losses due to offshoring; indeed, the opposite appears to be the case. However, rapid growth and broadening opportunities in these countries are posing challenges of growing inequality, uneven job creation, cultural clashes, lopsided development, widening rural-urban divide, and educational, infrastructural, and institutional constraints. Both China and India are grappling with the issue of how to harness the opportunities created by globalization/offshoring and technological developments to help eradicate poverty and facilitate broader social and economic development. The initial understanding of offshoring as an unqualified gain for the developing world and a loss for the advanced is now being supplemented by the realization, on both sides of the world, that offshoring involves gains as well as potential dislocations and disruptions. This realization has led to a more sober

appreciation of the distractingly seductive charms of the Information Technology (IT) industry in India.³

This chapter takes a look at some of the issues surrounding the impact of offshoring on future job creation, inequality, and related issues on both sides of the geo-economic divide, focusing on the United States, the leading country involved in services offshoring, and India, the primary beneficiary of this process. Some of the questions raised by this exercise are: What is involved in the process of offshoring, in terms of the disparate and seemingly contradictory concerns and issues of individual countries? What issues come up while trying to promote job creation in developed countries and broader social development in developing countries?

THE UNITED STATES PERSPECTIVE

The past couple of decades have witnessed the confluence of a number of political, economic, and technological factors that have given rise to a global white-collar labor market and a consequent upsurge in services offshoring. This period has seen an ascendance of market economics and the opening up of previously relatively closed economies to trade and foreign investment. These changes made possible the shifting of manufacturing plants, back-offices, and R&D centers of multinationals to China, India, Russia, and Eastern Europe. Additional factors include the large wage differentials between high-wage developed and low-wage developing countries. Because colleges and institutions of higher learning in developing countries have been successful in producing large numbers of graduates, there has been the added bonus of skilled labor being not just cheap, but plentiful as well. The combination of the factors listed above and the ever looming cost-cutting imperative has compelled Western companies to embrace emerging opportunities for shifting cost centers overseas. The final element that has made the global labor market viable in practice has been the revolution in information and communications technologies and the coming of age of the Internet. Some specific factors that have been instrumental in India's getting the lion's share of services offshoring, apart from the much cited usage of English as a medium of communication, include what might be termed general institutional similarity. This includes similar financial,

accounting, marketing, and legal systems, as well as compatible business culture and practices (see, e.g., Bardhan and Kroll 2003). Factors leading to the now global spread of corporate R&D include the diminishing cost-effectiveness of innovative activity in developed countries, the need to 'design to market' in developing countries, and of course, the availability of low-cost scientific labor (Bardhan 2006).

Impact on jobs

There is little data, and also little agreement, on the ongoing and future potential impact of offshoring on job loss in developed economies. Pressed on by media reports of continuing job losses in the United States and the simultaneous establishment of offices of U.S. firms in India, varying estimates of job migration and potential future job losses have been proposed in recent years for the United States, as well as other member countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Some of these estimates focus on direct job outmigration that can be attributed to offshoring, some on potential job losses in the future, and others on the overall macroeconomic effects on the economy. Forrester Research (2002) led this stream of investigation and projected a loss of 3.3 million jobs in the United States by 2015 due to offshoring. Ashok Bardhan and Cynthia Kroll (2003) analyzed the attributes of jobs and occupations that make them offshorable, matching them to the entire occupational structure of the U.S. economy. They claim that up to 14 million jobs in white-collar occupations, or 11% of the entire employed labor force, are vulnerable to being offshored. More recently, McKinsey Global Institute (2005) arrived at the same proportion of jobs at risk (11%), whereas Alan Blinder now calculates that the number of offshorable jobs is closer to 40 million and that economists and others have "underestim[ed] both [the] importance [of offshoring] and its disruptive impact on Western societies" (Blinder 2005:2) In any case, the prospect of major churning in the labor markets of developed countries is a distinct possibility in the future.

Academics, economists and policy makers have lined up to debate the extent of the impact on jobs as well as other pros and cons of offshoring for the U.S. economy. Although there is broad

agreement that direct job losses from offshoring have been, to date, small relative to the size of advanced economies, the effects on future job creation and income levels are heavily contested. A number of business and academic economists argue that in terms of employment and income the effects are 'win-win,' or at worst insignificant (see McKinsey Global Institute 2003; Mann 2003). Others argue that the current stage is different from earlier periods of offshoring because of changes in comparative advantage and could potentially have negative income effects (Samuelson 2004).⁴ Many belonging to the latter camp also claim that there are few signs of any emerging sectors or occupations that will create significant numbers of new jobs, such as those created by the U.S. software sector during the 1990s at the height of the first wave of manufacturing offshoring. On the other hand, adherents of the minor-impact school suggest that China, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Eastern European countries that have been the beneficiaries of offshoring have severe constraints on how many more offshoring related jobs those economies can create, absorb, and sustain.

Distributional impact and disruption

While the resolution of the job creation debate may well lie in the future, even the most optimistic concur that offshoring has been a disruptive process with strongly negative distributional effects. There is evidence that manufacturing offshoring is one of two key contributory factors to the rising inequality between blue-collar and white-collar workers in the United States, with technological change being the other (Feenstra and Hanson 1996). There is growing recognition that globalization in the form of services offshoring is partly responsible for the increasing wage inequality between white-collar occupations that are offshoreable and those that are not. There is also evidence that manufacturing offshoring has led to urban decline in areas losing manufacturing jobs (for example, in the U.S. midwest), and there is concern that this could be repeated in urban or suburban centers specializing in services activities that are vulnerable to white collar offshoring. The *hollowing out* of manufacturing, a phrase popular since the 1980s, may be accompanied by the 'pockmarking' of services sectors if many

occupations across different sectors start becoming 'at risk.' While offshoring has contributed to value-addition and productivity growth, as mentioned by Catherine Mann (2003), among others, the gains have appeared in the form of corporate profits and have accrued primarily to employers, senior executives, shareholders, certain high-skilled non-tradable, non-offshoreable occupations, and as CEO/Management compensation. In 2005, corporate profits as a share of national income (at around 14.5%) were at their highest point in U.S. history. Economic growth has not translated itself into robust job growth, or more importantly, into the growth of well paying jobs.⁵ Even *The Economist* (2006) had to concede: "The pace of productivity growth has been rising again, but now it seems to be lifting fewer boats. After you adjust for inflation, the wages of the typical American worker—the one at the very middle of the income distribution—have risen less than 1% since 2000. ... the increased offshoring of services to India and other countries has expanded the global supply of workers. This has reduced the relative price of labor and raised the returns to capital."⁶

Long-term issues of competitiveness and standard of living

Economists are largely in agreement on the importance of continued innovation as the primary way to create high-paying new jobs in the United States and other developed economies.⁷ Indeed, continuous innovation is one of the key characteristics of the economic history of the United States, going back to the era of rapid industrialization in the late nineteenth century. The innovative dynamism of the U.S. economy, the creation of new goods, new services, new value, and the temporary global monopoly that comes with them, as well as the spillover effects that these innovations have on productivity in other sectors of the economy, have all played a large part in the creation of high-paying jobs and in the sustained rise of living standards. The response to job-loss concerns on the part of many economists has been to point to domestic innovative activity as the key to future job creation and economic growth.⁸ Recently, however, there have been increasing signs that R&D and innovative activity is being offshored to China, India, Russia, and some Eastern European countries through the global spread of corporate R&D centers. Although the innovations coming from these centers are still the intellectual

property of the parent companies in the West (further exacerbating the distributional consequences mentioned above, since the benefits will again largely accrue to the shareholders of these companies), the increasing innovative capacity being built up in many countries around the world through formation of critical masses of engineers, scientists, entrepreneurs and necessary support personnel may change the balance of competitive advantage for innovation and job creation in the longer term. The steady erosion of a base of skilled workers from the West through the education and hiring of critical innovative occupations abroad, as well as the movement overseas of many research, developmental, and support activities that are crucial to the whole infrastructure of innovation clusters, may result in a more globally distributed origin of future innovations than had hitherto been the case. It is possible, therefore, that the next wave of innovation, together with its job and income benefits, will bypass the United States and other advanced countries. On the other hand, there is also the possibility, at least for the immediately foreseeable future, that the infrastructure of innovation in places such as Silicon Valley in the United States (in the form of the financial, legal, and public-private institutional structure built up to shepherd start-up companies to their initial public offerings and entrepreneurs to their sought-after riches), as well as the profit potential of the large U.S. market, will continue to attract start-up technology firms, even if the products are initially conceived and developed abroad by fledgling Indian or Chinese firms.

The combination, therefore, of increased offshoring of high-paying jobs, sluggish domestic job creation, and growing inequality and rapid technological change in an environment buffeted by irresistible global forces has led to a situation where prospects for a healthy labor market are fraught with uncertainty, so much so that a backlash against globalization and offshoring is a distinct possibility. Add to this mix the speed with which services offshoring has gained momentum and the broad spectrum of occupations and sectors it can potentially affect, and it is easy to see why the political economy of the topic can be so contentious.

The fact that many of the vulnerable white-collar jobs are high-paying ones—and that those occupying these jobs are better connected to a greater range of levers of power than blue-collar workers affected by manufacturing offshoring—sheds further light

on the nature of the political debate. Some obvious suspects have lined up on the two sides of the issue. While unions and some politicians have been in the forefront of the anti-offshoring battle, the corporate sector and much of the academic and policy establishment has concentrated on stressing the positives, adopting a ‘wait and you will see job growth’ position. The policy debate has largely revolved around the following measures—a hands-off policy; R&D spending to promote innovation; renewed stress on math/science education; retraining for workers; workers wage insurance⁹; and administrative measures to curtail offshoring—with the political right mostly favoring the earlier options and the left the latter ones. However, it should be noted that many political positions have become scrambled due to the offshoring of white-collar jobs. While the left appeals for protectionism, the right has staked a moral claim to be on the side of working people in poorer countries, with the disingenuous internationalism of the right replacing the traditional internationalism of the left. On the other hand, some of the free traders of yesteryear have morphed into xenophobic protectionists.

THE DEVELOPING COUNTRY PERSPECTIVE: THE LIMITED AND EXCLUSIVE IMPACT OF OFFSHORING

In the developing world, job creation in large numbers has always been considered an effective weapon in the struggle against poverty. Thus the sudden influx of jobs created by manufacturing and services offshoring initially seemed like an answer to problems of economic backwardness and development in both China and India. Indeed, one can get the impression from reading the business press that the ongoing boom in services offshoring and the IT and Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) sectors is the major engine of growth for the Indian economy. Recently, however, there has been a somewhat increasing recognition of the limitations of, and challenges emerging from offshoring related rapid development with respect to both the manufacturing base in China and the IT sector in India. Although the number of jobs created—in India at least—is again a matter of some debate, the consequences, both positive and negative (even though the latter may have

emerged due to the very success of attracting large numbers of offshoring jobs), are being better appreciated.

The manufacturing miracle of China, fueled partly by offshoring by multinationals from developed countries (a significant part of China's exports to the United States, for example, are actually carried out by U.S. multinationals with manufacturing plants in China; see Burke 2000), has created a large middle class, primarily although not exclusively in the coastal regions and some of the larger cities. This has led to a significant economic divide between these regions and the rest of the country, as well as broader urban-rural disparity. Rapid increases in productivity, while a sign of the dynamic learning curve of the Chinese manufacturing sector, have also resulted in unemployment and underemployment, conservatively estimated to be in the hundreds of millions. These numbers, taken together with the release of population employed in agricultural occupations and accompanying urbanization, have accounted for large migratory populations in search of work. Pollution and growing wage inequalities have also been some of the other byproducts of this wave of offshoring of manufacturing to China.

In India's case, it is surely nobody's contention that offshoring has been purely detrimental to its economic fortunes. According to NASSCOM figures (NASSCOM 2007), there are approximately 1.3 million people now employed in the IT and ITES sectors. While the benefits of job creation due to business process outsourcing (i.e., offshoring from the United States) in India are indisputable, a number of factors need to be clarified. These factors include questions surrounding the magnitude of job creation due to job inflows; the issue of sustainability of the offshoring model; the geographic and social distribution of economic gains; the extent of spillover benefits to the rest of the economy; and potential economic consequences and side-effects of the offshoring boom. In short, a critical appraisal of the impact of the IT industry therefore runs along the lines of too little, too concentrated, too hyped, and too detached from the rest of the economy.

Magnitude of job creation

One of the stylized facts of our time seems to be that we are currently living in an era of large countries. In earlier times, there existed a widespread impression among laypeople that small countries (such as Singapore, Hong Kong, or Ireland) have all the advantages: they are easier to govern and manage; they are more responsive to policies; and they have a greater propensity for faster economic growth. Yet globalization has now unleashed the power of larger developing countries, with their large labor pools and large supply and demand side economies of scale, although most of the large developing countries figure way down in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. In other words, a country's role on the international stage today, more so than in earlier times, is a function of its GDP rather than GDP per capita. One could call it the comforting solace of large absolute numbers, a mirage that sometimes blinds one to relative figures and per capita achievements (or the lack thereof). Impressive achievements at the national level—whether the size of the IT industry, the number of engineers graduating each year, and so on—are put into their proper perspective once the relative and proportional context is applied.

For example, the newly released provisional data of the Indian Economic Census (2006) are quite revealing when it comes to the magnitude of net job creation by the IT industry (Note: The provisional release does not include data on wages, incomes, or inflation). The Census of all the 42 million enterprises in the country covers the boom years of the Indian IT and ITES sectors, 1998-2005, the period when services offshoring acquired a sustained momentum. Table 1 shows rural and urban non-farm employment and employment growth data for eleven states and the union territory of Delhi, which together account for 80% of non-farm employment in India. A surprising finding of the Census has been that non-farm rural employment grew faster (3.33% per annum) than urban employment (1.68%) during this period. As Table 1 shows, the fastest employment growth overall among the major employment generating states has occurred in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Andhra. If one looks at urban job growth rate alone, then the fastest growing states are Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Delhi, and Gujarat, in that order. In terms of absolute

numbers of urban jobs created, Tamil Nadu and Kerala again occupy the top two spots, leaving the traditional giants Maharashtra and Gujarat, as well as the states most identified with the IT phenomenon in India such as Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, further down in the list.¹⁰ Of course, since the jobs created by the IT industry are of significantly higher value, the state GDP data may end up looking somewhat different. In any case, seen in the context of the country as a whole, or even in the context of the component states themselves, the magnitude of job creation by the IT related sectors does not seem very large. However, since the Census does not cover the self-employed in the informal sector, such as domestic help, hawkers, many part-time, informal employees, and individual, non-hired unskilled laborers, it is possible that the net job gains as a result of spillovers are much larger.

TABLE 1.

	<u>Total Employment</u> (2005)			<u>Annual Avg.</u> <u>Growth Rate</u> (1998-2005)		<u>Jobs Created</u> (1998-2005)	
	Rural	Urban	Both	Urban	Both	Urban	Both
Andhra Pradesh	5,718,202	3,152,389	8,870,591	1.32%	2.40%	276490.62	1,356,908
Bihar	1,382,776	893,304	2,276,080	-1.77%	0.27%	-118951.8	42,557
Gujarat	2,569,131	3,245,054	5,814,185	1.48%	1.39%	317137.29	535,534
Karnataka	3,319,579	2,658,856	5,978,435	0.91%	1.86%	163368.64	723,567
Kerala	3,683,752	1,875,585	5,559,337	8.08%	5.39%	786856.98	1,709,634
Madhya Pradesh	1,868,201	2,352,283	4,220,484	0.54%	1.04%	87026.404	294,858
Maharashtra	4,625,398	7,201,168	11,826,566	0.91%	1.79%	442462.86	1,381,219
Punjab	1,059,033	1,628,475	2,687,508	2.64%	3.59%	271522.67	587,964
Tamil Nadu	5,188,276	4,678,357	9,866,633	3.78%	4.62%	1070098.1	2,674,363
Uttar Pradesh	4,195,837	4,344,201	8,540,038	1.40%	3.03%	402858.05	1,610,346
West Bengal	4,921,382	4,396,644	9,318,026	0.00%	0.87%	0	548,224
Delhi	73,079	4,006,954	4,080,033	2.31%	2.21%	591977.15	578,889
Total	38,604,646	40,433,270	79,037,916			4,290,847	12,044,065

As a minor digression, one might note that while West Bengal's net urban job creation rate of 0% might seem to confirm the steady decline of the state's industrial base, which is only now being addressed, the extraordinary performance of Kerala, a state with somewhat similar political and economic culture, is a puzzle.

In the absence of more data, one could perhaps speculate that the inflow of remittances from the state's diaspora, because of the more dispersed nature of its recipients, succeeds in mitigating credit constraints of small entrepreneurs. This might end up creating more jobs than the much larger but concentrated investment flows to the IT oriented states.

Selective impact

A general matter of concern to many economists, social thinkers, and activists in India has been the fact that liberalization and reforms are being carried out on an already very unequal distribution of income and wealth. The recent benefits from the Indian IT sector have by and large bypassed large segments of the population, particularly those at the bottom of the social spectrum, thus further exacerbating economic disparities. Indeed, as things stand at present, the IT and ITES sectors are mostly confined to a handful of large cities, and more specifically, to the westernized upper-middle classes within these metropolitan areas. Even the lowest-paid offshoring jobs, such as call center operators or customer care representatives, immediately place the recipients in the top deciles of the income strata; in a majority of cases, employees come from a relatively affluent economic and social background to begin with. Needless to say, the resulting increase in income and wealth disparities has had an adverse impact on the price of housing and the general cost of living for those not involved in the IT industry in these metropolitan areas, particularly in the absence of affordable and reliable public services, such as transportation. Skewed development priorities, such as inadequate expenditures to combat widespread illiteracy, neglect of the physical infrastructure due to both private and public failures, and a general inability of the state structures to marshal resources commensurate with a booming economy do not make for a sustainable and conducive environment in which gains from offshoring can be usefully tapped. The rural-urban divide, along with increasing inequality in urban areas, further adds to the mix of factors that can create social instability and impede harmonious economic development.¹¹

An industry-isolate

Although a number of other countries-competitors in Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa exist in the marketplace for the offshoring of services, the significant mass of expertise built up in India in the whole spectrum of IT and ITES activities suggests that the outlook for services offshoring for the foreseeable future is sustainable, despite the well known problems of wage-inflation in some selected occupations, selective shortage of skilled personnel, and so on. The problem again lies elsewhere. Since the general path of development of the IT sector has been largely linked to the offshoring model, with the domestic market playing second fiddle, the social exclusivity of the sector referred to above is compounded by economic isolation. IT is potentially an input into practically every industry and sector and is a major factor in productivity growth wherever it is used. It requires widespread dissemination to be truly effective, hence the importance of a large domestic market. The potential size of the domestic market should therefore be both an incentive and a prerequisite for rapid growth on a sustained basis, whereas technological islands of excellence can be difficult to maintain.¹²

In addition to the specific attributes of the IT sector in India mentioned above, there are some other reasons for its somewhat exaggerated importance in contemporary Indian discourse. It could be said that the IT sector fits in well with the pervasive white-collar ethos of India's upper social strata and its aspirations for global recognition. While the dignity of blue-collar labor has never been highly prized by the upper classes (although attitudes are changing), information technology represents modernization, power, and prestige in today's global economy and polity; to display surpassing expertise in it is to be a global player of some importance. One could also say that India has its own version of the 'blackboard rule'¹³ and that the IT sector is compatible with the educational structure in the country as well as the underdeveloped physical infrastructure.

The challenge faced by the emerging economies of China, India, South Africa, Russia, Brazil, and other countries is thus to ensure that the benefits of this new emerging white-collar

specialization of labor, brought about by technological and institutional changes, can be channeled and harnessed for larger social and human development goals. Despite the differences in economic structures, and even the institutional and political setup in these countries, they all face somewhat similar developmental dilemmas, particularly when it comes to the joint impact of the twin forces of technology and globalization.

POLICY MATTERS, AND IS THERE A JOINT PERSPECTIVE?

The problem of mitigating the pain of adjustment from changes wrought by globalization, in its present stage of services offshoring, is common to developing countries and developed countries alike. The interplay of trade and technology has created ‘gainers’ and ‘losers’ in both sets of countries, leaving us grappling with some critical questions: What are some of the issues involved in economically feasible yet socially responsible approaches that can help reconcile what may seem to be contradictory and conflicting objectives on the two sides? Are policies promoting job creation in developed countries consistent with, in conflict with, or irrelevant to goals for developing countries? Glib formulations about a win-win situation arising out of offshoring, or the gains from trade and technology, rightly seem simplistic and patronizing, particularly to those who are dislocated and displaced. Ideally speaking, even in the absence of globally sustainable and reconcilable policies, a search for long-term global strategies is necessary for a better understanding of the issues and problems confronting those impacted adversely in both sets of countries.¹⁴

Issues in the United States

If there is an economic environment of rapid growth in innovation with broad dissemination through the economy, accompanied by the attendant economy-wide benefits of productivity growth and creation of high-paying jobs in the context of an overall positive global growth environment, then the political economy of offshoring will be somewhat manageable on the U.S. front. However, there is no law in economics or the sciences that says innovation has to accelerate or that the ‘next big thing’ is around the

corner. Although there will always be gradual, creeping innovation, the development of general purpose technologies such as IT, which has an economy-wide positive impact on job creation as well as productivity, is not inevitable. The newly emerging international specialization of R&D activity, however, gives rise to the possibility of carrying out cooperative international efforts to increase the pace of innovation and benefit in both developed and developing countries. The challenge for developed countries is thus two-fold: in addition to promoting innovation, with all that this implies in terms of education, R&D spending and subsidies, retraining, and so forth, they will have to ensure the widest possible social returns of these innovations so that the benefits are not appropriated by the top management of firms alone.

The unprecedented challenges that developed countries face in restructuring their economies are further underscored by a structural attribute of these economies. The economies of most developed countries are primarily services based, with manufacturing playing an increasingly minor role, leading to three additional sets of challenges: (1) Unfortunately for developed countries, most of the services that are not offshoreable are precisely those where productivity growth is intrinsically slow, or sometimes not even desirable, which means that such services become relatively costlier, therefore condemning advanced economies to even higher-cost structures¹⁵; (2) Many of these non-offshoreable occupations operate in winner-take-all markets, leading to large disparities in incomes within the same occupation in addition to rising inequalities across occupations; (3) To further add to labor market woes, the competitive advantage that many developed countries enjoy with respect to a range of services is difficult to exploit from a domestic job creation point of view, since exports of services such as consulting, legal, and technical services frequently leads to the establishment of offices abroad, and as a consequence, local hiring rather than at the headquarters.¹⁶

Faced with this dilemma, the more progressive policy makers, recognizing that protectionism at home pits workers here against those in the developing world, call for extracting additional resources from those quarters that are the prime beneficiaries of offshoring in order to pay for measures that can insure and retrain displaced workers, promote innovation, and create new jobs.

The issue of global labor standards is also brought up by many. Sarah Anderson and John Cavanagh (2004), while arguing that “the U.S. government should ensure that tax, government procurement, and subsidy policies are instruments for supporting good U.S. jobs,” also suggest that “raising standards overseas is vital to retaining stable and substantial jobs at home.” While any attempt to improve labor standards anywhere is to be welcomed, the issue is somewhat of a red herring, at least in the case of the present crop of services jobs. In any case, the constant invoking of global labor standards tends to put the onus of adjustment on the developing world. The predicament that the developed countries find themselves in is, after all, a natural consequence of the twin forces of capitalism and globalization.

Issues on the Indian side

In India’s case, the economic challenges revolve around boosting the job creation rate and spreading the largesse more equitably across the country and across a broader cross-section of society. The critical question is thus perhaps not the nature of the jobs themselves, which is of greater political importance in the West. Rather, because of India’s vast and relatively untapped human resources, there is an overwhelming need to attack poverty through job creation. The offshoring connected job bonanza has come about primarily because of a copious supply of relatively cheap, skilled labor. Some policies, therefore, suggest themselves. A significant increase in the numbers of graduating college students, together with incentives for moving offshoring operations to secondary and tertiary cities, is called for. While the market is taking tentative steps in the latter direction because of rising costs in the main metropolitan areas, policy intervention is still required to hasten and direct the process.¹⁷ In the matter of boosting numbers in higher education, the recently enacted reservations policy,¹⁸ in addition to its other social objectives, may succeed in giving a jolt to the moribund system, hopefully leading to a significant increase in the intake of students. This increase is necessitated by the need to retain the absolute number of seats available in the non-reserved category.

Services offshoring, however, is unlikely to deliver the goods in terms of a sizeable number of generated jobs. To make any

serious inroads into unemployment, India will have to tap emerging opportunities in manufacturing. The Chinese success in manufacturing can be quite instructive in a number of different ways. The ongoing offshoring of manufacturing from all around the world to China has had a relatively more beneficial impact on the socio-economic structure than services offshoring has had in India's case. This is due to the fact that manufacturing has created, in absolute terms, a significantly larger number of jobs in China: first, because local sales and purchases by foreign multinational corporations (MNCs) in the domestic Chinese market have also been sizeable, with all the spillover effects that accrue to manufacturing both from upstream and downstream sectors; and second, because manufacturing created blue-collar jobs, the natural and traditional employment transition for the peasantry throughout history. Manufacturing has created employment opportunities for a critical group and mitigated somewhat the potential inequality and social tensions that might have emerged had new job opportunities accrued to the traditional urban elite alone. There are increasing indications that manufacturing offshoring spillovers from China are already finding their way to other neighboring countries. The potential of a sizeable domestic market, low-cost blue-collar labor, and infrastructure improvements, particularly in the transportation nodes and coastal entrepôts, may attract more manufacturing to India from the developed world in the near future.

Development of rural entrepreneurship is another potential source of job growth. Indeed, the Economic Census data referred to earlier seem to suggest that, as with China, where small rural self-employed enterprises have grown fast, are financially healthy, and have contributed significantly to employment growth (see Zhang et al. 2006), the self-employed rural landscape in India is also showing signs of dynamism. Incidentally, while offshoring surely cannot be a major job creator for the rural unemployed, a few non-profit and quasi-non-profit organizations have launched efforts recently to help train people in non-urban areas for some of the non-IT related offshoring occupations that do not require higher education, such as in selective design-animation related work.

Although India is somewhat better placed to harness globalization and offshoring for economic growth and job creation than many other developing countries, the lack of a political

consensus at the national level and the absence of an effective public-private strategy limit the possibilities. While market enthusiasts would like to downsize government and the public sector,¹⁹ those on the left seem to be in constant opposition to various economic policies and have few suggestions for tapping global opportunities for poverty alleviation. For example, a consensus could revolve around a politically feasible job-creating foreign direct investment (FDI) and public-private initiatives in infrastructure. As the successful examples of many other countries have shown, the most effective way of exploiting the possibilities from globalization for broader development is actually through national policies that take into account distinctive national features, institutions, and imperatives rather than an obsession with standardized international ones.²⁰ As a matter of broad strategy, a politico-economic policy oriented toward job growth will deliver both jobs and economic growth, helping to mitigate poverty.

Academic and policy literature has been prolific in suggesting lessons to be learned by India from the Chinese economic experience. It should be kept in mind, however, that in addition to India's better ability to manage political conflicts,²¹ there are a number of other areas of a purely economic nature where India is either better placed or in a position not to emulate some of the more harmful economic policies of the Chinese.²² A variety of factors bode well for India's ability to seize the opportunities of globalization in an equitable manner, including the responsiveness and viability of the Indian banking system, the wide array of expertise developed in services sectors that are of increasing importance in the global economy, more transparent political and economic governance, a growing tradition of technology entrepreneurship, and finally, an assertive civil society that tries to ensure that the more egregious and disruptive of reforms will be kept at arms length.

Some general remarks

Having started with manufacturing processes, offshoring has embraced large swaths of services sectors and now innovative activity as well. This single largest burst of restructuring of the global economy since the colonial era presents many challenges to

developed and developing countries alike. The issue of job creation has been the key issue stressed in this chapter, since it is critical to poverty alleviation in the case of developing countries and is a matter of increasing concern in developed ones. The prospect of job losses in industrialized countries far into the future, together with rising concerns about the creation of new well-paying jobs, may lead to calls for protectionism, to political pressures on developing countries, or to efforts for some sort of global accommodation. On the part of developing countries, offshoring has brought home the lopsided nature of economic growth and is leading to efforts to seek ways to tap the growing opportunities of globalization for creating jobs for broader development. Since offshoring presents challenges on both sides of the geo-economic divide, then given the present economic and political realities it is necessary to pose a broad question: How can the process of globalization in general and offshoring in particular be managed politically and globally in a manner that is conducive to broad-based growth for both sides?

The easy answer would be innovation, which may allow the present structural shift to continue without undue dislocation, pushing the day of reckoning with increasing inequality further into the future. While the future rate of innovation is inherently uncertain, the increasing global specialization in innovative activity, the creation of a global scientific labor force, and the synergy between globally dispersed innovative regions might boost the chances of scientific breakthroughs. In the absence of a healthy rate of innovation, or indeed an accelerating rate of innovation (which would be required in developed countries in order to stay one-step ahead in new job creation), the global distribution of jobs may turn out to be a bitterly contested and divisive issue. It may also turn out to be difficult to postpone dealing with issues of rising inequality in the United States if some pre-emptive measures are not taken soon, whether in terms of a national wage insurance policy or some other fiscal or regulatory measures.

For India, offshoring has resulted in the creation of jobs, albeit only in a few concentrated locations and with limited impact. While the present stage of net-job creation due to offshoring has been the result of foreign and domestic investment meant for exports to U.S. markets, many on the left seem to suggest in knee-jerk reaction that offshoring is the thin end of the wedge for other kinds of FDI that

might displace local firms and jobs, as it also targets the domestic market in India. A politico-economic consensus, whether it is on issues relating to FDI, infrastructure, or education, is necessary for utilizing present global conditions for harnessing globalization and offshoring for broader economic development. While the search for a consistent global approach might seem difficult in light of contradictory labor market issues on the two sides, a number of other contradictions of present day global economy and polity further bedevil the attempt. There may be one global economy, but there is not one global polity; there may a global labor market, but there is no free labor mobility across borders; there may be one military-political superpower, but there are rising numbers of economic powers; the global supply of labor may have suddenly increased from the point of view of MNCs, but the supply of capital is the same. Indeed, the present model of economic globalization is also being accompanied by political localization and fragmentation, leading to unforeseeable consequences. As Richard Freeman (2005) says, “[t]he world needs a new model of globalization.”

It is interesting to note that while most of the criticism of globalization originated in the developing world, critiques of offshoring have for obvious reasons come more recently from the developed West. As noted earlier, some of this criticism is misdirected. Part of the reason for conflating the impact of globalization with those of other economic, political, and social policies is due to the fact that globalization—or the broader opening up of societies and economies—has at times been the vehicle for bringing in the more radical of pro-market ideas to the developing world. On the other hand, if globalization is understood in its expansive form, it has also served to bring together many NGO activists and political voices from across our shrinking world. This new stage in international consciousness has been brought about by a realization that unlike in the past, when ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ were separated by national boundaries, this time both reside in the same country, leading to the complex nature of cross-country alliances that we see developing today in certain grassroots global social movements. It is perhaps fitting that an issue with global resonance should have a global constituency in search of global solutions.

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NOTES

¹ *Offshoring* is sometimes inaccurately referred to as *outsourcing*.

² Of course, in the absence of offshoring, U.S. labor would have competed, to a lesser extent, with immigrant labor.

³ Many on the Indian side disapprove of looking a gift horse in the mouth, since offshoring has brought in jobs, but investigating the full impact and fallout of offshoring is necessary for exploiting its potential for broader growth.

⁴ A partial list of significant contributors to this debate would include Jensen and Kletzer (2005); Bhagwati, Panagariya, and Srinivasan (2004); Dossani and Kenney (2006); Atkinson (2006); Hira and Hira (2005).

⁵ While some may argue that the average American also profits because many people are invested in the stock market directly or indirectly through pension funds and the like, what most lose through low wages and disappearing jobs is not compensated by dividend income and capital gains. Major holdings of stocks, bonds, and other financial assets are, by and large, the preserve of the wealthy (see the Survey of Income and Program Participation 2007).

⁶ Of course, not all of the increase in inequality is to be blamed on offshoring. Other culprits include the low bargaining clout of labor, technological bias favoring some kinds of skilled labor, and fiscal and other policies.

⁷ This is also a key assumption of the 'win-win' school of thought, since both the United States and India stand to gain in this scenario, with the latter continuing to get the 'older' jobs. On the other hand, lead times for individual countries and for Schumpeterian profits for firms are getting squeezed, with greater implications than before for policy intervention.

⁸ After all, if the same job can be effectively carried out at a distance, but at a fraction of the cost, after adjusting for productivity

difference, then it stands to reason that the developed countries need to create jobs that are ‘new,’ or not easily replicable or non-offshoreable; hence the need for innovation.

⁹ See Kletzer and Litan (2001) for the wage insurance proposal.

¹⁰ Tamil Nadu does have a sizeable IT presence, but more importantly, it also has a diversified manufacturing industry, which has been doing well and which probably accounts for the high rate of urban job growth.

¹¹ With the notable exception of the Rural Employment Guarantee Act, many government policies in the economic sphere in the past couple of decades have been skewed in favor of the top decile or so; consider, for instance, the absence of a long term capital gains tax on equities and the inheritance tax.

¹² Some claim that developments such as the rapid development of offshoring, the construction of back offices of U.S. multinational corporations (MNCs), and the establishment of corporate R&D centers in Bangalore and a few other cities, have given rise to an Indian version of the *Dutch Disease* of old. To recall, the latter is an economic term to denote the connection between an increase in revenues from natural resources (or indeed any development that results in large inflows of foreign currency, such as offshoring from the United States to India) and an increase in the exchange rate, which has an adverse impact on other sectors, such as manufacturing, by making them less competitive. In the Indian context, the wooing of skilled professional and managerial talent by IT related sectors has bid up their wages in other sectors as well, impacting growth potential there (see Kocchar et al. 2006).

¹³ *Blackboard rule* was a term coined to describe the propensity of Russian science to be biased in favor of academic subjects that involved use of a blackboard and did not need sophisticated apparatuses, infrastructure, equipment, supplies, etc. The underlying reasons are the relatively simpler logistics and ‘planning’ involved.

¹⁴ That the experience of globalization has been a mixed one, especially for developing countries, is well summed up by Rodrik (2002): “For most of the world’s developing countries, the 1990s were a decade of frustration and disappointment. ... Latin American countries experienced growth rates significantly below their historical averages. Most of the former socialist economies ended the decade at *lower* levels of per-capita income than they started it.

... East Asian economies, which had been hailed previously as ‘miracles,’ were dealt a humiliating blow in the financial crisis of 1997. That this was also the decade in which globalization came into full swing is more than a minor inconvenience for its advocates. If globalization is such a boon for poor countries, why so many setbacks?”

¹⁵ See Blinder (2005) and Nordhaus (2004) for what is known as *Baumol’s disease*.

¹⁶ This is due to the manner in which most of these services are delivered to customers: production and consumption occur at the same place.

¹⁷ There are additional benefits to this policy of urban decentralization in terms of relieving the pressure on larger cities and bringing urbanization to the hinterland.

¹⁸ The Indian reservations policy reserves seats in education and government jobs for less privileged social strata; in 2006 its scope was extended to include what are known as *other backward castes*.

¹⁹ Few in India know that the United States, with a labor force less than one-third of India’s, has approximately as many people in the state sector. It is true that the composition of the U.S. state sector is entirely different, being concentrated in educational, regulatory, and governance spheres; however, the point here is that the relevance and importance of an effective government in India is greater and broader.

²⁰ See Kumar and Sharma (this volume). As pointed out by Rodrik (2002), “China’s economic policies have violated virtually every rule by which the proselytizers of globalization would like the game to be played. China did *not* liberalize its trade regime to any significant extent ... to this day, its economy remains among the most protected in the world. ... Most striking of all, China achieved its transformation without adopting private-property rights, let alone privatizing its state enterprises.”

²¹ See Pranab Bardhan (2003).

²² China seems to have enjoyed for a while the best of both worlds: capitalism and socialism. The Chinese version of this ‘equilibrium’ is unstable and fraught with contradictions and is ‘addicted’ to unsustainably high economic growth rates. The opaque public decision-making of quasi-private enterprises, the high savings rate

driven by a disappearing safety net, and a Soviet-style penchant for gigantism are just some of the stranger features of the economy.

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