indialogs
Spanish Journal of India Studies

Nº 1
2014
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## Miscellanea/ Miscelánea

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Welcome to the first issue of Indi@logs - Spanish Journal of India Studies, the first electronic journal in Spain that focuses exclusively on the Indian Subcontinent. The journal is a joint initiative of the Spanish Association for Interdisciplinary India Studies http://www.aeeii.org together with the Department of English of the UAB. The journal covers a wide variety of disciplines, ranging from literature, culture and film to politics, history and environmental studies. Indi@logs is an academic journal but one of its goals is to reach out to the general public and encourage a deeper understanding of the richness and diversity of India, its people and its extraordinary history. This is why we have opted for an open access system journal. Our objectives are to promote research on India from a multidisciplinary perspective and strengthen cultural and scientific ties with the subcontinent. Indi@logs is a forum where a network of scholars within Spain and abroad with common interests can publish their research and circulate their work in both English and Spanish. The Spanish Association for Interdisciplinary India Studies has worked hard in the last five years to create a space for Indian studies in our country and to put Spain on the international map of leading academic work on the subcontinent.

The journal, which will be published once a year, consists of scholarly articles and a Miscellanea section, where authors are invited to contribute memoirs, shorter academic papers, extracts from work-in-progress or other types of pieces aimed at the non-specialised reader. We are indebted to the scholars who have generously accepted our invitation to contribute to the launching of the journal. The eight articles in the first issue cover a variety of disciplines ranging from literary analyses to environmental studies, from the sociopolitical to the musical.

Proceeding in alphabetical order, renowned postcolonial scholar, Bill Ashcroft, deals with what he calls “Midnight’s heirs”, that is, a young generation of Indian writers who have carried on the Rushdiesque subversion of the grand narrative of nation. He
argues that the work of writers such as Arundhati Roy, Hari Kunzru, Aravind Adiga and Kiran Desai, have proved that the Indian Anglophone novel has reached a high level of sophistication in its global reach and pervasive social critique. Enrique Gallud Jardiel focuses on a play by Nobel Prize winner, Jacinto Benavente, which describes, in allegorical terms, the so-called Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Benavente clearly sides with the rebels as he emphasises their tolerance, compassion and pacifism unlike the British who are portrayed in unfavourable terms. The silandeses – sea landers, that is, the British – consider themselves vastly superior to the natives but Gallud shows how Benavente criticises their materialism and cruelty.

Joel Kuortti takes a close look at one of the notorious episodes of the British Raj: the Amritsar Massacre of 1919. His article compares the narrative strategies used by two authors, Salman Rushdie and Shauna Singh Baldwin, to recount the incident. He suggests that despite the fact that the event described is the same one, they approach the colonial political situation from different angles. Joan Martinez-Alier, Leah Temper and Federico Demaria provide readers with a detailed analysis of environmental issues in India today. Through a series of case studies – responses in Odisha to bauxite mining, conflicts on sand mining, disputes on waste management options in Delhi and ship dismantling in Alang, Gujarat – they provide the reader with a clear picture of ecological distribution conflicts in India today. Their article concludes with a vindication of environmental justice movements as they contribute to democracy and constitute the strongest forces for environmental sustainability.

Agustín Pániker examines the figure of the father of the Indian constitution, Bhimrao Ambedkar, and his role in current dalit consciousness, which has grown in recent years. Pániker highlights Ambedkar’s work in improving the socioeconomic status of the former untouchables despite the fact that he had serious disagreements with Gandhi. He points out the irony of the current state of Ambedkarite Neobuddhism, which has practically become another Hindu sect. Makarand Paranjape takes a close look at the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi through a detailed discussion of two films, one a British blockbuster and the other a typical Bollywood masala. Paranjape suggests that Gandhi’s ideas have survived the passage of time. Attenborough’s Gandhi casts him as a twentieth-century saint while Lage Raho Munna Bhai focuses on the Mahatma’s afterlife and how his spirit can still be revitalized in contemporary India. What Paranjape calls Gandhi’s “haunting of the nation” may become as transformative as it is therapeutic.
Óscar Pujol explores the work of Octavio Paz in The Monkey Grammarians in order to tease out the reflections made by the Mexican poet on language and poetry. The metaphysical raptures remind us that he was, until 1968, his country's ambassador to India. Pujol argues that Paz’s ideas on language coincide with those of Abhinavagupta, the 11th century Indian literary critic and priest. He suggests that Paz’s notion of reconciliation between the figure of the poet and that of the philosopher would have found favour with the 11th century scholar, despite the huge gap in geographical and temporal terms between them. Mohan Ramanan describes the power and effect of South Indian Classical Musical Culture and in particular the Bhakti tradition. His article describes in great detail the form and nature of Kutcheri, the South Indian music concert and points out the need to differentiate between Karnatak music and Hindustani (North Indian) music. Ramanan’s article insists on the importance of Sanskrit aesthetic tradition and the concept of rasa in order to appreciate the emotional mood of Indian music.

In the Miscellanea section we are honoured to be able to include work by two well-known scholars in Indian studies. Uma Parameswaran focuses on the evolution of a South Asian community in the diaspora. Her own experiences in Winnipeg during the nineteen sixties show how these early pioneers slowly acquired diaspora consciousness even though this has meant that the community has become fragmented into linguistic and religious groups. However, she suggests that old ways of social interaction die hard as, for example, gender separation occurs almost unconsciously among affluent people among today’s Indo-Canadians. Susie Tharu’s innovative research is represented here in the extract from her book on dalit women. She shows how in the early years of the dalit and feminist movements, dalit women often clashed against well-intentioned male and female activists as they refused to forfeit their traditions or their identity. She states that caste patriarchy is a productive term to use in questions of dalit emancipation as both women’s issues as well as problems of land, water, housing, bank loans, education, political leadership and domestic violence need to be addressed.

The articles that make up our first issue have set a high standard for Indi@logs. We look forward to receiving research articles from scholars in Spain and abroad as the success of our new journal depends on the international community of Indian enthusiasts. By launching it through the Open Journal System, we hope to encourage both the spread of Indian Studies in our country and the consolidation of Spain as an active participant in international arenas on India. We hope this task will come to
Editorial

fruition in the issues to come with the help of the academic community to whom Indi@logs is addressed.
ABSTRACT
This paper argues that while it is generally accepted that contemporary Indian literature entered a decisive, cosmopolitan and globally popular phase with the publication of *Midnight’s Children* in 1981, this period actually demonstrated a continuation of deep skepticism about nationalism that had originated with Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. The three decades after 1981 have revealed a literature whose mobility and energy has had perhaps a greater impact on English literature than any other. The argument is that this mobility goes hand in hand with skepticism about nation and nationalism that has had a pronounced impact on the perception of the globalization of literature. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008) and Hari Kunzru’s *Transmission* (2004) sketch the trajectory of the contemporary novel’s extension of *Midnight Children’s* subversion of the grand narrative of nation. Three of these share the status of Rushdie’s novel as a Booker Prize winner and indicating that the impact of India’s nationalist skepticism has been felt globally.

KEYWORDS: Indian literature; nationalism; globalization; mobility; Arundhati Roy; Kiran Desai; Aravind Adiga; Hari Kunzru

RESUMEN Más allá de la nación: la movilidad de la literatura india

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1. An earlier version of this paper was published as “Re-Writing India” in Krishna Sen & Rituparna Roy (eds) (2013), *Writing India Anew*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP.
iniciada por *Midnight Children*. Tres de estas novelas comparten con Rushdie el estatus de haber ganado el premio Booker, lo cual indica que el impacto del escepticismo nacionalista indio se ha experimentado a nivel global.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Literatura india; nacionalismo; globalización; movilidad; Arundhati Roy; Kiran Desai; Aravind Adiga; Hari Kunzru.

For most critics, and possibly for most readers, contemporary Indian literature entered a decisive, cosmopolitan and globally popular phase with the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* in 1981. The following decades have witnessed the growth of a literature that has been outward-looking, confident and increasingly widely read. It is arguable that in that time the Indian literary diaspora has had a greater impact on English Literature than writing from any other nation. The revolution inaugurated by Rushdie hinged on the subversion of the nationalist euphoria of midnight, 27 August 1947. One version of this story is that the euphoria continued until the arrival of Indira Gandhi, when disappointment set in with a vengeance. The 1980s saw the flourishing of a literature – particularly the Bombay novel (Ashcroft, 2011) – virtually obsessed with Gandhian corruption. But whatever the confluence of forces, it seems that *Midnight’s Children* triggered scepticism about nationalism that has characterised India’s increasingly vital and outward-moving literature.

However, in many respects the ‘Rushdie revolution’ represents a continuation rather than a break. While it is clear that *Midnight’s Children* marks the beginning of the growth of diasporic Indian literature over the next three decades, it regenerates a hidden tradition of anti-nationalist utopianism in Indian literature most prominent in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Gandhi. The irony of this is that both Tagore and Gandhi have become nationalist icons and in Gandhi’s case sanctified almost as a national deity. Yet it is their insurgent *anti-national* philosophy that best survives in the contemporary novel. *Midnight’s Children* won the Booker Prize in 1981 and we can follow this phenomenon of post-nationalist mobility through subsequent Indian Booker Prize winners, the inheritors of Rushdie’s prize-winning revolution, to understand the nature of this globalizing trend. The three Booker-winning novels are Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) and Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008). Also of key relevance here is a novel that
Beyond the Nation

perhaps more than any others demonstrates the direction of Indian writing: diasporic British Indian Hari Kunzru’s *Transmission* (2004).

To understand the manner in which India is being written anew today, we need to understand the history of the Indian relationship with the idea of nation, in particular the history of its literary imaginings, undergirded by a utopianism that goes hand in hand, ironically, with a deep anti-nationalist scepticism. For both Tagore and Gandhi future thinking was inextricable from a sense of moral purpose in which Indian destiny existed beyond the confines of the Nation, and in many respects that utopian supra-nationalist vision of India came into full flower in the period inaugurated by *Midnight’s Children*.

The imagined community of the Indian nation can be understood in three stages in India’s literary development. Of course they are not clearly demarcated periods: they overlap extensively, but each is dominated by a particular utopian vision. The first period, from the beginning of the century to independence, is the time of nationalist fervour, of the light on the hill, the promised utopia of the modern Indian nation. This is the period in which Tagore’s vision went against the grain of Swadeshi nationalism – two poles around which Indian writing continued to circulate. This is also the period in which Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* came out in English, but the effect of Gandhi’s deep scepticism about nationalism was not to take effect until after independence. The second is the period after independence, a period of apparent modernization but one that in reality consolidated the alternative modernity that had begun during colonial occupation. This is the period of national triumph in which Gandhi’s vision of *Hind Swaraj*, although co-opted by official nationalist politics, proved to be subversive in the purity of its philosophical anarchism. The third stems from the time of Indira Gandhi – a manifestation of the imagined community for which *Midnight’s Children* if not its initiator, is its most evocative example. This is a period of rebellion and recovery, but it moves by the turn of the century into a period of global optimism. In each one of these periods the figure of Mohandas Gandhi looms large but his presence underpins the imagining of the nation in quite different ways.

The nation-state has been critiqued in postcolonial analysis largely because the post-independence, post-colonized nation, that wonderful utopian idea, proved to be a focus of
exclusion and division rather than unity, perpetuating the class divisions of the colonial state rather than liberating national subjects. However, nationalism and its vision of a liberated nation have still been extremely important to anti-colonial literature because the idea of nation has so clearly focused the utopian ideals of independence, and perhaps nowhere more so than in the early decades of twentieth-century India. Nevertheless, in Tagore we find the trenchant position of the earliest and most widely known anti-nationalist. For Tagore, there can be no good nationalism; it can only be what he calls the “fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship” (Tagore, 2005: 39) – the exquisite irony being the use of his songs as Bengali, Bangladeshi and Indian national anthems. Tagore’s warning against the model of European nationalism was unmistakable:

This abstract being, the Nation, is ruling India. (46)
The Nation, with all its paraphernalia of power and prosperity… cannot hide the fact that the Nation is the greatest evil for the Nation. (60)
Nationalism is a great menace. It is a particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India’s troubles. (87)

Tagore’s scepticism over nationalism was a by-product of his utopian vision. He railed against the teaching that “idolatry of the Nation is almost better than reverence for God or humanity.” (83) Tagore’s utopianism is nowhere more evident than in his belief in the spiritual potential of human society for openness and acceptance:

I have no hesitation in saying that those who are gifted with the moral power of love and vision of spiritual unity, who have the least feeling of enmity against aliens, and the sympathetic insight to place themselves in the position of others, will be the fittest to take their permanent place in the age that is lying before us. (78)

It is certainly not the spiritual fervour of this that characterizes contemporary Indian writing, but rather the sense of a future world beyond the restrictions of the nation. Indian society has always been exogenous and this has only become more pronounced.

Tagore was ahead of his time in more ways than one. However, the early years of the century were marked by an anti-colonial momentum that set very great store by the idea of the nation. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s Anandamath coined the image that was to become the essence of Indian nationalism:

“an enchanting image more beautiful or glorious than Lakshmi or Sarasvati”
“Who is she?”
Beyond the Nation

“The Mother”
‘Who is this Mother?’
The monk answered: “She whose children we are.” (Chatterjee, 2006: 149)

Mother India became a rallying point for Indian nationalism, and its most iconic representation in the film *Mother India* ensured that the image would continue to haunt the Indian imagination. Such images offer a much more powerful focus than ‘visions of spiritual unity’, and the connection between the nation and Mother India was imprinted on the Indian psyche. Yet, against the militancy of ‘Swadeshi’ nationalism Tagore produced his novel *Ghare Baire (The Home and the World)*. Swadeshi advocated the boycott of foreign goods but “drew increasingly on the rhetoric and iconography of a revivalist Hindu nationalism that sought to define the nation in religious terms” (Gopal, 2009: 34). When Hindu-Muslim riots broke out Tagore became one of the movement’s most trenchant critics, earning himself the reputation of apologist for colonialism. The complexity of utopian thinking can be seen in the clash between Mother India and Tagore’s vision of a union of home and world. Both are visions of the future, one attaining tremendous power in the lead-up to independence, the other looking beyond the boundaries of nation and rejecting its idolatry. The latter is arguably the deeper and longer-lasting in the Indian literary consciousness.

In the decades before and after the turn of the century Indian writing has taken a significant turn – one affected by globalization, with its increasing mobility and its diasporic movements of people – that might be cautiously termed *cosmopolitan*, despite Tagore’s reference to the “colourless vagueness” of the term (2005: 39). India has led the way in its literature, not only because of the proliferation of South Asian diasporic writing, but also because India itself has put the traditional idea of the nation as imagined community into question. Where did this questioning come from? When Gandhi wrote as early as 1909 that India’s freedom struggle had misunderstood the “real significance” of *Swaraj* by equating it with independence, declaring: “My life henceforth is dedicated [to realizing its true meaning]”, (Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi [CWMG] 10:64, *Hind Swaraj*, 22 November 1909) he introduced a range of ideas centring on the concept of *satyagraha* that had little to do with conventional nationalism. Whereas independence meant outward freedom, Gandhi’s goal was a deeper one that came, in time, to clash with conventional nationalist ideals: “The outward freedom therefore that we shall attain will
only be in exact proportion to the inward freedom to which we may have grown at a
given moment” (CWMG 38: 1-2, 1 November 1928).

Although Salman Rushdie admits to learning ‘a trick or two’ from G.V. Desani’s All
about H. Hatterr (1949), Midnight’s Children (1981) can be regarded as the founding text
of a new generation. The style of Rushdie’s prodigious and excessive chronicle is
continued in Alan Sealy’s The Trotter-Nama (1990). However, in the main this new
generation was characterised by mobility and hybridity and gained worldwide attention
through writing from what might called the ‘third-wave’ diaspora. It was also
characterised by a deep distrust of the boundaries of the nation, a distrust embodied in
Saleem’s despair. Nonetheless, Rushdie’s novel had a different, more utopian vision, as
he explains in Imaginary Homelands

What I tried to do was to set up a tension in [Midnight’s Children], a paradoxical
opposition between the form and content of the narrative. The story of Saleem does
indeed lead him to despair. But the story is told in a manner designed to echo, as closely
as my abilities allowed, the Indian talent for non-stop self-regeneration. This is why the
narrative constantly throws up new stories, why it “teems.” The form – multitudinous,
hinting at the infinite possibilities of the country – is the optimistic counterweight to
Saleem’s personal tragedy. (Rushdie, 1991: 16)

Saleem’s personal tragedy is of course the tragedy of the postcolonial nation. But it is
also the tragedy of the idea of the bordered nation itself, the very concept of a bounded
space within which a diverse people could come together as one. The saving grace, for
Rushdie, is the capacity of a people to ‘teem,’ its irrepressible and exorbitant capacity to
transcend the nation that becomes its most hopeful gesture. The rich underpinning of
mythic allegory allows him to conceive a multitudinous civilizational reality existing
beyond the nation. This is precisely the function of the Midnight’s Children themselves:
to reveal the improbability of the nation ever encompassing their extravagant variety and
potential. This potential is one we could call utopian in the very unbounded extent of its
possibilities.

The infinite possibilities of the country greatly exceed any notion of ‘unity in diversity,’
which is a standard, if deceptive national mantra. Rushdie is, in effect, describing a
condition suggested by Jean Franco when she pointed out the inadequacy of Fredric
Jameson’s notorious designation of Third World literature as ‘national allegories’
(Franco, 1986: 69). Rather, we find “the dissolution of the idea of nation and the
continuous persistence of national concerns” (211). Writing in the decade ushered in by *Midnight’s Children* Franco could say that the nation “is no longer the inevitable frame for political or cultural projects” (204).

The response of nation-states the world over to the increasing global flow of people has been to make these borders ever more impermeable, and their actual ephemerality is shown nowhere more powerfully than in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1988). Although it was published in the 1980s, this book’s devastating denunciation of nationalism and national borders, and its multi-layered narrative of memory and identity, continue to resonate in a world in which borders articulate a worldwide territorial paranoia. It stands as a powerful prelude to the present century, in its view of the great deception of nationalism and the illusory nature of borders. In an interview Ghosh remarked:

> Today nationalism, once conceived of as a form of freedom, is really destroying our world. It's destroying the forms of ordinary life that many people know. The nation-state prevents the development of free exchange between peoples. (cited in Wassef, 1998: 75)

This is the classic postcolonial critique. Postcolonial nationalism, which is born in the quest for freedom, comes to imprison rather than liberate because it inherits its model of governance from the colonial state. However illusory and arbitrarily established the borders of the state may be, they come to function as rigid constructors of identity.

Ghosh continues Rushdie’s satire of nationalism with a scathing dismantling of the concept of borders, not only geographical ones but also the borders of identity itself. The story of *The Shadow Lines* is woven around the ambivalent metaphors of maps, place, memory, nation and identity and the possibility of freedom from the borders they invoke.

Every representation of space in the novel – rooms, houses, neighbourhoods, cities, countries – assumes a metonymic significance culminating in the importance of maps as metaphors of identity because they so clearly locate subjects (Mukherjee, 2006: 260). However, maps are also a metonym for the futile regulation of memory. As Robi says at the end of the book, “Why don’t they draw thousands of little lines though the whole subcontinent and give every little place a new name? What would it change? It’s a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide a memory?” (241). In the
end,

That word ‘freedom’ is the great gaoler, the illusion behind countless deaths in the name
of the nation… behind all those pictures of people killed by terrorists and the army is the
single word ‘free’. Whole villages killed so that the terrorists will be destroyed and the
country made free. (Ghosh, 1988: 232)

This could be regarded as prophetic for our century.

**Midnight’s Heirs**

There are of course many novels that have built on Rushdie’s and Ghosh’s scepticism,
but Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006),
of the contemporary novel’s extension of *Midnight Children’s* subversion of the grand
narrative of nation. The status of the first three as Booker prizewinners (Kunzru’s novel
was shortlisted) emphasizes the growing global reach of Indian literature. Stories of
family and community continue, but very differently in form and orientation from the
Gandhi-inspired vision of Raja Rao or R.K. Narayan. The constant tension between the
Gandhian sense of community in family or village and the large, increasingly global
sense of History and Nation characterize these novels in different ways. They do not
highlight the growing tensions of communal violence, of Shiv Sena and Hindu
majoritarianism, which form much of the interest of the ‘Bombay novel’ of the 1990s, but
they expose the extent to which both the idea and the reality of Nation have betrayed
those who so enthusiastically embraced it in 1947.

Sixteen years after *Midnight’s Children*, Roy’s *The God of Small Things* refuses the
grandeur and epic scale of Rushdie’s novel in favour of a story of small people whose
lives are shattered by small things that take on an immense significance. Priyamvada
Gopal states that “[after] the stylistic pyrotechnics of magical realism, Roy’s novel
proffered a masterly command of realism and the pleasures of seemingly unmediated
experience” (2009: 156). Indian history, argues Ranajit Guha (1996: 3), is fixated on the
nation-state, which determines how the past is to be read; this can be undone by listening
to the myriad ‘small voices’ in Indian society. Roy’s is a classic postcolonial approach to
History, which is invariably the history of the state. Where the ‘Big God’ of Nation or
Empire writes History, it gets in the way of memory – the grand narrative of the nation
swallows up the smaller narratives of its people. So often it has been the task of literature to re-write History because the dominance of Imperial History so easily slides into the grand narrative of the Nation. Where ‘Big God’ controls the writing of official History, Small God “climbed into people’s eyes and became an exasperating expression” (Roy, 1997: 11) If the nation is the dominant story, then individuals are subject to that story. It is in the ‘small things’, according to Roy, that the life of the nation is contained, and it is by reading the silences in the interstices of the grand narrative of History that the stories that make up the nation can be recovered.

Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) circulates around the pathos of those discarded by History, those out of time and place, whether the anglophile remnants of a faded empire or those caught out of place by the desire to better their lives in the West. The ‘loss’ inherited is the loss of empire, of privilege, of home and also of the sense of place bestowed by the idea of nation. “Could fulfilment ever be felt as deeply as loss?” (Desai, 2006: 2), asks the novel as it questions the possibility of fulfilment in the constantly shifting realities of nation and history. Set in the Himalayan region of the India/Nepal border and illuminating the debilitating state of displacement experienced by wealthy anglophile Indians as the region is torn apart by a ‘Gorkhaland’ nationalist movement, the novel touches on the inevitability and the inevitable futility of nationalism. It contrasts this with the desperate straits of the cook’s son Biju, in New York without a green card, who demonstrates a different state of loss, as he gradually loses his dream of wealth in the harsh reality of the exploited illegal immigrant. The novel hinges on the uncertainty of liminal spaces – the geographical liminality of those on the borders of the nation, the liminality of those who have been betrayed by history, the liminality of the immigrant worker.

Aravind Adiga’s searingly iconoclastic novel *The White Tiger* (2008) raised considerable controversy when it was published for its unflattering view of Indian society. Nonetheless, it continues an approach to the corruption of politics and the ‘democratic state’ that lies deep in the Indian social consciousness. Adiga’s mantra, “to be a man”, is at no great distance from Gandhi’s philosophy of *satyagraha*, although the language the novelist uses to attack the failed democratic nation is far more trenchant, a savage critique of the corruption of capitalist society. The putative address of the novel to Wen Jiabao
places the novel in a global context from the first line. Though it enables an informal insouciant style, its globalizing trajectory also permits a considerable degree of dramatic irony in the voice of the ‘white tiger’ as he continually compares the Indian economic reconstruction to the Chinese: “And these entrepreneurs – we entrepreneurs – have set up all these outsourcing companies that virtually run America now.” (Adiga, 2008: 4). The White Tiger is the novel of an India that has unquestionably taken its place in the world. But here the silences of the ‘small things’ overwritten by history find an ironic revenge as Balram enters the entrepreneurial future through murder, theft and bribery.

A novel that did not receive a Booker Prize but nonetheless reveals the global trajectory of Indian writing perhaps better than any other is Hari Kunzru’s Transmission. Including this novel within this company raises a significant question: What is an “Indian” novel today? Hari Mohan Nath Kunzru was born in London of Kashmiri Pandit origin. Sometimes referred to as a ‘British Indian’ novelist, and deputy president of English PEN, he, along with fellow writers Ruchir Joshi, Jeet Thayil and Amitava Kumar, risked arrest by reading out excerpts from Rushdie’s The Satanic Verses (which is banned in India) at the 2012 Jaipur Literature Festival. Thus, by orientation, commitment, and, in Transmission, by subject-matter, Kunzru is deeply implicated in the widening production of Indian writing. The question: “What is an Indian writer?” may never be conclusively answered. So many Indian novels are now written in the diaspora that it seems that Tagore’s admonition about the world has been fulfilled with a vengeance, with writers’ national identities becoming more and more a matter of representation.

If Balram Halwai in The White Tiger moves out of his life of poverty into the Bangalore milieu of ‘the entrepreneur,’ Transmission’s hero Arjun Mehta extends this movement into the Californian Silicon Valley Nirvana of every middle-class computer nerd. Arjun, a geeky, daydreaming Indian software engineer, fares little better, at first, than the impoverished Biju in Inheritance of Loss. He is recruited by an exploitative staffing agency to work in Silicon Valley, “the daydream location, a hidden ravine lined with fibre optics and RadioShacks” (Kunzru, 2004: 22). He is employed as a specialist in virus protection, but when he is unfairly laid off he creates the Leela virus (based on his film idol Leela Zahir), a virus so sinister that only he will be able to find the cure, thus making him an indispensable employee. When his company refuses to re-employ him, systems
around the globe suddenly become infected and inoperable, with a mysterious rendering of Leela Zahir dancing across the screen. However, Arjun's plot is uncovered by the FBI and simple, day-dreamy Arjun becomes the world's most-wanted terrorist. In a classic Bollywood conclusion the film star Leela Zahir, herself unhappily exploited by her mother’s ambition, disappears after viewing a message Arjun has sent her. We are not told, but can certainly assume that Leela has run off with Arjun: “Like Arjun Mehta, Leela Zahir has never reappeared” (271) – a dénouement which emphasizes the complex and confusing integration of the virtual and the ‘real’ in the modern world.

The Legacy: Class, Nation, World

Gandhi’s vision of *Hind Swaraj* is one of the most potent forms of utopianism of modern times, and was, as we have seen, a very different vision of ‘home rule’ from that perceived by most politicians. *Hind Swaraj* is interesting because it was able to achieve what Frantz Fanon thought nationalism could not do: mobilize the “innermost hopes of a whole people” (Fanon, 1963: 148). It is arguable that Nehru’s modern industrial socialist nation could not have been established without the utopia of *Hind Swaraj*. Yet paradoxically this vision, so critical in the birth of Indian nationalism was anti-nationalist, anti-Enlightenment and anti-modern. Indeed Gandhi’s vision of *Hind Swaraj* was as far from the modern capitalist state as could be imagined. ‘Home rule’ conceived an India outside any version of the modern nation state – an India much closer to Ernst Bloch’s conception of *Heimat* than to the modern idea of nation (as indeed was Tagore’s). *Heimat* is Bloch’s word for the home that we have all sensed but have never experienced or known. It is *Heimat* as utopia that “determines the truth content of a work of art.” (Zipes, 1989: xxxiii). This paradox is explored in Partha Chatterjee’s foundational study *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1986), which exposes the ambivalent relationship between utopian thinking and nation-building and the actual process by which utopian thinking may evolve, or ‘degenerate,’ into an organised nation-state machine.

However, when we examine the extent to which the post-Rushdie novel continues the resistance to the idea of the nation state, three themes appear. The first is the continuation in different ways of the condemnation of class and economic injustice. In Gandhi this was
most prominent in his condemnation of untouchability, but the philosophy of *Khadi* or self-sufficiency was at the same time a programme of economic equality and a critique of capitalism. Second is the critique of the bounded nation state itself, a critique that blossoms in Indian writing in the metaphor of borders, and continues the spirit of both Tagore’s and Gandhi’s anti-state philosophies. The third characteristic of the contemporary novel is its movement outward from ‘Home’ into the ‘World’. Both the actual mobility of writers and the exogenous way Indian consciousness interpolates the economic, cultural and literary world in the novels considered here suggest a trajectory that will continue into the twenty-first century.

**Class**

The theme of class is summed up in *The White Tiger* when Balram says in his letter to Wen Jiabao: “I won’t be saying anything new if I say that the history of the world is a history of a ten thousand year war of brains between the rich and the poor.” (Adiga, 2008: 254). It is significant that the war is described as one of brains, but it is nonetheless one in which the structure of the contest is heavily weighted against the poor.

Despite Arundhati Roy’s very well-known activism and her radical interest in class struggle, her distinction between the ‘small God’ and the ‘Big God’ is a subtle one in which class overlaps nation, as private and personal despair drops below the gaze of the public or citizenship or the nation:

In some places, like the country that Rahel came from, various kinds of despair competed for primacy. And the personal despair could never be enough. That something happened when personal turmoil dropped by the wayside shrine of the vast, violent circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible, public turmoil of a nation. That Big God howled like a hot wind and demanded obeisance. Then Small God (cozy and contained, private and limited came away cauterized, laughing numbly at his own temerity. (Roy, 1997: 19)

The Small God is the God of the impoverished and disenfranchised, but it is also the God of the teeming ordinariness of the people living beneath the level of the grand narrative of nation. Where Big God controls the writing of official History, Small God “climbed into people’s eyes and became an exasperating expression” (Roy, 1997: 19). If the nation is the dominant story then the ordinary individual stories are footnotes, and individual despair does not enter the story.

In each of these novels the issues of class, of poverty, of abandonment by corrupt
Beyond the Nation

Officials are inextricable from the failure of nation. In Tagore’s words, “the Nation is the greatest evil for the Nation” (2005: 60). However, this failure is just as often a consequence of nationalism. In The Inheritance of Loss the pathos is maintained by the confusion of those caught in a changing world in which their privilege is diminishing under the onslaught of demands for justice and independence. The sisters Lola and Noni find themselves “with the rotten luck of being in the exact wrong place at the exact wrong time when it all caught up – and generations worth of trouble settled on them” (241). The achievement of the novel is to reveal the extent to which issues of class, privilege and discrimination occur as a function of the structure of the postcolonial nation fuelled more by ignorance than by active discrimination. Lola and Noni are the recipients of the privilege bestowed by empire. Now the Nepali inhabitants of this border region are demanding change.

The obnoxious judge whose anglophilia is so rampant that he functions as a cultural metaphor in the book is driven by hatred for everything – his wife, daughter, cook, India and probably subconsciously himself for his abjection to imperial power. As a Cambridge student he had undertaken with utter resolve to become as English as he could, only to be despised by both his countrymen and his colonial masters. It is not until the moment of independence that he realizes this:

He thought of how the English government and its civil servants had sailed away, throwing their topis overboard, leaving behind only those ridiculous Indians who couldn’t rid themselves of what they’d broken their souls to learn. (Desai, 2006: 205)

It is perhaps this more than anything: the feeling of being thrown on the dust-heap of history, of being betrayed by imperialism, that generates the judge’s rage. This is why he decides to live in the hills, at the very edge of the nation: “The judge could live here, in this shell [of a house] this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country, for this time he would not learn the language.” (Desai, 2006: 29) His determined alienation from everything and everyone except his dog Mutt reveals the true absurdity of his position as the detritus of empire. When his dog is stolen his entreaties seem laughable to people who are starving.

The issue of class (and caste) is deeply bound up in The White Tiger with that of social and political corruption. Gandhi waged a lifelong war against untouchability, claiming
that there was nothing in the Shastras justifying it (CWMG 62: 121-22, 16 November 1935). However, it is class that seems to have taken a greater hold on the contemporary literary imagination. Balram sees caste as meaningless rather than constricting. A member of the Halwai caste of sweetmakers, he knows nobody in his family who made sweets. His father was a rickshaw driver. Caste is overshadowed in the novel by the spectre of economic class and poverty, particularly the poverty of those at the very bottom of society. This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in the corruption of the health system. Balram’s father, dying of TB, waiting at a hospital to which no doctor will visit, is ‘permanently cured’ of his TB at 6pm that night “as the government ledger no doubt accurately reported” – by dying (Adiga, 2008: 50) The doctors, by bribing the supervisor, were marked as present and released to earn money in private practice.

The poor are not only subject to the corruption of the system. They dwell completely outside the political process. Balram is regarded with scorn by his employers, who see his ignorance as disqualifying him from political enfranchisement. When asked questions such as ‘Who was the first Prime Minister of India? What is the name of this continent? Balram’s apparently risible answers lead him to remark: “And we entrust our glorious parliamentary democracy – he pointed at me – to characters like these. That’s the whole tragedy of this country.’” (10) Consequently, (in a poignant echo of Rohinton Mistry), everybody’s vote in Balram’s village is controlled by the landlord. When a “brave mad man” turns up to the voting booth to demand to cast his vote he is beaten to death by the local politician and the police. “After a while the body of the rickshaw puller stopped wriggling and fighting back, but they kept stamping on him, until he had been stamped back into the earth.” (102) Significantly, the poor are of the soil and are kept there by the system – “stamped back into the earth”. This is something Gandhi himself sensed. His conception of the nation looked beyond the structure of the legislature: “What strange blindness it is that those who are elected as legislators to represent the people should seem, and in fact are, their rulers!” (CWMG 38:18, 4 November 1928). The White Tiger puts horrifying flesh to the bones of that reality. As Balram says: “I am India’s most faithful voter, and I still have not seen the inside of a voting booth.” (102)

It is not just from voting but from access to the amenities of society that the poor find themselves excluded. The drivers who wait outside the gleaming glass mall for their
masters to shop are enthralled to see a rickshaw puller attempt to enter the Mall, but he is stopped by the guard. “Instead of backing off and going away – as nine in ten in his place would have done, the man in the sandals exploded, “Am I not a human being too?” (148)

As one of the drivers remarks: “If all of us were like that we would rule India and they would be polishing our boots” (148-49). The problem is, of course that individuals like this are very rare and Adiga explains it with the metaphor of the Rooster Coop:

Never before in human history have so few owed so much to so many, Mr Jiabao.
A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 per cent – as strong, as talented as intelligent in every way – to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man’s hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse. (175-76)

The Rooster Coop does its work when servants keep other servants “from becoming innovators, experimenters or entrepreneurs” (194). However extreme and hyperbolic we regard The White Tiger it is worth remembering that Gandhi regarded economic equality as the “master-key to non-violent independence”:

Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. It means the levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation’s wealth on the one hand, and the levelling up of the semi-starved, naked millions on the other. A non-violent system of government is clearly impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists. (CWMG 81: 366, 13 December 1941)

A subtle issue in the question of class is education, for economic equality relies not only on the levelling of wealth but on the education of the poor. As Balram discovers, the reading matter of choice for the drivers is Murder Weekly, which acts as a form of social control, because “the murderer in the magazine is so mentally disturbed and sexually deranged that not one reader would want to be like him … So if your driver is busy flicking through the pages of Murder Weekly, relax. No danger to you. Quite the contrary. It’s when your driver starts to read about Gandhi and the Buddha that it’s time to wet your pants Mr Jiabao”. (Adiga, 2008: 126)
The Nation and its borders

Nation has been crucial to decolonizing rhetoric. The pre-independence utopia of a liberated postcolonial nation provided a very clear focus for anti-colonial activism in India, but this ground to a halt once the goal of that activism was reached and the sombre realities of post-independence political life began to be felt. Both Tagore and Gandhi saw the issues of class and economic disparity as being tied up with the problem of the nation state and its promotion of profit. In one of his more resonant visions of unmet possibility Tagore says:

The conflict between the individual and the state, labour and capital, the man and the woman; the conflict between the greed of material gain and the spiritual life of man, the organized selfishness of nations and the higher ideals of humanity; the conflict between all the ugly complexities inseparable from giant organizations of commerce and state and the natural instincts of man crying for simplicity and beauty and fullness of leisure – all these have yet to be brought into harmony in a manner not yet dreamt of. (Tagore, 2005: 7)

The core of the problem was the inheritance of colonial boundaries, colonial administrative structures, and colonial prejudices, so that the problem of the Nation was from the beginning a problem of borders. Part of the power of The God of Small Things comes from the vividness with which the children’s impressions and voice are relayed. Childhood is a time without divisions, whereas now “Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits have appeared like a team of trolls on their separate horizons” (Roy, 1997: 3). The grand narratives of Nation and History are part of this team, and Roy’s apparent break from the exuberant excess of Rushdie’s sweeping novel nevertheless implies a focus on similar issues – on the boundaries that hem us in all sides.

One of the most bounded dimensions, one in which the destiny of the nation is figured, is time. Time is the medium of the nation’s teleological move towards completion and fulfilment. But it is a movement that never resolves itself, that is never realized and cannot ever be. One of the ways in which The God of Small Things disrupts the boundary of time is by presenting its two central stories in more or less alternating chapters – an Indian family living in Ayemenem in Kerala during a two-week period in 1969, and the murderous consequences; and the story of a day in 1993, when the twins Estha and Rahel meet for the first time since the violent events twenty-three years before, a meeting that culminates in an incestuous sexual encounter. Each chapter weaves back and forth over
other time periods, creating a complex series of references and allusions. Repeated flashbacks and images bring past events into the present and, while future events appear to disrupt the past. Elizabeth Outka argues: “By presenting the novel's temporal framework not as a continuous narrative but as a disordered mix of various times that can be pieced together only by the reader (if at all), Roy's text echoes the way her characters are experiencing the present moment, one always already haunted by past and future events” (Outka, 2011: 25-26). This experience, like so much of the domain of the Small God, exists well below the level of Nation.

However, the nation is not always subverted in so subtle a fashion. In many respects, despite the soaring aspirations of politicians, the Nation took over the function of the colonial masters. As Balram says in The White Tiger: “In 1947 the British left, but only a moron would think we became free then” (Adiga, 2008: 22). Perhaps worse than that, the new order was a jungle:

And then, thanks to all those politicians in Delhi, on the fifteenth day of August 1947 – the day the British left – the cages had been left open; and the animals had attacked and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law. Those that were most ferocious, the hungriest, had eaten everyone else up … (Adiga, 2008: 63-64)

Adiga’s novel depends upon hyperbole, because this is the métier of Balram’s discourse in his letters to Wen Jiabao. But it is clear that the triumph of the nation has become the triumph of corruption. The “Great Socialist” is the regional strongman who eventually wins the national elections, and his record is spectacular:

The Great Socialist – a total of ninety-three criminal cases – for murder, rape, grand larceny, gun-smuggling, pimping and many other such minor offences – are pending against the Great Socialist and his ministers … and three of the ministers are currently in jail – but continue to be ministers. (97-98)

In The Inheritance of Loss the nation is just as powerful in its invisibility as in its obvious control, partly because the region is in the grip of an insurgency in which the very concept of nation is at stake. Here at the geographical edges of nation, the porous border of the state, a new nationalism rises up to demonstrate the persistence of national feeling. “This state making,” says Lola, “biggest mistake that fool Nehru made. Under his rules any group of idiots can stand up demanding a new state and get it too. How many new

There is an ironic moment when Gyan, coming to visit Sai, is ordered by the judge to recite poetry, to which he responds by reciting Tagore.

> “Where the head is held high. Where knowledge is free, Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls... Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let me and my country awake.” Every schoolchild in India knew at least this. (Desai, 2006: 109)

This is a poignant reminder of Tagore’s view of nationalism, because Gyan is becoming enmeshed in the “narrow domestic walls” of a Ghorkaland rebellion, a political passion that will destroy his love for Sai. Indeed the pathos of the novel is played out in the conflict between the justice of the Ghorkas’ cry for equality, their desire for “that heaven of freedom,” and the consequences of their actions. Here at the edge of the nation, in the liminal space of a porous border, a different kind of nationalism wreaks its havoc.

> As he floated through the market, Gyan had a feeling of history being wrought, its wheels churning under him, for the men were behaving as if they were being featured in a documentary of war, and Gyan could not help but look on the scene already from the angle of nostalgia, the position of a revolutionary (Desai, 2006: 157)

> “In 1947, brothers and sisters, the British left granting India her freedom, granting the Muslims Pakistan, granting special provisions for the scheduled castes and tribes, leaving everything taken care of brothers and sisters – Except us. EXCEPT US.” (158)

Although the cry of freedom is strong in this liminal space of the Himalayan border, this passage reaffirms the continued dependence of postcolonial national formations on imperial structures: “The men sat unbedding their rage, learning, as everyone does in this country, at one time or another, that old hatreds are endlessly retrievable” (161). Rage, enmity, passion, the feelings of class exclusion and economic injustice, of ethnic marginalization resolve themselves inevitably in the utopia of nation. As Sai ponders: “What was a country but the idea of it? She thought of India as a concept, a hope, or a desire. How often could you attack it before it crumbled?” (236). What Sai finds herself in the middle of is the endless cycle of history, the passion for decolonization repeating itself.
The World

It would be foolhardy to see the mobility and outward movement of Indian writing and, indeed, Indian society itself as motivated by those high cosmopolitan ideals expressed by Tagore, the “moral power of love and vision of spiritual unity”. Even so, it is worth noting that the global sensibilities of the contemporary Indian novel have a deep prehistory. Certainly colonialism unleashed an unprecedented era of mobility as colonial peoples flowed to the centre and then circulated to other economic magnets. India, however, was already a migratory and even diasporic aggregation of flows and convergences, both within and without state boundaries. Jagat K. Motwani has made a compelling, if provocative, claim for the migratory adventures of Indian peoples since about 8000 BC - migrations as far as Mexico, Turkey, Bali as well as the obvious migrations to South-East Asia (2004: 40). Motwani’s investigations challenge the very profound and resilient linking of Indian identity with the geographical Bharat (the ancient term for the holy land of the Hindus), with ‘Mother India’. For him the Indian people have always been migratory and exploratory, and it would seem that flow rather than stasis is a cultural characteristic.

This flow, however, is not always enriching. The other side of the story of displacement and loss in The Inheritance of Loss is the failed aspirations of those like the son of the judge’s cook, Biju, whose journey to New York leads to poverty and exploitation by other Indians. Ejected from restaurant after restaurant as he looks for work, slipping “out and back on the street. It was horrible what happened to Indians abroad and nobody knew it but Indians abroad” (Desai, 2006: 138). One thing Biju discovers in New York is the extent to which a country is no more than an idea, an idea that grows more vague the further away you travel: “What was India to these people? How many lived in fake versions of their countries, in fake versions of other people’s countries? Did their lives feel as unreal to them as his did to him?” (267.) Biju exists in the dystopian version of diaspora inhabited by many: without visa or green card, exploited, underpaid, sleeping on the floor of the restaurant kitchen. To him home is loss and absence – America, exile and loneliness. He knows that he represents the magical possibility of freedom and wealth to many back home - but it is an illusion.
This has become the stereotype of the diasporic condition – absence and loss, poverty and failure. But there is another story demonstrated by Indian writers themselves, writers who have interpellated Anglophone literature. In this respect these novels can be seen to outline a trajectory towards a more self-assured engagement with the global - from the dystopian exile of Biju’s life in New York, to Balram’s move to Bangalore with its industries and call centres plugged into the global economy, to Arjun’s move to Silicon Valley and his catastrophic revenge upon Virugenix and subsequently, the world. This pattern is not strictly chronological, as Transmission was written before Desai’s and Adiga’s novels, but it indicates the outward movement of Indian society, a movement that is increasingly captured by writers.

Transmission stands for the direction of the contemporary Indian novel in many ways: the complications of its authorship; its generic border crossing; its representation of the ways in which Indian expertise and Indian culture – through Bollywood and computer savvy – have infiltrated the world; its confident satire of both US and global technological society even as it demonstrates an Indian familiarity with that society; its ability to balance an insider knowledge of Indian family dynamics with knowledge of the computer geek world. These qualities suggest a literature that is both deeply rooted in the Indian cultural consciousness and yet prolific in its engagement with the world.

The Mother India trope may continue to hold its grip on the Indian imagination, but a deeper and perhaps more lasting tendency is that spirit of questioning that occurs most influentially in Tagore and Gandhi. While we may be tempted to view their anti-modernism as anachronistic and their moral urgings as naïve, these thinkers captured a sceptical view of the devil’s pact between nation and capitalism that remains even more relevant today. In these contemporary novels that deep vein of scepticism continues: an awareness of the interrelation of ‘Home and World;’ the often exuberant iconoclasm of their approach to questions of nation and history; and the alertness to the potential failures of democracy and of international capitalism – all this suggests that the trajectory of the Indian novel has taken it a long way from the village. In their global reach, sophistication and social critique Indian novels continue to shape world Anglophone literature.
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**RESUMEN**

*El dragón de fuego* es una comedia de Jacinto Benavente, ganador del Premio Nobel de Literatura en 1922, donde se describe la situación de India durante la época del dominio británico. La acción tiene lugar en el Nirvan, un país imaginario que simboliza a la India. En lenguaje alegórico, la obra presenta una realidad histórica: la de la llamada “rebelión de los cipayos”, un levantamiento armado contra el gobierno colonial, que acabó en fracaso. El artículo compara el argumento de la obra con los sucesos históricos, y estudia la peculiar postura del autor ante el colonialismo inglés, pues Benavente, a diferencia de la mayoría de los intelectuales españoles de inicios del siglo XX, tomó partido por los indios que reclamaban su independencia.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Benavente; drama; India; rebelión; cipayos; colonialismo: Imperio británico

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**ABSTRACT**

*The Fire Dragon. Benavente’s Indian Comedy*

*El dragón de fuego* is a play by Jacinto Benavente, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1922, which describes the situation in India during the British Raj. The action takes place in Nirvan, an imaginary country which symbolises India. In an allegorical language the play presents a historical reality: that of the so-called “Sepoy Mutiny”, an armed uprising against colonial rule, which ended in great failure. The article compares the plot of the play with historical events and studies the peculiar position of the author regarding British colonialism, as Benavente, unlike most Spanish intellectuals of the early twentieth century, sided with the Indians who were claiming their independence.

**KEYWORDS:** Benavente; drama; India; Mutiny; sepoy; colonialism; British Empire
y gran profusión de elementos de igual origen. Poetas modernistas y del Noventa y Ocho, como Valle-Inclán y Machado, utilizan profusamente conceptos filosóficos indios, como los románticos utilizaran la mitología, y el teatro popular se nutriera de los elementos fantásticos y humorísticos que proporcionaba la India de los maharajás, de riqueza y suntuosidad hiperbólicas. En medio de ellos, Jacinto Benavente se interesa por diversos aspectos relacionados con la India, pero principalmente por la historia del país bajo el dominio británico. Grosso modo, podría clasificarse a este acercamiento benaventino en tres planos diferentes: el estético, el filosófico-religioso y el histórico.

Los dos planos primeramente mencionados se hayan peculiarmente relacionados, como sucede en su obra Y va de cuento (1919), en la que Maya —la ilusión— se presenta de forma alegórica protagonizando una pieza basada en símbolos puramente indios. De igual manera, en su drama La escuela de las princesas (1909), el autor desarrolla el tema del dharma, como deber entendido como obligatoriedad soteriológica única, en la línea más pura del Gitopanishad, sirviendo de precursor a lo que Ortega explicara más tarde a los españoles en El espectador (1916). Más interesante aún es una obra que, por su corta duración, no ha gozado de la debida popularidad. Se trata de A las puertas del cielo, un diálogo de dos personajes en el que la mitología cristiana sirve de marco y de trasfondo a conceptos puramente hindúes, como la ley del karma —causa y efecto a un tiempo de las reencarnaciones sucesivas—, la influencia decisivamente negativa de la ignorancia (avidyā) en el progreso espiritual y, de nuevo, el concepto de mâyāvāda —teoría de la ilusoriedad del mundo fenoménico— según el tratamiento típicamente español que supone la gran metáfora del theatrum mundi, tema de gran repetición en el Siglo de Oro y tocado frecuentes veces por Lope y Calderón. La fusión de elementos cristianos e hindúes está hecha de forma sumamente sutil, en consonancia con el estilo del autor y con el grado de aceptación en España de nuevas ideas en materia religiosa en el momento en que se escribió la obra.

Su interés en la historia de la India se centra en la ya mencionada revuelta de 1857, llamada «rebelión de los cipayos». En el momento en que Benavente se dispone a tocar el tema, la situación socio-política de la India no era plenamente conocida en España, pues la corona inglesa no permitía que se filtrara información que pudiera ir en detrimento de su apariencia de labor de civilización. Durante el siglo xx millones de indios, a través del inglés, tuvieron acceso al mundo europeo y se habían eliminado
barreras físicas con Occidente. No obstante, el acercamiento no tuvo lugar sino a unos niveles específicos y en algunas esferas literarias. Esta situación con la que se encuentra Jacinto Benavente al cambio de siglo hacen aún más meritorios la exactitud y el cuidado con que estudia y desarrolla el tema del conflicto de 1857 y de las circunstancias que lo ocasionaron, en una obra que, pese a hallarse escrita en clave simbólica y con nombres de un Oriente imaginario, es la relación más precisa y acertada que ha producido la ficción española sobre la India del XIX. Tal obra es un drama en tres actos y un epílogo, con el título de *El dragón de fuego*, que estrenó el 16 de marzo de 1904 en el teatro Español de Madrid la Compañía Guerrero-Mendoza, siendo unánimemente aclamada por el público y la crítica que, empero, sólo se hallaban en condiciones de apreciar los elementos estéticos, exóticos y dramáticos de la pieza, por falta de información histórica fidedigna que les permitiera juzgar la clara visión y la penetración con que se había tocado el asunto.

Las fuentes de las que el autor se sirve para la elaboración de su drama son de variada índole, aunque limitadas en número. Benavente, espíritu cosmopolita y perfecto conocedor del inglés, hace escaso empleo de la propaganda oficial, como se deduce del tono y la orientación esencialmente anglofoba de sus escritos. Consulta principalmente *Viaje al país de los elefantes* (1878) de José Muñoz y Gaviria, Vizconde de San Javier, y *Las civilizaciones de la India* (1901), de Gustave Le Bon, al que hace una referencia ocasional en uno de sus artículos. En la ficción halla también elementos y datos de interés, aunque de enfoque totalmente contrario. En cuanto al ángulo inglés, se sabe positivamente que conocía en detalle la obra de Rudyard Kipling, al que admira y cita frecuentemente. La literatura francesa provee a nuestro autor de una obra de ficción ambientada en 1867 y que narra en forma retrospectiva episodios sobre el fracaso de la rebelión. Se trata de *La mansion à vapeur* de Julio Verne, que fue traducida inmediatamente al español. La tendencia de esta novela es claramente pro-inglesa, en ella se narran episodios de crueldad exagerada para con los europeos, como las «matanzas de Cawnpore» (la ciudad de Khanpur, en el estado actual de Uttar Pradesh); por su parte los dirigentes hindúes, tanto Nana Sahib como la reina de Jhansi, aparecen descritos como personalidades psicóticas y sáticas.

Por contraposición al modelo francés, tenemos a un autor italiano de gran difusión España, que cultiva el género de aventuras y presenta una antítesis perfecta de la obra de
Verne, mostrando a un gobierno inglés tiránico y esencialmente racista y a un pueblo indio levantado heroicamente en armas para defender su tierra, su religión y su cultura. Es Emilio Salgari, y las novelas principales en las que nos habla de la India de 1857 son *Il misteri della giungla nera* y *Le dui Tigri*, obras que irradiían simpatía hacia el indio y su causa y que hacen una descripción perfecta de lugares, personajes y acontecimientos, pese al hecho de que el italiano no pisó nunca el suelo del Indostán. Los puntos de referencia con los que contaba Benavente a la hora de emprender su tarea eran extremadamente variados y algunos dudosamente fidedignos. El riesgo del autor de caer en la imprecisión resultaba en gran medida superior a aquel con el se enfrentaron autores posteriores, como Pearl S. Buck, Mary M. Kaye o Edward M. Forster, quienes escribieron sobre la India de los dos últimos siglos basándose en una cantidad de material histórico enormemente mayor.

Benavente comienza por dotar a su obra de una ambientación imaginaria que indica más lo que la India simboliza que lo que la India era en aquel tiempo. No se citan fechas concretas, aunque la lengua empleada y otros aspectos sugieren que se halla bien avanzado el siglo XIX. La acción transcurre en el Nirván1, país exótico y tropical, de abundantes selvas. Los nombres propios de los personajes indios son un tanto imprecisos. Hallamos nombres reales (Sita, Dilip), algunos tomados de ciudades (Nagpur, Jhansi) y otros totalmente ficticios (Dani-Sar, Durani, Mamni), aunque filológicamente posibles. Por lo que respecta a Inglaterra, aparece como Silandia (transliteración española de Sea Land, «la tierra del mar», por referencia a la isla británica). Los naturales de este país ostentan nombres claramente sajones (Lake, Ford, Francis), aunque castellanizados en ocasiones (Estevens). También se mencionan otras dos potencias europeas: Franconia y Suavia, nombres antiguos de sendas partes de Alemania, pero que en el contexto de la obra pueden hacer referencia a Francia y a Holanda si se consideran como símbolos históricos. Recuérdese que la Compañía de las Indias Orientales inglesa desplazó a franceses y holandeses, que habían pretendido un monopolio comercial con los reyes indios.

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1 El término *nirvâna* (del sánscrito nis = fuera, más allá, y *vana* = soplo, vida) es un concepto filosófico hindú en su origen y de aplicación posterior en el budismo que, de manera general, se interpreta como la extinción espiritual del yo individual separado. El *nirvâna* brahmánico es un perderse en el seno universal del Absoluto, mientras que en el budismo implica la aniquilación en la Nada.
Los acontecimientos de la obra indican una condensación del tiempo real. El drama se inicia en el momento en que Silandia acaba de apoderarse del país por medio de su compañía comercial, que aprovecha la indignación nacionalista que culmina con la rebelión de los patriotas del Nirván para justificar el dominio militar por parte de su gobierno. De este modo, la lenta penetración de la Compañía de las Indias Orientales, sus años de política disgregadora entre los diferentes reinos, la rebelión de los cipayos de 1857 y el inicio formal del dominio británico se condensan en un tiempo limitado, dando al espectador una visión rápida y panorámica de tres siglos. Para presentar a la facción de los naturales del país de forma más representativa, Benavente prescinde del factor musulmán. El Nirván es un reino hindú entre muchos otros y lo que en él sucede es la representación antonomásica del conflicto indo-británico. No se habla de un territorio pequeño, sino de un reino de carácter homogéneo, unificado en sus tradiciones y creencias. Sus problemas internos no se consideran elementos perturbadores y queda patente que el origen de sus males proviene del exterior, recordándose el dominio que antes de Silandia ha ejercido Franconia.

Dentro de este marco, la trama argumental se desarrolla en dos niveles distintos. Por un lado, tenemos el plano meramente político de cómo Silandia le arrebata a Franconia la supremacía en el Nirván. Los últimos apoyan a Dani-Sar, rey del lugar (un personaje creado mediante la fusión de las personalidades del Nabab Wajid Ali Shah, rey de Oudh, y del último de los gobernantes mogoles, Bahadur Shah Zafar, que había sido declarado Emperador de la India por los rebeldes de Delhi y que fue luego depuesto, juzgado y desterrado). Los silandeses desean provocar una crisis política que derroque al rey y le sustituya por su hermano, el príncipe Duraní, educado en Silandia y casi totalmente occidentalizado. Este es un aspecto ignorado en el país, por lo que los nacionalistas tienen puestas en Duraní sus esperanzas por miedo a que Dani-Sar se venda completamente al extranjero. Además se presenta la forma en la que la Compañía de las Indias Orientales –denominada en la obra Real Compañía de Comercio y Navegación– reacciona ante el nacionalismo de los nirvaneses y lo emplea para sus fines de dominio militar. Se nos presenta el distanciamiento de los hermanos, provocado por los silandeses, y la inutilidad de sus buenas intenciones referentes al gobierno del reino. Dani-Sar es una personalidad noble, aunque débil, caracterizada por una gran indecisión y un pacifismo extremado. Pese a lo positivo de la descripción humana que de él se hace, carece de visión política y duda sobre lo que será mejor para su pueblo,
por lo que es juguete de los silandeses y también de los rebeldes. Duraní deja de amar a su hermano cuando le hacen creer que ha cometido con él una traición, arrebatándole a su amada Sita, siendo éste acontecimiento suficiente para que la separación de ambos hermanos llegue a ser completa.

Silandia es la causante directa de los males del Nirván, pero el dramaturgo culpa también a la excesiva occidentalización de los nirvaneses, que ha facilitado el terreno a la rapiña de la Compañía. Esta xenofilia se produce por diversas razones. En Duraní se origina por un complejo de inferioridad innato ante lo exterior. Durante sus años de formación en Silandia se le trató con la deferencia debida a su condición de príncipe y esto, lejos de parecerle normal, le ha hecho considerar a los silandeses como excepcionalmente nobles. Entre la elite del Nirván se aprecian los adelantos mecánicos y se siguen las modas europeas con más fervor que en la misma Europa. Sirva como ejemplo el entusiasmo nirvanes por la música de Wagner, prohibida —según se nos dice— en algunos países del Viejo Continente.

En lo que respecta a Dani-Sar, el caso es completamente distinto. El rey considera que el influjo extranjero puede ayudarle a acabar con los dos grandes problemas del país: la pobreza y el excesivo control social ejercido por la casta de los brahmines, a la que acusa de utilizar su fuerza para contener a los rebeldes y emplear la mentira para consolar a los cobardes. Pero además de poseer confianza en el progreso material, Dani-Sar la tiene también en la bondad humana y con gran ingenuidad trata de superar las barreras raciales. Es aquí el rey símbolo de la capacidad india de asimilar culturas, fundiendo y aunando elementos diversos. Su pacifismo se encuentra en las siguientes reflexiones:

**DANI-SAR.**—¿Enemigo? ¿Extranjero? ¿Por qué esos nombres? ¿Qué significan esas palabras? ¿Por qué han de odiarnos? ¿Porque su color es pálido, dorados sus cabellos y sus ojos azules? Si aman nuestra tierra, estéril para nosotros, por ellos fertilizada, por qué no han de amarnos también, si con amor les acogemos? (pp. 358-59).

Los silandeses, empero, no responden de igual manera. Entienden a los nirvaneses como salvajes y miserables, fanatizados por sus sacerdotes; para ellos es una raza inferior

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destinada a desaparecer y cuyo contacto hay que evitar en lo posible. Esta postura refleja fielmente la realidad histórica, pues es sabido que los militares británicos consideraban a la India como una “tierra de pesadumbre” en donde se veían obligados a pasar un destierro entre un pueblo al que consideraban decadente. El autor reitera este desprecio por la India. Desde el punto de vista frío del inglés, los indios reaccionan como niños que pasan en un instante del abatimiento a la exasperación y de la melancolía al entusiasmo. A Dani-Sar se le define como un pobre loco, rodeado de una corte bárbara y fanática entre la que vive en continuo sobresalto de ser asesinado y contando únicamente con partidarios entre la hez de su pueblo.

Esta postura origina entre los silandeses indiferencia y crueldad para con los naturales del país, de cuyas vidas se dispone libremente. A la protesta de una dama silandesa ante la certeza de que varios guías y ojeadores hallarán ciertamente la muerte durante una cacería, se la acalla con el argumento de que las gentes del país se hallan acostumbradas a ello. Silandia se arroga el derecho de ser la protectora del Nirván salvaje. Sus enviados afirman que es una tierra tan bella como un niño, pero que, por lo mismo, precisa de cuidados y protección, no pudiendo permanecer por más tiempo apartada de la civilización que Silandia le ofrece. La Compañía justifica así su intromisión en los asuntos del país, y cuando Dani-Sar se opone a la explotación de las minas, sus directivos, que no pueden comprar al rey con incentivos materiales, lo hacen apelando a su interés patriótico y espiritual. Dani-Sar, símbolo del rey indio dominado por la Compañía, llega a afirmar que no fue rey nunca, sino tan sólo un prisionero.

La religión toma también una postura peculiar, sin que se vea afectada la conciencia de los silandeses, que utilizan ampliamente el proselitismo religioso como medio político. La Iglesia es la encargada de buscar bellas palabras para encubrir y justificar los actos de la Compañía:

MR. MORRIS.— Y la paz somos nosotros: el comercio, los intereses, la civilización.

PASTOR.— El espíritu.

MR. COTTON.— Eso es, el espíritu. (Aparte a Morris) ¿No teméis que los pastores nos comprometan por un exceso de celo?

MR. MORRIS.— No lo temáis. Todos ellos son accionistas de nuestra Compañía. Están en su papel y hay que aceptarlo sin alarmarse (p. 341).
Estas palabras sólo engañan a los europeos. En el Nirván hasta los más confiados llegan a descubrir esta hipocresía, aunque tarde. Dani-Sar percibe que no importa lo que se haga, sino lo que se dice sobre lo hecho. Con palabras como «civilización» o «progreso», Silandia se burla del mundo entero:

**Dani-Sar.**—¿Qué quieres del Nirván? ¿Su tierra y sus tesoros y los esclavos que basten a servirte? Pues roba y extermina lealmente. Si eres fuerte, si Europa entera se acobarda ante ti, no necesitas engañarla; y cuando destruyas todos dirán que civilizas y cuando seas más cruel, que eres más grande (p. 411).

La labor principal de la Compañía consiste en pavimentar el terreno para un total dominio militar posterior, lo que no es óbice para que no descuide los intereses materialistas que constituyen su credo. La desintegración de la unidad nirvanesa redunda en su beneficio y la noticia de las desavenencias de los hermanos provoca un alza en las acciones. La Compañía desea que Dani-Sar apoye a los rebeldes para justificar que Silandia intervenga militarmente, dejando el Nirván de ser un protectorado para convertirse en una colonia propiamente dicha. Europa, que siempre acepta los hechos consumados, nada podrá decir. Los dirigentes de la Compañía provocan el fracaso de la rebelión, infiltrando traídores entre los nacionalistas ocultos en la selva de Sindra y mediante otra hábil medida que Benavente toma también de la historia: a las tropas del país fíeles a Dani-Sar se las provee de armas que necesitan ser engrasadas con grasa de vaca y de cerdo, para que se nieguen a servirse de ellas debido a los preceptos religiosos que respetan. Todo este proceso de manipulación llega a su extremo al final de la obra, cuando Dani-Sar, residiendo en Silandia casi moribundo y negándose a regresar al Nirván conquistado, es drogado y conducido contra su voluntad a su país para evitar la responsabilidad en que se incurriría si muriera dentro de Silandia. Los europeos auguran que, de restablecerse de su enfermedad, Dani-Sar probablemente morirá asesinado por algún fanático sin que ellos puedan evitarlo. Esta es la visión de la Inglaterra colonial que Benavente se atreve el primero a presentar en España, con toda su crudeza y verdad.

En cuanto a los naturales del país y a la rebelión, son múltiples las facetas que se muestran en la obra, jugando la religión un papel destacado, tanto entre los rebeldes armados como entre la facción pacifista y no violenta, los dos procedimientos con que experimentó la India en los siglos XIX y XX respectivamente para librarse del yugo
extranjero. Cuando se estrenó la obra, en 1904, quizá intuyó Benavente que sería el segundo procedimiento (la \textit{ahimsā} o no violencia) —al que presenta como único correcto y espiritualmente superior— el que tendría efectividad en los esfuerzos independentistas de la India real. Desde el punto de vista teatral es definitivamente el pacifismo de Dani-Sar el que realza y reivindica su personalidad y le hace convertirse en un ser con grandeza de alma, pese a sus debilidades en el terreno del juego político.

Los partidarios de la violencia muestran un alto grado de fanatismo y su repulsa ante los silandeses es tanto racial como política, aunque no se avengan a reconocerlo así. La rebelión de 1857 queda simbolizada por el ataque a los silandeses que se prepara en la selva de Sindra y que ha de tener lugar simultáneamente con una avanzada sobre la sede del poder en la ciudad. A este movimiento se le da un tono religioso y los cabecillas se refieren a sus partidarios como a «los creyentes». Por traición de un revolucionario, los silandeses se hallan sobre aviso y la rebelión fracasa. Algunos permanecen en la selva y otros van desertando paulatinamente mientras el odio al invasor sigue aumentando. Se habla de «los tigres de ojos azules, color de maldición» y Dani-Sar, al que obligan a unirse al levantamiento, se ve despreciado por los suyos debido a sus anteriores concesiones a Silandia:

\begin{quote}
KIRKI.—Has preferido ser perro en un palacio que tigre en una selva. El extranjero puso la corona sobre tu cabeza; pero la corona era grande, resbaló por tu frente y es collar en tu cuello (p. 384).
\end{quote}

El signo que indica el momento propicio para la revuelta es «el dragón de fuego», concepto simbólico que da título a la obra y que se basa en un eclipse solar que pudo observarse en la ciudad de Khanpur justo antes del levantamiento. La perspectiva religiosa es muy clara: el dragón de fuego que brilla en el cielo es un fenómeno que ha anunciado y precedido siempre a un suceso de gloria para el Nirván. Anuncia la destrucción de los enemigos y a su interpretación sólo pueden tener acceso los iniciados. El concepto del fuego se emplea en su simbolismo típico de purificación, en este caso de la tierra del Nirván, mediante la eliminación de los invasores.

Frente a la violencia patriótica de la mayoría, Dani-Sar representa idealísticamente la no violencia, la tolerancia hindú, la compasión budista, el respeto por la vida, el pacifismo que cristalizaría en credo político con el Mahatma Gandhi. Esta otra realidad del
Nirván, paralela a su rebelión armada, es tan palmaria que incluso los silandeses se ven obligados a reconocerla. El pastor protestante, cuando es interrogado acerca del éxito de su labor evangelizadora, afirma que en el Nirván no le han apedreado todavía, no pudiendo decir lo mismo de sus expediciones a los suburbios de su propia metrópolis. Dani-Sar reniega de la guerra a la que les precipitan los intereses de las potencias enemigas «...porque todas las aguas del río sagrado no bastan a lavar las manos manchadas con la sangre de un hermano» (p. 350) y se entristece de un destino que le ha impulsado a vivir amenazado por el odio, cuando su única plegaria a los dioses era que evitaran el dolor a cuanto existe.

El rey pasa por unos momentos de debilidad y llega a creer error lo que Benavente presenta como virtud. En medio de su enfermedad y su embriaguez reflexiona amargamente sobre lo aparentemente inútil de su pacifismo:

DANI-SAR.- Sólo supe amar y amé al extranjero como a un hermano y a mi hermano más que al amor de mi vida. Y no debió ser, no debió ser. No basta con amar como yo amé. Para ser fuerte es preciso odiar, es preciso defender nuestros amores con nuestros odios (p. 408).

Pero su pacifismo innato pronto le hace desechar cualquier antagonismo, porque sabe que la fuerza del Nirván no estriba en su valor guerrero, sino en su fe en ese otro valor intangible y trascendente, en esa espiritualidad que sus habitantes comparten desde antiguo y que les hace sobrevivir a los altibajos de la historia. En medio de sus angustias y su delirio, Dani-Sar oye como un canto eterno que sale de las raíces de su pueblo; se regocija diciendo que en ese canto vive cuanto amó y en cuanto creyó y que esa canción es el alma de su país. En la obra, los silandeses interpretan sus palabras como producto de su extravío y de la fiebre, pero Benavente se encarga de decírnos bien a las claras en su valiente drama que, en último extremo y pese a su poder, Silandia no ha vencido. Y la historia le da la razón.
OBRAS CITADAS


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‘ONE THOUSAND SIX HUNDRED AND FIFTY-rounds’: COLONIAL VIOLENCE IN THE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE

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Received: 16-09-2013
Accepted: 23-11-2013

ABSTRACT
The Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar in 1919 paved the way for the independence of India and Pakistan. The paper looks at the narrative strategies of representing the incident in two novels that recount it, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers*. How do these texts engage with the colonial political situation? How do the two writers see the repercussions of the incident for the time of their narratives?

KEYWORDS: Salman Rushdie; Shauna Singh Baldwin; Jallianwala Bagh massacre; colonial politics; narrative strategies; representation

RESUMEN ‘Mil seiscientas cincuenta balas’. La violencia colonial en las representaciones de la masacre de Jallianwala Bagh

La masacre de Jallianwala Bagh en Amritsar en 1919 allanó el camino hacia la independencia de India y Pakistán. Este artículo examina las estrategias narrativas empleadas en la representación de este suceso en dos novelas que lo describen: *Midnight’s Children* de Salman Rushdie y *What the Body Remembers* de Shauna Singh Baldwin. ¿Cómo abordan estas novelas la situación política colonial? ¿Cómo perciben estos escritores las repercusiones de este suceso en el contexto histórico de la narrativa?

PALABRAS CLAVE: Salman Rushdie; Shauna Singh Baldwin; masacre de Jallianwala Bagh; política colonial; estrategias narrativas; representación

The Road to Jallianwala Bagh – The Historical Context
After the Great War of 1914–1918, the British faced grave problems in subduing growing resistance in India. As the wartime Defence of India Act was becoming defunct, the British began to seek new measures to fight rebellion in the subcontinent and for this, a Sedition Committee was formed in 1918, chaired by Justice Sir Sidney Rowlatt. The Committee came up with two Bills of emergency measures, although ‘every non-official Indian in the Imperial Legislative Council’ voted against the Bills (Spear, 1965: 341). In the end, only one of the Bills actually
became law (Robb, 2004: 184). This piece of legislation, known officially as the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act and informally as the Rowlatt Act or “Black Bill”, became operational on 21 March 1919. The Indians were not deceived by this colonial legislative manoeuvre and they ingeniously recapitulated the sardonic spirit of the Bill: “No trial, no lawyer, no appeal” (Kulke & Rothermund, 1986: 283). The unjust and radical restriction of basic rights immediately aroused resistance.

Mahatma Gandhi was disappointed with the actions the British were taking and lost what was left of any desire to cooperate with the Government (Gandhi, 1999: 379–93). Consequently, he began to organize non-cooperation protests in line with his 1909 programme *Hind Swaraj*, a strategy which was to exert a long-term influence. Initially Gandhi did not regard the Jallianwala Bagh massacre as significant, writing: “Before this outrage [i.e. the Amritsar ‘crawling orders’], the Jalianwala [sic] Bagh tragedy paled into insignificance in my eyes, though it was this massacre principally that attracted the attention of the people of India and of the world” (393). Here Gandhi refers to an incident that took place one week after the actual massacre (see below), and it was this further humiliation that made him change his mind on the matter.

Two weeks after the passing of the Bill, on 6 April 1919, people all over India responded to Gandhiji’s invitation (383) to observe *hartal*, a day of mourning to protest against the Bill (see McLeod, 2002: 106). The protests were followed by violent outbursts all over the country. After the arrest of two important Punjabi Congress leaders, Dr Satyapal and Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew, on 10 April, the public protests in the Punjab were spreading and in Amritsar a protest meeting was called in the Jallianwala Bagh compound for Sunday, 13 April (Collett, 2005: 232; see also Datta, 2004, on-line).

The Massacre and Its Representations
The Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 13 April 1919 meant death and injuries for hundreds of people in the Punjab. The British General Reginald Dyer, in charge of the city of Amritsar, had forbidden public meetings. An attack by a mob on a British missionary worker, Miss Marcella Sherwood (Collett, 2005: 234), provoked Dyer to resort to harsh measures in order, as he said,

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1 For more on Satyapal and Kitchlew, see Goyal 2004 and Kitchlew 1987, respectively. Similarly to Aadam Aziz in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Kitchlew had obtained his Ph.D. from a German university (but from Münster, not Heidelberg).
“to give them a lesson”.² Dyer ordered his soldiers to fire on a crowd that had gathered in Jallianwala Bagh. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2005, on-line) sees the incident as an indication of race-consciousness on the part of the colonial military.

A week later, Dyer issued the so-called ‘crawling orders’ by which local people were flogged and made to crawl on their stomach on the site of Miss Sherwood’s attack (Lal, 1993: on-line; Collett, 2005: 269–93). In comparison to the 1857 Mutiny, historian Percival Spear comments that with the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, “a scar was drawn across Indo-British relations deeper than any which had been inflicted since the Mutiny” (Spear, 1965: 341). The tragic event had far-reaching consequences – for example Rabindranath Tagore renounced his British knighthood in the wake of the massacre – and it became a remarkable signpost on the way towards Indian independence.

This is the historical context of the episode that is described in the two works I will be discussing in this article. In his novel of 1980 Midnight’s Children, Salman Rushdie (1947–) depicts the Jallianwala Bagh incident in its violent details. Nineteen years later, in her novel What the Body Remembers (1999), Shauna Singh Baldwin (1962–) recounts the same incident as Rushdie.³ Both books attend to almost the same historical details, such as reporting the number of shots fired as one thousand six hundred and fifty rounds (MC 36, WBR 62).

Witness is borne to the traumatic nature of the massacre, not only by these works but also by numerous other Indian and British literary works and films in which the incident occurs. There is the Punjabi novel Kall Vi Suraj Nahin Charhega (1967) by Surjit Singh Sethi, which narrates the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy (Singh 1996) and in 2004 Santokh Singh Sheharyar brought out the Punjabi play “Jallianwala” (published by Nanak Singh Pustakmala; Walia, 2004: on-line). In his novel The Day of the Scorpion (published in 1968 as the second part of the Raj Quartet), Paul Scott (67–71) gives a brief account of the massacre and its significance (Scott, 1973: 67-71), and Stanley Wolpert’s ironically titled novel An Error of Judgment (1970) portrays the incident in a melodramatic way (Quinn, 2008: on-line; Bose, 2003: 65). The Hindi film The Legend of Bhagat Singh (2002, directed by Rajkumar Santoshi) represents the events through a child’s perspective, while Richard Attenborough’s film Gandhi (1982, scenes 11 and 12) and the Granada Television

² “I was going to give them a lesson” (Copland 1990, 59).
³ Further references to the two novels will be preceded by MC (Midnight’s Children) and WBR (What the Body Remembers).

In this article, I will look at the similarities and differences in Rushdie’s and Singh Baldwin’s narratives: how do they engage with the colonial political situation in the light of the Amritsar massacre? and how do the writers see the repercussions of the incident for the time of their narratives?

**Attention to Detail**

In both novels, the brutal official account of the numbers – drawn from unidentified but parallel historical records – is pressed into the service of a critique of the inhumanity of modern warfare (see Collett, 2005: 262–63). We can see this when we compare what the two texts say about the actual reporting of the killing. First, Rushdie’s description:

Brigadier Dyer’s fifty men put down their machine-guns and go away. They have fired a total of one thousand six hundred and fifty rounds into the unarmed crowd. Of these, one thousand five hundred and sixteen have found their mark, killing or wounding some person. ‘Good shooting,’ Dyer tells his men, ‘We have done a jolly good thing.’ (MC 36; emphases added)

Now, Singh Baldwin:

[the carpenter] swore he heard an Englishman shout, ‘Fire low!’ And then he said General Dyer’s Gurkhas really fired low, reloaded and fired again – volley after volley. Fifty men. And sixteen hundred and fifty rounds, they fired. I saw a few bullet marks in the walls where those poor people tried to climb over, get away. And the carpenter showed me [Papaji] where a bullet hit his home below the window he was watching from. No, most of the bullets found their mark. (WBR 62; emphases added)

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4 The details are also recorded in the popular Internet source Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reginald_Dyer>.

Indi@logs, Vol 1 2014, pp.38-50, ISSN 2339-8523
Both writers mention the number of troops, the number of shots fired, and the accuracy of the shooting. They mention the *fifty soldiers* (although some sources refer to ninety) who fired into the crowd with their rifles. They also contrast the regimented soldiers with an “*unarmed crowd*” and “*those poor people*”. Rushdie incorrectly mentions machine-guns: these were actually brought to the site but could not be used as they were fastened to armoured cars which could not get through the narrow passageway leading to the compound. Later on Rushdie calls the guns used rifles: “R. E. Dyer might have commended his murderers’ rifle skills” (MC 37).

The Punjab Sub-Committee of the Indian National Congress (*Punjab Disturbances*, 1976: 49) regarded it as customary for the colonial executive and military “to count Indian life very cheap”. Singh Baldwin agrees on this: “Only Indian lives are so worthless to them” (WBR 63).

Most of the gun-shots found their mark on their victims, killing or wounding them. Rushdie counts the number of victims as “*one thousand five hundred and sixteen*” (MC 36). There is a major disagreement among historians as to the actual number of victims. The original report on the incident by the Hunter Commission stated the numbers to be 379 dead and 1,200 wounded (Spear 341). These are also the figures Rushdie and Singh Baldwin refer to, although Singh Baldwin also lets her protagonist contradict the figures:

> The English magistrate who comes here told me *less than four hundred people died* – he lies; *it cannot be*. These English don’t think we know or understand – of course we know, of course we understand. (WBR 63–64; emphases added)

Other sources refer to many more casualties – even over one thousand deaths (see Collett, 2005: 263). Collett (quoted in Roy, 2005: online) also comments: “As to how many died, I accept the final figure of the Sewa Samiti of 480 known named deaths, but suspect there were many not known. […] I would not be surprised if the total deaths had been double that. The 397 accepted by the Hunter Committee (which investigated Dyer’s conduct) was wrong. As to injured, there is no way of knowing accurately. Over 1,000 easily”.

The sheer number of victims is devastating – and caused an immediate international scandal. The conflict between the colonial power and its subalterns is forcefully drawn. But it is not only this conflict that the stories seem to address. Nor do the narrations of the massacre, in
their rather faithful attention to detail, aim to challenge the existing information about the incident itself. They do, instead, try to interpret its meaning in new social and political environments, new historical contexts. I argue that the narrative conventions that differentiate the two authors’ texts also emphasise their different contextual schemes. To clarify this, I will concentrate on discussing the issue of nation versus community in two parallel passages of the novels.

Narrative Interpretations

Before I go into the two issues themselves, let me first outline the basic narrative strategies to be found in the two novels. There is a remarkable difference between the way they engage in distancing or connecting the incident with the context of their characters.

Rushdie’s story reads as a postmodern novel, with its metafictional structure. The narrative voice of Saleem Sinai is ironic and unreliable as he tells his story to Padma, his explicit audience. The narrative conventions used create a detached atmosphere. This can be seen in the scene where Aadam Aziz is handed a pamphlet calling for a meeting:

> It had been inserted into his hand (we cut to a long-shot – nobody from Bombay should be without a basic film vocabulary) as he entered the hotel foyer. (MC 33; emphasis added)

Here, distancing happens not only through an external commentary but explicitly technically, through a description of camera movement: after a close-up it moves to a long-shot. This cinematic impression is emphasized by the present-tense narration: Rushdie’s strategy is based on an understanding of constructedness and unreliability of discourse.

A further distancing method in Rushdie is the use of memory as a narrative technique. The accuracy of data is replaced by the suggestiveness of memory: “Hartal – April 7, agree mosque newspaper wall and pamphlet, because Gandhi has decreed that the whole of India shall, on that day, come to a halt” (MC 33) – here, the factual date of 6 April is replaced by the next day. Also grotesque irony is used for distancing: “On April 6th, 1919, the holy city of Amritsar smelled (gloriously, Padma, celestially!) of excrement” (MC 32). In his article published in the collection Imaginary Homelands, “Errata: Or, Unreliable Narration in Midnight’s Children”
Rushdie describes the way in which his narrative is faulty – both accidentally and deliberately. He says, for example that:

in the description of the Amritsar massacre [...] I have Saleem say that Dyer entered the Jallianwala Bagh compound followed by ‘fifty white troops’. The truth is that there were fifty troops, but they weren’t white. When I first found out my error I was upset and tried to have it corrected. Now I’m not so sure. The mistake feels more and more like Saleem’s; its wrongness feels right. (Rushdie, 1992: 23; emphasis original)

The corrected passage in the novel reads: “fifty crack troops” (MC 36).

In Singh Baldwin’s novel the setting is different. A Sikh family is gathered together in the evening to listen to the father, Papaji Bachan Singh, telling a story to his son Jeevan, with her daughter Roop listening. The story of the massacre is not told from the point of view of an omniscient narrator but as one heard from eye-witnesses – from a “carpenter who saw the slaughter from his terrace overlooking Jallianwala Bagh” (WBR 62) and an “old man [who] lost his only son and his two small grandsons in the massacre” (WBR 63). Furthermore, Papaji had himself just visited the scene of the massacre, nine years on: “I went through the passage into Jallianwala Bagh, you know which passage I mean, na?” (WBR 62).

Where Rushdie’s protagonist Saleem is ironically detached, Singh Baldwin’s Papaji is moved with emotion: in the course of his narration “Papaji’s voice deepens” (WBR 63) and at one point he “pauses for breath” (WBR 65). All this functions to convey a sense of realism: Singh Baldwin’s strategy is that of immediacy and reliability.

**Nation and Community**

The different strategies of the two texts position them differently with regard to the issues concerning nation and community. Rushdie’s narrative (here as in all his writings on India) emphasises the Indian nation, albeit in its multiplicity (see Kortenaar, 2003: 151). Singh Baldwin, for her part, represents India as segregated into separate, conflicting communal identities.

In *Midnight’s Children*, Aadam Aziz is an outsider in the scene of the massacre. He is a foreign-educated passer-by who anticipates “trouble from the military” because meetings had
been forbidden under martial law (MC 35). When the pamphlet about the hartal is pushed into his hand, he is hesitant:

Tai once said: ‘Kashmiris are different. Cowards, for instance. Put a gun in a Kashmiri’s hand and it will have to go off by itself – he’ll never dare to pull the trigger. We are not like Indians, always making battles’. Aziz, with Tai in his head, does not feel Indian. Kashmir, after all, is not strictly speaking a part of the Empire, but an independent princely state. He is not sure if the hartal of pamphlet mosque wall newspaper is his fight, even though he is in occupied territory now. (MC 33; emphases added)

Rushdie’s penchant for Kashmir shows in this quotation. A radical difference is constructed between the Kashmiris and the Indians. Aadam Aziz “does not feel Indian” and “he is not sure if the hartal of pamphlet mosque wall newspaper is his fight”. Nevertheless, despite this seeming communal thread, the basic outlook of Aziz – and Rushdie – concerns India as a whole – a whole that consists of a multitude of voices. For Rushdie, “the defining image of India is the crowd, and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once” (Rushdie, 1992: 32). To account for this, he writes of the people gathered in Jallianwala Bagh on the day of the tragic event: “On April 13th, many thousands of Indians are crowding through this alleyway” (MC 35).

From her side, Singh Baldwin connects the communal division directly to the colonial governance of the massacre:

after Jallianwala Bagh, the British had to agree that each religion, each community, should be represented in the legislature of each province according to the number of its people. So now, Muslims need more Muslims, Hindus need more Hindus, and we Sikhs need more Sikhs. (WBR 64–65; emphases added)

It is divide and rule: the British try to undermine the unity of Indians by positioning them one against the other – “each religion, each community” according “to the number of its people”. Earlier in the novel, Singh Baldwin writes: “Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, they are like the three
strands of [Roop's] hair, a strong rope against the British, but separate nevertheless” (WBR 16). Anti-colonial resistance is strengthened by the incident, but at the same time communal divisions are deepened. What emerges from her narration is the claim and simultaneous identification through the use of “we”: “we Sikhs need more Sikhs”. Where Rushdie speaks of “thousands of Indians” gathering in the Jallianwala Bagh, Singh Baldwin sees the gathering as a Sikh meeting: “Those people were almost all Sikhs who had come for the Baisakhi fair” (WBR 63; emphasis added).

However, contrary to Singh Baldwin’s depiction, in his biography of General Dyer Nigel Collett (2005: 491n) states that of the 291 casualties whose jats (castes) could be identified most were Hindus and Muslims, and only 22 were certainly Sikh (see also Roy, 2005: online). The historical records are dubious, but whatever the ‘facts’ might be, here both Rushdie and Singh Baldwin interpret them from and for their own contexts.

Criticism of Gandhi
The other issue to be discussed briefly here is criticism of Mahatma Gandhi. Both authors take on a critical view of Gandhi in their narratives. Rushdie’s national narrative celebrating multiplicity criticizes Gandhi for trying to homogenize India. Rushdie writes about the way in which the whole country took up Gandhi’s idea of turning hortal into a nationalist project:

_Hortal! Which is to say, literally speaking, a day of mourning, of stillness, of silence._

But this is India in the heyday of the Mahatma, when _even language obeys the instructions of Gandhiji_, and the word has acquired, under his influence, new resonances. (MC 33)

The appearance in this passage of the otherwise almost totally absent Gandhi highlights the urgency of Rushdie’s critique. Although elsewhere Rushdie (2000: 29) has referred to Gandhi as ‘a sharp, crafty, streetfighting Gujarati lawyer who was a brilliant politician’, the sarcastic comment on “even language obey[ing] the instructions of Gandhiji” is a reminder of the problematic relationship Rushdie has with Gandhi. This is confirmed in the following observation by Neil ten Kortenaar:
After Brigadier Dyer’s massacre, [Aziz] is crushed under the bodies of the crowd, but because they have assembled in the name of the nation, he does not lose himself but finds himself. We must conclude that the distinction between a crowd and a mob is the distinction between the nation-state and the subnational grouping based on language or religion. [...] In the mob the self is lost; in the nation, however, it is confirmed. (Kortenaar, 2003: 151)

Singh Baldwin’s narrative stressing Sikh communal identity, too, remonstrates with Gandhi’s indifference to the Sikh sacrifice, nine years on from the massacre:

Nine years ago, I remember very well Gandhiji protested the crawling order and firing, and the deaths of the Sikhs who died there, just as he has protested other deaths since. But now? It is a different time, now. These Arya Samajis in Gujarkhan are trying to convert one Sikh at a time, back to being Hindus! Gandhiji should stop them, tell them they must understand that everyone should be allowed to follow the Guru and God of his choice. (WBR 64; emphases added)

Singh Baldwin’s view is that even if Gandhi was originally understanding of the Sikh suffering, the immediate political situation later prevented him from taking action against an aggressive Hinduism that was trying to convert Sikhs ‘back’ to being Hindus.

Conclusion: The Inevitability of Colonial Collapse

The examples I have discussed here are literary echoes of colonial violence. When Rushdie and Singh Baldwin write from their post-independence contexts, they do so in retrospection. Their narratives are thus speaking not so much of the process of gaining independence as of the historical aftermath of colonialism. Singh Baldwin comes from the (diasporic) Sikh minority of Indians, and Rushdie from the (diasporic) Muslim minority of Indians. They both see communalism as a danger to Indian people. They show that colonial rule was ruthless and not in the least benevolent, trying to exploit the subaltern colonials and resorting to whatever measures might protect its interests. After the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Gandhi (398) gave this attitude the name of ‘Dyerism’ (1999: 398).
However, as postcolonial criticism has made evident, colonial power carried with it the elements of its own downfall. We may conclude with Dipesh Chakrabarty’s words on the consequences of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre: “Such a moment when a challenge to the sovereignty of the colonial power has to be put down with violence always contained a contradiction that was necessary to colonial sovereignty” (Chakrabarty, 2005: on-line).

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SOCIAL METABOLISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS IN INDIA

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Received: 03-09-2013
Accepted: 20-11-2013

ABSTRACT

This paper explains the methods for counting the energy and material flows in the economy, and gives the main results of the Material Flows for the economy of India between 1961 and 2008 as researched by Simron Singh et al (2012). Drawing on work done in the EJOLT project, some illustrations are given of the links between the changing social metabolism and ecological distribution conflicts, looking at responses in Odisha to bauxite mining, at conflicts on sand mining, at disputes on waste management options in Delhi and at ship dismantling in Alang, Gujarat. The aim is to show how a history of social metabolism, of socio-environmental conflicts, and of the changing valuation languages deployed by various social actors in such conflicts, could be written in a common framework.

KEYWORDS: Economic Growth; Material Flows; Bauxite Mining; Sand Mining; Ship Dismantling; Urban Waste Disposal; Environmental Movements

The Standard Of Living

The industrial economy works in practice by shifting costs to poor people, to future generations, and to other species. Could an industrial economy work otherwise? The impacts occur at various temporal and geographical scales. They arise because of the
increased social metabolism, and this article shall show what the main trends in India are.

Sometimes, environmental liabilities appear in the public scene when there are complaints or when there are sudden accidents as in Bhopal in 1984 or Fukushima in 2011 and so many other cases. But here we shall look at those other scenarios that very rarely make the headlines. Shrivastava’s and Kothari’s brilliant book of 2012, *Churning the Earth: the Making of Global India* is written in the spirit of Karl Polanyi’s *Great Transformation*, and also draws on the critique of uniform development brought forward since the 1980s by Ashish Nandy, Shiv Visvanathan, Arturo Escobar, Gustavo Esteva, Wolfgang Sachs (1991) and Norgaard (1994).¹

Shrivastava and Kothari also draw on ecological economists such as K.W. Kapp and Herman Daly, and they criticize Amartya Sen’s notion of “development as freedom” (Sen, 1999). Development is not only growth of income per capita and the movement of low productivity farmers into higher productivity occupations, together with industrialization and urbanization. Sen’s canvass is broader, and can be summarized in the caption of “capabilities”. Development should really mean to acquire the material circumstances and the mental and social abilities to choose as much as possible your own path in life. One can agree with all this but there is still in Amartya Sen a positive view of economic development in contrast to the critics of development quoted above. From the current Indian experience, Shristavastava and Kothari assert that “development as freedom” falls short of accounting for disappearing natural environments and human cultures, and they ask why “even as sophisticated a writer as Amartya Sen… omits any discussion on the loss of land and livelihood, human community and culture that is invariably involved in the displacement induced by development”. In Sen’s writings, the natural environment has been seen, if at all, as amenities to be enjoyed once you are well off although in fact, using Sen’s own conceptual framework, it could be claimed that what development achieves is the loss of traditional “entitlements” to products and services formerly available outside the market. This is taken up again below in the section on “the GDP of the poor”.

¹ Wolfgang Sachs edited a collection of these authors’ writings (Sachs, 1991) including also Serge Latouche and Vandana Shiva. They are seen in retrospect as “post-development” thinkers. There is a straight line from their critique of uniform development to today’s notion of *Buen Vivir* in the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador.
There is still a persistent trend among economists to see the environment as a luxury good and to consider that the poor are “too poor to be green” (Martinez-Alier, 1995 & Temper & Martinez-Alier, 2007). This view is vigorously opposed by Shrivastava and Khotari whose book is dedicated to the many movements for ecological and social justice taking place today in India and elsewhere.

In British historiography, there was a debate on whether the “standard of living” for the common people increased between 1760 and 1850, and on what the “standard of living” meant. In India, a country that at present is compressing into a short time socio-economic historical periods that could be represented in the West by Charles Dickens, Henry Ford and Bill Gates, there could be a similar debate. Moreover, sensitivity to environmental values and the diversity of languages and cultures has increased since E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm have argued for a more “pessimistic” interpretation of British society.

The British “standard of living” debate is relevant to today’s India, and these historic issues are not only defined by the enclosures and the application of the “Poor Laws”, but also by the rate of increase in real wages of labourers and industrial workers. Quality of life had deteriorated (in terms incommensurate with money wages) because of overcrowded urban housing conditions, pollution, loss of access to land and loss of status of independent skilled workers. In due course, the condition of the English working class improved. This improvement was due to the increasingly efficient power of coal to move the machines of the “thermo-industrial” revolution (Grinevald, 1976) and to the making of markets for the textile industry all over the world, including India. It was also due to the slowly increasing union power of the new working class and the political power of Britain to exploit other territories, both in its colonies, and in the southern United States which, until the 1860s, exported to Britain cheap slave labour-power and cheap soil services transformed into cotton. The “ghost acres” and slave labour-time in sugar production in the Caribbean also helped (Hornborg, 1998 & 2007).

Although they tried, the British were far from being able to literally strip the world bare like locusts because there were too few of them (about 27 million by 1870), many were poor, and also because coal was extracted from the island itself. In 1870 (when Charles
Dickens died) coal extraction in Britain was to the tune of three to four tons per person, a figure that rose per capita until 1914.²

Poverty itself had been created by enclosures and dispossession. It decreased in Britain after the first decades of the thermo-industrial revolution but there were many losses unaccounted for. Then, something unexpected happened internationally that should have dampened the positive views on the thermo-industrial revolution. In 1896 Svante Arrhenius published the first articles showing that temperatures would increase because of increased carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere by burning coal. Nevertheless, climate change was not a spanner thrown into doctrines of economic growth until 1985, ninety years later, with the creation of the IPCC. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has been chaired since 2002 by an Indian, Dr R.K. Pachauri. The IPCC copes with the impossible task of making climate change one main political issue in India and the world.

There was early awareness that the economy was increasingly relying on non-renewable sources of energy. From Jevons in 1865 to Patrick Geddes from the 1880s to the 1920s, and Frederick Soddy in the 1910s and 1920s, it was repeatedly pointed out that economic growth was based on fossil energy stocks which were being burnt and irreversibly dissipated. Later, in the late 1940s, calculations of “peak oil” began to appear, and in the 1970s estimates of a decreasing EROI in agriculture and in the commercial energy sector (Pimentel, et al., 1973; Hall et al., 1986; Martinez-Alier, 1987 & 2011)

Energy cannot be recycled, therefore even an economy that would not grow but that would use large amounts of fossil fuels, would need “fresh” supplies coming from the commodity frontiers. The same applies to materials, which in practice are recycled only to some extent (like copper, aluminium, steel or paper). Water is recycled in nature by sun energy but we use groundwater and sometimes also surface water quicker that it is replenished. When the economy grows, the search for water and other materials and energy sources is of course even greater.

² In India coal extraction is still only about 0.5 t/cap/yr, mainly for electricity production (a process somewhat more efficient than 1870 steam engines).
The GDP of the Poor

When economic historians reconstruct GDP series, they would have to balance gains (in monetary and non monetary terms) with losses. A notion developed in India that points to such unaccounted losses is denominated the “GDP of the poor”, and was popularized by the reports published in 2008 and 2010 of The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB). Authors Haripriya Gundimeda, Pushpam Kumar and Pavan Sukhdev in the first TEEB report “found that the most significant beneficiaries of forest biodiversity and ecosystem services are the poor, and the predominant economic impact of a loss or denial of these inputs is to the income security and well-being of the poor”. Here “economic” and “income” are not or should not be meant in a chrematistic sense.

Assume a woman making a living by collecting shells in a mangrove forest with a husband who sustainably produces charcoal for the family and for the local market. Assume that a local shrimp farming corporation or an urban developer encloses the mangrove forest and destroys it (legally or illegally). The loss in the standard of living because of displacement, the increased fear because of threats of security guards, lack of access to food and domestic energy, are not well measured in money terms. That family is likely to lack money to compensate for the losses through buying alternative accommodation and other sources of livelihood. The notion of equivalent compensation itself is in question. Moreover, the surrounding populations are now in danger because they lack protection against storms or tsunamis and, furthermore, there has also been a loss of biodiversity in itself, beyond products or services for humans.

Assume (as in India which is driven by an increased extraction of materials), that a poor rural woman working at home and also outside the home for subsistence or for wages, finds that that the water in the river or the well is now polluted because of mining nearby. This water which was once free (providing if social institutions of caste allowed access to it) is now polluted, and this woman is unlikely to have money, even if she gets...
a NREGA\(^3\) wage to buy the plastic bottles for the water need for the family. If she buys water she cannot buy food or wood or clothes.

When people see their access to nature’s products or services destroyed by deforestation, mining, tree plantations, dams or transport infrastructures, they often complain. They might ask for compensation (to “internalize the externalities”) or, very likely, they will eschew chrematistic accounting and appeal instead to a language of rights.

**Ecological Distribution Conflicts and the Defence of the Commons**

The increased use of fossil fuels and minerals, the human appropriation of the available biomass, the diversion of water to industrial use etc., all bring about an increase in conflicts related to the access to environmental products and services and on the distribution of the burdens of pollution. This does not imply that poor people are always on the side of conservation, which would be patently untrue. However, in many conflicts born out of resource extraction, transport or pollution, the local poor people (indigenous or not) are often on the side of conservation not so much because they are explicitly environmentalists but because of their livelihood needs and (often) their cultural values (Guha & Martinez-Alier, 1997; Martinez-Alier, 2005).

Therefore, there are movements of environmental justice or an environmentalism of the poor and the indigenous often appealing to non-monetary values such as livelihood, territorial rights or sacredness of the land or the rivers. These movements combine livelihood, social, economic and environmental issues. They set their “moral economy” in opposition to the logic of extraction of oil, minerals, wood or agrofuels at the “commodity frontiers”, and thus defend biodiversity and their own livelihood. In many instances they draw on a sense of “place” and local identity (indigenous rights and values) but they also could connect easily with the politics of the Left. However, the traditional left in southern countries (as in West Bengal in 2007) still tends to see environmentalism as a “luxury of the rich”. The same applies to the nationalist-popular movements in Latin America. However, there is currently a change in some circles of

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\(^3\) The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act guarantees a hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
the intellectual and political left in Latin America with authors such as Alberto Acosta, Eduardo Gudynas and Maristella Svampa who draw inspiration from the critics of development of the 1980s and from political ecology.

India’s socio-environmental conflicts have their peculiarities. There are not so many foreign corporations as in Latin America, Indonesia and Africa (from Canada, China, the United States, Australia, Europe) engaging in open cast mining or fossil fuel extraction. There are no foreign land grabs in rural areas of India, on the contrary there are some Indian land grabs outside India. There are no foreign-owned large plantations of oil palms or eucalyptus. In India there are many conflicts related to the mining of coal and lignite, bauxite, iron ore (usually by domestic corporations, public or private). Furthermore, there are conflicts involving illegal sand and gravel extraction, which do not happen so often in other countries. There are also biomass conflicts (deforestation, tree plantations), conflicts regarding water use (dams, excessive consumption of underground water, pollution by mining and by industry) which are common to other countries. There are also renewed conflicts concerning the uncertain risks from nuclear electricity, as in Maharashtra (Ranatgiri) where there is opposition to the French Jaitapur grandiose nuclear projects. In Tamil Nadu the Russian-built Kudankulam power plant of Russian design has caused much social unrest, and in December 2012 “fishermen from the coastal villages set out into the sea in more than 100 boats towards the Kudankulam nuclear power plant while women and children stayed back at the protest site in front of St Lourdes Church in Idinthakarai, the epicenter of the 400-day-long protest”.4 At the other extreme of the “commodity chain”, there have been persistent conflicts regarding uranium mining in Jharkhand.

Until 2011, it was foreseen that in Haripur, West Bengal, six Russian-built nuclear power plants were to be installed in the region.5 This was to be a second nuclear park, after Kudankulam. Haripur was set to be operational once all the six reactors at Kudankulam became operational. However, this met with opposition, and after peasant opposition had prevented in 2007 the setting up of SEZ (special economic zones) at Nandigram and Singhur (for the chemical industry and for a Tata car factory), the

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4 Times of India, 11 Dec. 2012
Communist Party government of West Bengal, which also favoured Haripur, was defeated in the elections. Its general secretary, Prakash Karat, complained in 2007 against “the modern-day Narodniks who claim to champion the cause of the peasantry” while neglecting the historic task of industrialization. He mentioned “the likes of Medha Patkar” among the Narodniks.6

Interestingly, one main spokesman for the new party AAP in India, Yogendra Yadav, has said: “… the most creative energy in our public life has not come from within politics proper but from outside politics — from people’s movements on issues such as displacement, Dalits, farmers, women, right to food, right to information and above all, jāl, jungle, zameen (water, forests, land). The difficulty is that this energy did not have a political expression, hope, and a political vehicle. In my dream script, the AAP is the natural political hope for these energies”.7

Anywhere one goes in India, one can find small civil society organizations (Gandhian and, in an Indian sense, Narodnik) both documenting and becoming actively involved in conflicts on land-grabbing, water grabbing and exploitation of other natural resources. One such group in Allahabad claims that defense of the people’s “communitarian ownership of natural resources is the underlying idea behind the mass upsurge, assertion and activism” in states like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh against coal mining, in Uttarakhand and other Himalayan states against dams, in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Haryana against nuclear energy threats. Thus, in Jharkhand, in the Karapura valley of Hazaribagh, “indigenous and agrarian populations of 205 villages have not allowed the entry of 35 corporations to start mining of coal and build large thermal power stations”, while in Haryana “rural people in and around the village of Gorakhpur of Fatehabad district are opposing the proposed nuclear plant there. They have been sitting in a continuous dharna since July 20, 2010. Three persons have died while sitting dharna”.8

6 http://pd.cpim.org/2007/0128/01282007_prakash.htm
8 Nai Azadi, monthly journal of Azadi Bachao Andolan, Oct-Dec 2012, special issue in memory of Prof. Banwari Lal Sharma, issued by the Swaraj Vidyapith in Allahabad. Dharna is the practice of demanding redress for an offense by sitting down and fasting at a public place or at the doorstep of the offender or debtor.
The primary causes of such movements of resistance are the increase in the social metabolism and the defence of communitarian livelihoods against resource extraction. Meanwhile, there are also new urban waste disposal conflicts. The questions we must now ask ourselves are: which of these types of conflicts already existed in 1947, and which ones are new? Furthermore, one must ask oneself what are the current trends? Are there historical studies of political ecology following the pioneering work of the 1980s and 1990s by Ramachandra Guha, Rohan D’Souza and other authors on forests and water management conflicts since colonial times?  

Methods for the Study of Social Metabolism

Economies may be described in terms of economic indicators such as growth of GDP, savings ratio, budget deficit as percentage of GDP, current account balance in the external sector, and so forth. Social factors may be taken into account, as in the Human Development Index which nevertheless correlates closely with GDP per capita leaving aside (as Shrivastava and Kothari emphasize) environmental and cultural loses.

The economy may also be described in terms of physical indicators. Economic, social, and physical indicators are non-equivalent descriptions. For example: a particular economy may provide 260 GJ (gigajoules) of energy per person/year, its HANPP (human appropriation of net primary production of biomass) is 35%, material flow amounts to 16 tons per person/year of which fossil fuels account for 5 tons. Of the material flows, 5 tons are imported, 1 ton is exported. Income per capita is 34,000 US$, and therefore it ranks 10th in the HDI (human development index).

To take another example, we have an economy that provides only 35 GJ person/year, its materials flow amounts to only 5 tons person/year, its HANPP is 65% (a heavily populated country, relying on biomass, with little external trade). Foreign trade is less than 0.3 ton per capita/year of exports or imports. Income per capita is 3,000 US$ (at purchasing power parity) and, therefore, it ranks 127th in the HDI. Different regions and
different classes of people in such countries could be classified by their metabolic profiles.

MEFA -materials and energy flows accounting- is a set of methods for describing and analysing socio-economic metabolism. It examines economies as systems that reproduce themselves not only socially and culturally, but also physically through a continuous exchange of energy and matter with their natural environments and with other socio-economic systems. Material flow accounts are published at national level by Eurostat and now also UNEP, drawing on methodologies established by research groups such as the one led by Marina Fischer-Kowalski in Vienna over the last twenty years. We suggest that material flow accounting is also needed at regional (state) level, and we wonder whether this is being done or will be done officially in India. All-India’s accounts show levels of domestic extraction per capita and trends very different from those that would be shown by individual states, some of which have very large Physical Trade Deficits as they perform the role of suppliers of cheap materials.

In the Material Flows we calculate first the Domestic Extraction (in tons per year) divided into Biomass, Minerals for Building Materials, Mineral Ores for Metals, and Fossil Fuels. They show different levels and trends in different countries. The Domestic Extraction is denoted as DE. The DMC (Domestic Material Consumption) is equal to Domestic Extraction plus Imports minus Exports. Physical imports and physical exports measure are all imported or exported commodities in tonnes. Physical trade balance (PTB) equals physical imports minus physical exports. So countries like Brazil or Russia (among the BRICs) have large Physical Trade Deficits, but not India as a whole. Such accounts (including carbon or energy “rucksacks”, “virtual” water and “embodied HANPP”) are relevant for historical and current debates on ecologically unequal exchange and the ecological debt.

Energy flow accounting (EFA) is an integral part of the analysis of social metabolism. Primary and final energy delivered are usually classified in the statistics according to source. Such energy flows (including hydro-electricity) are also unequally distributed, and in India they are creating not only coal mining conflicts and the new nuclear

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10 The Material Flows of India have been calculated in S.J. Singh, et al, 2012.
conflicts but also conflicts in the Himalaya and in the North East on hydroelectricity. Notice that energy accounts are separate from the Material Flows. The idea of linking economic history to the use of energy goes back to Wilhelm Ostwald, and later to Leslie White and other authors but it was only in the 1980s when several histories of the use of energy in the economy were published. The most interesting EFA indicator is that of Energy Return on Energy Input (EROI).

The question arises whether economic growth will be slowed down around the world as and if we enter a period of decreasing EROI. Are industrial late comers damaged by this? An economic-ecological history would establish the changes in the EROIs in a country such as India over the coming years. This would register a remarkable improvement as biomass energy is substituted or supplemented by fossil fuels and would later in turn, indicate perhaps a decline due to the fact that obtaining energy while going down the Hubbert curve (after peak oil) requires (it seems) increasing amounts of energy.

**The HANPP**
The HANPP (human appropriation of net primary production of biomass) is calculated in three steps. First, the potential net primary production (in the natural ecosystems of a given region or country), NPP (net primary production), is calculated. Then, the actual NPP (normally, less than potential NPP, because of agricultural simplification and soil sealing) is calculated. The part of actual NPP used by humans and associate beings (cattle, etc.) relative to potential NPP is the HANPP, and this is meant to be an index of the pressure on the biodiversity (due to the higher the HANPP the less biomass is available for “wild” species). So, an increasing HANPP is an indicator of increasing pressure on biodiversity. This data would be relevant to undertake a history of India’s conservation areas and threats to its wildlife.

In India, due to high population density and land conversion, and due also to a relatively high use of biomass per capita (which would still be larger if the Indian population ate more meat), the Human Appropriation of Net Primary Production is very high (as it is also in Bangladesh). S. J. Singh et al (2012) put it at 73% compared to about 40% in the EU (with comparable population densities), and only 24% in Japan (a country that
imports much biomass). Therefore, the higher the HANPP the stronger the pressure on biodiversity. We can also ask the question of which social group actually benefits from the HANPP as in the scenario when a commercial tree plantation is planted in a former forest used sparsely by Adivasi groups.

**India’s Social Metabolism**

Following the example set by Japan for the last twenty years, economic growth has stopped in many rich countries since 2008 (less by design than by the economic crisis), while in the BRICs but also Peru, Indonesia, Colombia, Turkey and many other countries there has been growth after 2008. Poverty in terms of income per capita is declining in all such countries, including India.

This growth is achieved at great environmental and social costs. There is land grabbing and enclosures, peasants are squeezed out of the land, tribals in India and elsewhere are being displaced because they happen to live at the “commodity frontiers”, and the consequence is that biodiversity is being rapidly lost.

This is the background to the study of India’s Material Flows in 2012. India per capita still consumes less fossil fuels, less building materials, and less mineral ores than many other countries. In the 1960s, about three quarters of the total material consumption consisted of biomass while construction materials were second in importance. Fossil fuels and industrial minerals and ores were insignificant in relation to the total flows. In the course of the approximately 50 years of study, this relationship has changed in quantity and composition. The use of biomass has doubled while fossil fuel consumption multiplied by a factor of 12.2, industrial minerals and ores by a factor of 8.6, and construction materials by a factor of 9.1

Until the 1980s the population grew at a slightly faster pace than material throughput. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, material use remained at a low and slowly declining level of less than 3 t/cap/yr. Only since the early 1980s (ten years before Dr Manmohan Singh became Finance Minister in 1991) a sustained growth in per capita material consumption set in, growing by over 60% to 4.3 t/cap/yr, and accelerating in the period since 2004. Taking into account further growth from 2008 to 2012, India is probably at a level of 5 t/cap/yr. In comparison, per capita material consumption in EU countries is
about 15 tons per person/year. (Notice moreover that in the EU imports are very
significant, and they exceed exports in tons by a factor of 4).

As regards the material intensity (or its reverse, resource productivity), India’s GDP (in
constant 2000 USD) increased by a factor of 12.4 between 1961 and 2008. The
monetary economy grew faster than the physical economy. The material intensity of the
Indian economy, measured as the ratio of DMC (domestic material consumption) per
GDP, declined by 69%, from almost 20 kg of DMC per $ GDP to only 6 kg per $. This
decline can be attributed to the slow growth of biomass consumption that only doubled.
In contrast, the use of minerals and fossil fuels grew at about the same pace as GDP. In
Singh et al (2012) we wrote that, in general, construction minerals are abundant and
scarcity (and extraction conflicts) are usually only regional phenomena. But almost all
regions of India suffer from the phenomenon of “sand mafias”.

As regards trade, India has no Physical Trade Deficit, and this fact has become
bothersome for theorists of Ecologically Unequal Trade. In the case of India, unequal
trade has to be analysed at state level. For instance, as we shall see, Odisha is a large net
exporter, and its exports cause locally large environmental and social damages. Could
Odisha tax exports substantially for its own benefit?

The trends in total and per capita material domestic consumption in India (extraction
plus imports minus exports), on material intensity, and on physical trade are
summarized in Fig. 1.
Fig. 1 Material flows accounts of India 1961-2008 (source, Singh et al 2012, op. cit).
Table 1 shows again the Domestic Material Consumption (Domestic Extraction + Imports –Exports) per capita from 1961 to 2008, excluding the Biomass, comparing with growth of GDP and population.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP [billion USD at const. 2000]</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population [million]</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>1140</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fossil energy carriers [DMC t/cap/yr]</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ores and industrial minerals [DMC t/cap/yr]</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction minerals [DMC t/cap/yr]</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: DMC [t/cap/yr] of India for the three main groups of mineral and fossil materials and their average annual growth rates (%) in comparison to population and GDP. Source: Singh et al (2012)

Regional Variations in Social Metabolism and Resource Extraction Conflicts: the Case of Odisha

In this section (inspired by Felix Padel and Samarendra Das over the years) we shall account for the historical novelty in the very long recorded history of Odisha: the clashes due to the plans for mineral extraction, as in Maikanch, or due to the cases of industrial land grabbing, as in Kalinganar (Padel & Das, 2010).

The mining and quarrying sector has been the fastest growing sector in Odisha at above 10% per annum growth since 1980-81 to 2008-09 and beyond. Yet at the same time, virtually the whole of Odisha, including Kashipur in Rayagada, Lanjigarh in Kalahandi, Lower Suktel area in Balangir, Kotagarh in Phulbani, the mining-industrial belt in Jharsuguda, Kalinganagar and Rourkela, has turned into a battleground over the issue of development and displacement. The issue at hand in these conflicts is sometimes demanding better compensation packages, but often communities are raising serious objections to the notion of development itself that is being promoted, and they champion a different system of values plus an alternative vision of development to that advocated by the state. The Niyamgiri-Lanjigarh case, as well as the struggle over the...
investments of the Korean steel company POSCO, have become emblematic of these clashes which are also experienced in neighbouring states.\textsuperscript{11}

While other growing economies such as Brazil, Argentina, Russia and South Africa have large physical trade deficits in relation to the size of their economies, India’s exports and imports (in tonnes) are relatively small in comparison to the physical size of her economy (Fig. 1). However, within the subcontinent, there are resource-rich regions with very large net material exports to foreign countries and to the rest of India. As such, looking at material flows only at a national level obscures large variations between per capita (and per hectare) material extraction between states. Particularly in the eastern part of the country in states such as Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha, the ecological distribution conflicts associated with the growing social metabolism can be most clearly evidenced and, furthermore, if we study energy flows we can understand the resistance to hydro-electric developments in other areas. It is always the same story: from increased social metabolism in terms of materials and energy comes socio-environmental conflicts.

Odisha is the 9\textsuperscript{th} largest state by area in India and the 11\textsuperscript{th} largest by population, and the region holds many minerals. However, despite (or because of) increasing exports of this wealth to other regions, it remains one of the poorest states in India with a sum total of 40\% of its inhabitants below poverty line (\textit{Economic Survey}, Government of Orissa, 2003-04 and 2008-09). Recent years have seen unprecedented levels of investment from both domestic and international companies hoping to profit from this mineral bounty. In 2009, Odisha was the Indian state with the 2\textsuperscript{nd} most Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), after industrial Gujarat.

In states like Odisha, the incidence of mining is much larger than in the country as a whole. Iron ores, coal, bauxite together with other minerals extracted reach in Odisha 4.7 tons per capita per year (Table 2), with rapid increase since 1980. We have observed that the incidence of conflicts depends on the growth in extraction within a region, however there does not exist a rule as to the amount of extraction in tons in proportion to the number and intensity of conflicts. The type of mineral and the rate of growth are

\textsuperscript{11} And also in distant Goa and Karnataka where there have been bans imposed by the Supreme Court of iron mining and exports, because of corruption in mining permits and because of environmental damage. http://www.ejolt.org/2012/12/the-ban-on-iron-mining-in-goa/
relevant together with other variables such as population densities, water scarcities, indigenous presence, and local political activism.

Table 2: Extraction of important minerals in Odisha, 1960 - 2000

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>nd</td>
<td>nd</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-89</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>nd</td>
<td>nd</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>138.7</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>97.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>189.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Odisha holds one-third of the country’s iron ore reserves, a quarter of its coal, half its bauxite and more than 90% of its nickel and chromite. The state, under the firm government of Naveen Patnaik who has been relected several times, has attracted large investment proposals from Tata, Jindal, Posco, Arcelor Mittal and Vedanta, while some large investment projects include the building of new harbours. Conversely, there exists many problems over land acquisition, accusations of corruption, and violations of environmental regulations, and this has brought about an increase in the Naxalite presence within the state. However, while the increase in mineral extraction is undeniable, this process will most probably be slowed down in 2013 due to two factors; Odisha (as Karnataka and Goa) is undergoing a review of illegal iron ore leases, and the Vedanta fiasco in Lanjigarh.

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12 The Naxalites are various militant groups of Maoist origin that predate the economic boom.
13 “Games Vadanta Plays”, 2012.
Compare with Table 3 for the whole country, which shows rapid growth and then stagnation (for metallic minerals) due sometimes to (as acknowledged by the Ministry of Mines’ Annual Report of 2011-12) a “temporary discontinuance of mining for want of environmental clearance”.\(^\text{14}\)

**Table 3. Extraction of some key minerals (1000 tons per year).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>1997-98</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bauxite</td>
<td>6 108</td>
<td>15 250</td>
<td>13 172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal</td>
<td>297 000</td>
<td>493 000</td>
<td>533 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron Ore</td>
<td>75 723</td>
<td>225 544</td>
<td>191 522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chromite</td>
<td>1 515</td>
<td>3 976</td>
<td>3 900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although they do not yet provide a systematic Political Ecology of resource extraction and waste disposal conflicts in India, linking social metabolic flows to such conflicts, Shrivastava and Khotari (2012, p. 125) eloquently state that the socio-environmental impacts of mining are horrifying and they are far from being randomly distributed. “The blasted limestone and marble hills of the Aravallis and Shivaliks; the cratered iron ore or bauxite plateau of Goa, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa (Odisha); the charred coal landscapes of eastern India; and the radioactive uranium belt in Jharkhand are all witness to the worst that economic “development” can do”. The worst affected, they conclude, are possibly the adivasis of central and eastern India.

While Odisha had only two iron and steel plants in 1995, today there are 14 steel plants and four pig-iron plants in the state. Yet this was only the tip of the expansion, with over 43 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) to set up steel plants already signed by 2005 (Asher 2009), including a $12 billion dollar plant that South Korean company POSCO aims to establish near Paradip Port, plans from Arcelor-Mittal to invest in a mega steel plant worth $10 billion, and Russian Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Company (MMK) plans to set up a 10 MT steel plant. The state is also attracting record investment in aluminum, coal-based power plants, and petrochemicals. Proposed investments would see an annual production of 76 million tons of steel, 5 million tons of cement, 4 million tons of aluminum and 25,000 MW of electricity to fuel this production in the coming years (Mishra 2010).

\(^{14}\) [http://mines.nic.in/writereaddata%5CContentlinks%5C1ed4a15b370646d7be2c6defb2ecf6e9.pdf](http://mines.nic.in/writereaddata%5CContentlinks%5C1ed4a15b370646d7be2c6defb2ecf6e9.pdf)
Examining the relevant material flow data from 1960-2006 (Table 3), Odisha’s role in providing itself and the rest of the country with minerals can be seen. In 2008-09, over 4.7 tonnes of minerals (including coal) were mined per capita in Odisha – the equivalent of the per capita consumption of all materials including biomass for an average Indian. The growth of the mining sector was vertiginous from 1995 onwards, when the deregulation of the mining sector allowed increased foreign investment and more state-level control over mining concessions (Asher 2009).

The need for land acquisition in a wide wave of enclosures to accommodate Special Economic Zones and mines, often forestland, has induced local level conflicts between the state and those slated to be displaced. The population density in Odisha is close to the average for India (approximately 300/km2) leading to extreme land scarcity in a state where 85% of the population is rural and almost entirely dependent on agricultural land and forest resources for their livelihoods. From 1950-1995 over 250 000 people were displaced in Odisha, half of these adivasi. Of these, only 25% were ever resettled (Fernandes and Asif 1997).

This establishes a clear link between an increasing social metabolism and resource extraction conflicts. In the Odisha state, hydroelectric dams (at the service of the mining industry), eucalyptus plantations and shrimp farms have proved to be no less controversial than open cast mining. Conflicts include the killing of three young men in Maikanch protesting against the UTKAL Aluminum plant in Kashipur on the 16th of December, 2000; in Kalinganagar, 12 people were shot dead by police in 2006 resisting displacement by the industrial conglomerate TATA. The South Korean multinational POSCO’s attempts to acquire land for a steel plant that would displace many people growing crops has led to violent clashes, including a protest in 2006 where 11 persons were injured (Padel and Das 2010). As it is well known in India, this type of violence is different from that of Naxalite (or counter-Naxalite) origin. There is a geographical overlap in some areas between Naxalite violence and resource extraction conflicts, although this is not the case in Odisha at the time that these extraction conflict incidents took place.
Illegal Sand Mining in India

From a factsheet for the EJOLT project prepared by the Centre for Studies in Science Policy at JNU and from other sources, we take evidence and interpretations regarding this practice (A.A. Singh et al., 2012) which is not unique to India.

Sand mining refers in India to the extraction of sand and gravel from riverbeds and seashores for construction activities and for minerals such as gold, silver, silicates. Mining sand for silica or for metals in coastal areas (such as ilmenite for titanium) is different from “mining” sand and gravel from river beds or beaches as building materials. What in India are called the “sand mafias” refers to those small contractors serving the building industry. There are cases of violence due to sand mining that all too often make the national news.

The increasing demand for materials for the booming real estate and infrastructure projects together with weak governance and rampant corruption, leads to illegal mining of sand and gravel in the rivers of India. The illegality arises because the practice is forbidden as damaging to the environment. These illegal practices have been reported in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Karnataka, Goa, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chattisgarh, Odisha and West Bengal (12 March 2012, Express News Service), as well as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharosta, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarkhand, which pretty much covers the whole country. The Centre for Science and Environment has published several reports on sand mining. The use of excavators to remove sand causes riverbeds to erode, banks to collapse; it damages infrastructure like bridges and transmission lines, and causes problems in drinking water systems. Uncontrolled, illegal sand mining has caused depletion of groundwater tables and degradation of groundwater quality.

In this respect, we shall briefly present three conflicts as regards sand mining and evidence the social agents involved: an environmentalist, a religious priest, and a high-ranking police officer.

I. Awaaz Foundation vs. the Sand Mafia

Awaaz Foundation is an environmental NGO based in Mumbai working extensively on raising awareness about the vulnerability of the environment through educational projects in different states of India. Ms. Sumaira Abdulali, Founder of Awaaz
Foundation, was physically assaulted on 17 March 2010 by the son and employees of a local politician, who are part of an extensive politically-controlled sand mafia in Maharashtra (17 March 2010, *Times of India*). The Awaaz Foundation filed a case at the Bombay High Court through Public Interest Litigation, demanding a ban on sand mining activities along the Konkan coast of Maharashtra. As a result, the Bombay High Court banned mining in the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ). Moreover, the court ordered the state government to implement the alternative measures mentioned in the report prepared by the prestigious IIT Mumbai (Indian Institute of Technology), which includes reusing sand from building debris and the use of environmentally sound techniques for sand extraction.

II. Swami vs. the Uttarakhand State

In June 2011, Hindu priest Swami Nigamananda Saraswati died after a four-month fast in protest of reckless state-sponsored sand mining and stone crushing on the banks of the Ganga, near Haridwar in Uttarakhand. Millions of pilgrims visit this holy place to dip in the river during Kumbh Mela to wash away their sins. A few days before Swami Nigamanand died, the Uttarakhand government ordered a ban on mining activities in the region which is considered sacred. The ban also followed a directive of the Uttarakhand High Court on 26 May 2011 that expressed concerns over the degradation of the river’s ecology and in general the area used for Kumbh celebrations (Shrivastava, 2011).

III. Narendra Kumar (IPS Officer) vs. the Mining Mafia

In Madhya Pradesh, Narendra Kumar (Indian Police Service, a high-ranking officer) was brutally crushed to death by a tractor loaded with illegally-mined stones, allegedly by the ‘mining mafia’ in Morena on 8 March 2012. The Chhatarpur district administration ordered the cancellation of all sand mining contracts in the district after the media outrage over the IPS officer's killing, and a second attack on a sub-divisional magistrate and police officials in Panna. Later, the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister announced they were handing the murder case of the IPS officer over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (13 March 2012, *Times of India*).

Finally, we consider a case of the People against the Sand Mafia in Tamil Nadu which occurred over ten years ago. The Cauvery River has been seriously impacted by
indiscriminate sand mining. The groundwater table has been depleted, rendering the water scarce. Decrease in soil fertility has led to a sharp decline in agricultural productivity, forcing farmers to sell off their lands and allowing miners to dredge the precious sand lying beneath their fields. People who realised that their very livelihood was at stake due to mining took to the streets at the call of AREDS (Association for Rural Education and Development) on several occasions. Since 1991, AREDS, together with the local people, women’s organisations and activists, organized several road blockades. AREDS also filed a case through Public Interest Litigation (5762/90) to the Madras High Court in 1990. As a result, mining was banned in the Cauvery River by the High Court on 25 January 1999.

In comparison with past decades, the rapid economic growth that India is currently experiencing, coupled with the drive to industrialise, has significantly increased the demand for materials, including sand. Legal sand mining, in line with existing regulations, was not enough to meet the demand generated by the booming real estate and infrastructure projects and, as a result, riverbed and seashore ecosystems are being severely impacted due to sand mining.

**Delhi Waste Wars: from Cradle to Grave**

The industrial capitalist system prospers not only by appropriating as cheaply as possible energy and material resources (in a process of accumulation of profits and capital by dispossession, as David Harvey calls it) but it also needs to dispose of waste as cheaply as possible. Waste disposal conflicts have come to the fore due to climate change and this has propelled movements for Climate Justice. There are also injustices related to the appropriation of water and the environmental services that water brings, and this has also motivated movements which have been identified internationally as movements for Hydric Justice.

There are also problems with urban solid waste disposal. The connection to climate change comes through the methane escaping from non-recycled organic waste going to dumps. There are schemes to collect and burn the methane (a powerful greenhouse gas), which are translated into “carbon equivalent credits”. In common with so many other cities in the world, Delhi and other cities of India are producing more and more solid
waste, and have policy debates and social disputes on how to manage this waste. Research by Federico Demaria and colleagues looks at the customary “property rights” that recyclers have on the waste. There are unequally distributed advantages and disadvantages in changing from a system of informal recycling by poor people to a formal system of collecting waste and then burning most of this waste in incinerators.

Authorities in Delhi proclaim that waste management is in a state of crisis. They say that waste is commonly dumped in the open illegally and the existing landfills are over capacity. This narrative portrays the crisis as a failure of management and, furthermore, begs the questions of: what should be done about this crisis, and who absorbs both the costs and the benefits of this change in waste management which has been motivated by the increase in the social metabolism in such a large city?

A modern waste management system, based on subsidizing and supporting the recyclers’ unions (as has been set up in Porto Alegre in Brazil and other cities) could consist in separating organic waste from the other waste, and then composting it for fertilizer, while the rest of the waste would be separated (even more than at present by “traditional” recycling) into glass, paper, plastics, to be used as raw materials again. This should be done in hygienic conditions. Such alternatives are being tried in other places. In Pune, for example, waste workers have organised themselves into a union, the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) (6,000 members), that has promoted a waste management cooperative, the Solid Waste Collection and Handling (SWaCHCoop) authorised by the Pune Municipal Corporation to provide door-to-door collection.

Instead, what is proposed in Delhi is something unprecedented in the long history of the city, namely, to dismiss the recyclers “expropriating” or “dispossessing” them from their customary rights to collect and make some money from the waste and, instead, bringing most of it to incinerators that would produce some electricity. Critics point out, both in India and in Europe, that large scale incineration (even if disguised as “energy recovery”) is an incentive to produce more waste instead of moving towards a “zero waste” objective. Out of sight and into the fire also means out of mind, at the risk however of dioxin production if the process of incineration is not adequate and proper.
Also, after incineration, there still remains about of one third of ashes as waste that needs to be disposed of. Besides, incineration is difficult (apart from unjust and wasteful) when the organic fraction is large, as in cities where poverty is still prevalent.

Social metabolism starts with resources but ends as waste. The conflicts on waste management in Delhi are divided between, on the one side, the “traditional” recyclers and the neighbors who distrust the Ghazipur and Okhla incinerators, and on the other side, the city administration and the private sectors interested in making profits from the various stages of waste management. Schindler et al. (2012) argue that the informal sector should be incorporated into an efficient and equitable waste management system that is also environmentally sustainable. Their article is an example of action research, co-authored by the secretary of the “traditional” recyclers union, the All India Kabadi Mazdoor Mahasangh (AIKMM). The incineration alternative (called “waste to energy facility”) poses a major threat to the livelihoods of waste workers because they must increasingly compete with private firms for ownership and control over recyclable waste at multiple stages. There are approximately 150,000-waste workers in Delhi, who belong to unprivileged communities and cannot easily find alternative livelihoods. These workers provide environmental services in the form of high level of recycling in working conditions that are extremely hazardous, and could and should become more just and safer.15

**Shipbreaking in Alang**

Finally, another type of conflict that takes place in India (as also in Bangladesh) arises from one form of waste disposal that has directly to do not so much with the internal metabolism of the Indian economy (although it contributes to it) as with what we call “Lawrence Summers’ Principle”. The well known economist, when he worked at the World Bank, wrote a memorandum that was leaked to the press. *The Economist* (8 Febr. 1992) titled the story as “Let them eat pollution”. The memo recommended putting polluting industries in areas without people or where people were poor, because the costs of illness or mortality of poor people were lower than those of richer people.

The shipbreaking yards at Alang-Sosiya are practical applications of Lawrence Summers’ principle. Shipbreaking is a successful case of cost shifting, or in other

15 http://www.ejolt.org/2012/02/watch-a-gaia-ejolt-video-on-waste-wars-in-delhi/
words, profit accumulation by contamination. This business shows the ugly face of globalization although in terms of economic value added and in terms of raw materials recovered, it is not so important. Over 500 big ships per year (the quantity depending on the world economic cycles) reach the beaches of Gujarat where they become grounded at high tide and are subsequently dismantled by a legion of manual workers. In 2012, Alang was again in the news when the notorious Exxon Valdez after many changes of flag (its last name was “Oriental Nicety”), reached Alang for final demolition.

Federico Demaria’s work, written with activist Gopal Krishna, explains that more than 80% of international trade in goods by volume is carried by sea (Demaria, 2010). The shipping industry constitutes a key element in the infrastructure of the world's social metabolism. Ocean-going ships are owned and used for their trade by developed countries but are often demolished, together with their toxic materials, in relatively poor countries. Ship breaking is the process of dismantling an obsolete vessel's structure for scrapping or disposal. Ship owners and ship breakers obtain large profits shifting the environmental costs to workers, local farmers and fishermen and their families.

The international and national uneven distribution of power has led to an ecological distribution conflict. The valuation languages deployed can be analysed. The Supreme Court of India has been called on more than one occasion to decide on the costs and benefits of ship dismantling in Alang-Sosiya because of appeals through public interest litigation. Are the benefits of ship dismantling (the jobs, the recycled steel) larger than the costs to the local environment and to human health, considering that the dismantled ships carry asbestos, heavy metals? Are such costs and benefits commensurable? For instance, there was a controversy at the Indian Supreme Court in 2006 over the dismantling of the ocean liner *Blue Lady*, showing how the different languages of valuation expressed by different social groups clashed and how the language that expresses sustainability as monetary benefit at the national scale dominated the debate.

Here we see not only that “the poor sell cheap”, and that capitalism is an economy of unpaid social and environmental costs. We also see, at a small scale, how pertinent are

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16 See also http://www.shipbreakingplatform.org/shipbrea_wp2011/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/120410_Ejolt-1_Low2.pdf
the questions that Kothari and Shrivastava ask about the costs of economic growth in India as a whole. Another growing stream of waste from North to South is electronic waste. The environmental justice organization, Toxic Links, is trying to keep track of these flows in India.

After Alang-Sosiya, the second largest ship-breaking yards are in Chittagong in Bangladesh. *The Economist*, 2012, where similar controversies have arisen. The Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) convinced the Supreme Court in 2009 to ban all ship breaking not meeting certain environmental standards. The industry stopped in 2010 but then pressure from the government and from the Bangladesh Ship Breakers Association led to about 150 ships being dismantled there in 2011.

**Sustainability Indicators**

In India, with the exception of the HANPP, which is very bad, many other indicators are still good, *per capita*. Based on S.J. Singh et al. (2012), we foresee that biomass is unlikely to increase very much. But it is also unlikely to decrease as other demands for biomass substitutes for decreased fuelwood and decrease fodder for cattle. Biomass might increase because of more wood, paper and meat consumption, although at a slower rate, while agrofuels will remain marginal. Historically, it is interesting to compare the slowly moving trends in biomass from the rapid moving trends in other materials. Material flows per capita, driven by building materials (hence so many conflicts in sand mining), mineral ores for metals, and fossil fuels, will increase with income, tending towards 10 tons per capita in fifteen years at current rates of growth (still below EU average), with important internal and international impacts.

This paper has explained the methods used to count the material flows in the economy, giving the main results for the Indian economy between 1961 and 2008. We have drawn on work done by colleagues of the EJOLT project, and brief illustrations of the links between social metabolism and ecological distribution conflicts have been given. Instead of anecdotal evidence as presented in the present paper, we assure that what is needed is a historical reconstruction of hundreds or indeed thousands of environmental conflicts in India (classified as biomass conflicts, mining and fossil fuels conflicts,
waste disposal conflicts). This data thus ought to show whether these conflicts increase in number and intensity with the growth of the social metabolism, what the outcomes have been, and how they have been solved; i.e. by technological modernization or by repression, displacement, criminalization of activists, or by monetary compensation for the “externalities”. In this light, the historical significance of movements of environmental resistance has been analyzed by historians of India on many occasions already.

In a pioneering article in 1988 linking ecological economics and political ecology, Jayanta Bandyopahdyay and Vandana Shiva, who have already published remarkable articles against eucalyptus plantations, provided a theory on what they called the Political Economy of Environmental Movements. Citing repeatedly Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, they showed the incapacity of economic theory to deal with resource exhaustion and with pervasive externalities, and they ridiculed Solow’s phrase dated 1974 that the economy could get along without natural resources. Furthermore, they pointed out that environmental movements made the externalities visible (as Enrique Leff had written in 1986 in Ecología y Capital), and asserted that care of the environment was not a “luxury of the rich” and explained (following N.S. Jodha) that human survival in India was directly dependant, for many people, on the direct utilization of natural resources held in common. They listed a number of historical and current movements such as the Chipko and Appiko movements against deforestation and tree plantations, the movements against limestone quarries in the Doon Valley and in Almora and Pithoragath in Uttarakhand, the early successful movements against bauxite mining in the Gandhamarardan hills in Odisha against the state company BALCO (Bharat Aluminium Company), the conflicts on coal mining in Singrauli (“the energy capital of the country”, a terrible place), and also the movements attempting to stop dams whether in the Silent Valley in Kerala (whose motivation was biodiversity conservation rather than the survival of the people), the Tehri Dam in the Himalaya, and other movements fighting submersion in Bedthi, Inchampalli, Bhopalpatnam, Narmada, Koel-Karo, Bodhghat. Among the authors quoted in this study figures Medha Patkar (Bandyopadhyay & Shiva, 1988).
Current conflicting coal mining cases include Jharia in Jarkhand where another state company, Bharat Coking Coal (BCCL), operates the collieries in a landscape of underground fires and land subsidence, or the Mahanadi Coal Fields in Orissa. In Jharkhand, UCIL (Uranium Corporation of India) mines uranium, and an outstanding documentary, “Buddha weeps at Jadugoda”, shows birth malformations negated by the company and corroborated by Xavier Dias. Iron mining in Bailadila in Chhattisgarh is another socio-environmental disaster, narrated as the preceding cases in one of the chapters of *The Caterpillar and the Mahua Flower* edited in 2007 by Rakesh Kanshian. The visual metaphor behind the book’s title refers to the mahua tree of the central and eastern zone of India which provides a nice drink for tribal peoples, while the “caterpillar” here does not refer to a life form but, instead, to the fossil-fuel driven machine.

There is much accumulated knowledge on socio-environmental conflicts coming from “activist knowledge” since the 1980s in the Centre for Science and Environment’s citizens’ reports of 1982 and 1985, and we assure that there must also exist an enormous variety of regional sources. What would now be required are studies at state or regional levels of the trends in social metabolism (at least, the Domestic Material Extraction and the Physical Trade Balances), including also historical statistics on the increase in the HANPP, on water use, on energy flows. This enhanced data would thus help to see the connections to changing patterns of environmental conflicts.

**Climate Change and Climate Justice**

The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is still increasing at 2 ppm per year. It was 300 ppm when Arrhenius first wrote on the enhanced greenhouse effect, and it is now at 400 ppm, with no prospect of international agreement on reduction of emissions since the UN gave up this initiative after the failed Copenhagen meeting of 2009.

Per capita carbon emissions and (therefore) the ecological footprint, amount in India to only one third of the global mean, and about an eighth of industrialised economies. The

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feeling of injustice expressed by Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain in their influential booklet of 1991, *Global warming in an unequal world: a case of environmental colonialism*. The subsequent movements claim that the “ecological debt” (and Climate Justice) also had resonance in other countries of the “South”, although they have not succeeded in shaming the rich countries in paying back such liabilities or in slowing down their growth.

Internationally, India’s government and citizens claim with reason that the country has, by its low per capita consumption, made a contribution to world sustainability. With a population that is almost one-fifth of the global total, India currently uses only 10% of the global supply of material resources (in terms of tonnage) and 6% of global primary energy supply. Even though India’s per capita level of resource use and emissions are strikingly modest, India’s requirements are not negligible at present. Internationally, an India whose carbon dioxide emissions per capita would increase from two tons before 1990 to a European average of ten tons, would have (ceteris paribus) a most significant impact on world climate.

Given the fact that India might hold nearly one fifth of humanity when world population (optimistically) peaks by 2050 at 8.5 billion people, one can easily foresee the non negligible impact that the social metabolism of the growing Indian economy (largely fuelled by coal) will have on world environmental pressures. To give room for India, China and the rest of the world, the rich countries should decrease their social metabolism, and this could be hopefully be achieved by moving towards a steady-state economy preceded by a period of moderate degrowth in material and energy use. There is a possible alliance between the small *décroissance* (degrowth), and *post-Wachstum*, “prosperity without growth” movements in some Northern countries who ask the question, how much should a person consume? and the large and growing world movements for environmental justice (Martinez-Alier, 2012)

**Conclusion**

India should take pride in the fact that its material throughput per person is still at 5 tons per year while the European Union is at 15 tons. But such numbers are irrelevant in
actual political life and such pride is largely absent. On the contrary, there is emphasis in many circles in India on the glories of economic growth, leaving aside the metabolic implications. However, the links from social metabolism to resource extraction and waste disposal conflicts at different scales are a reality that we have only superficially explored in this article. The growing social metabolism causes internally great environmental and human livelihood losses, and also, increasingly negative external effects at world level.

One should look at the historically changing social actors and types of resistance in such conflicts, as has been done in historical work on ecological distribution conflicts (as when Ramachandra Guha compared Garhwal and Kumaun in *The Unquiet Woods*), while also looking at the changing valuation languages deployed. For instance, when and why did the Kanchan Chopra committee at the prompting of the Supreme Court, establish methodologies to count the NPV (Net Present Value) of destroyed forests, and what have been its effects? Indeed, has the Supreme Court the power to impose the single language of valuation of the NPV, and at which discount rate? On the contrary, what are the regional and historical patterns of development projects stopped in India by the use of “sacredness”? (Temper and Martínez-Alier, 2013). Or, for instance, has the use of adivasi forest rights been increasingly effective to stop development projects as the use of Convention 169 of ILO has been in Latin America? Such studies would represent important contributions to the history of the global environmental justice movement where India is such a big actor.

Since the 1970s and 1980s authors and groups in India have taken part and have sometimes led movements for environmental justice at local, national and international levels. There is now a global Climate Justice movement, coupled with a growing Hydric Justice (Water Justice) movement, plus networks with strong Indian presence sharing strategies in the combat against biopiracy or against particularly aggressive international firms (Coca Cola in water extraction). Such environmental justice movements contribute to democracy and they constitute the strongest forces for environmental sustainability.

On the contrary, there is too much emphasis among policy makers on hypothetical economic valuations of environmental damages and on economic instruments, and too
little on this great tide of environmental justice. When the stakeholders in such conflicts
do not insist so much on economic compensation for externalities as on different local
alternatives (as explained in the second part of Shrivastava’s and Kothari’s book, 2012)
they join those in Latin America searching for a buen vivir or Sumak Kawsay, perhaps
translatable as aparigraha, a voluntary simplicity rooted in local social values, and they
also join and support those few in rich countries who preach a moderate décroissance
(degrowth) leading to a “steady state economy” or a “prosperity without growth”.

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BHYMRAO R. AMBEDKAR:
EL NACIMIENTO DE UNA NUEVA CONCIENCIA DALIT

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Recibido: 22-01-2013
Aceptado: 01-09-2013

RESUMEN
Un repaso a la vida y el legado de Bhimrao Ambedkar, el político más influyente del siglo XX en la lucha por la emancipación de los intocables de la India. Él mismo de origen dalit, fue el artífice de la Constitución de la India, líder de diversas formaciones políticas y quien sentó las bases de las modernas políticas de acción afirmativa del país. Especial énfasis se pone en la manera cómo Ambedkar dotó de una nueva conciencia e identidad (budista) a muchos dalits de Maharashtra.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Ambedkar; Castas; Intocabilidad; Dalits; Neo-budismo; Gandhi

ABSTRACT  Bhimrao R. Ambedkar: a New Dalit Consciousness
This article is a survey of the life and legacy of Bhimrao Ambedkar, the most influential politician of the 20th century in the struggle for the emancipation of the Untouchables of India. Being himself of Dalit origin, Ambedkar was the architect of the Indian Constitution, the leader of various political associations and was the man who laid the foundations of the country’s modern policies of affirmative action. Special emphasis is given to the way Ambedkar provided a new consciousness and a Buddhist identity to many Dalits of Maharashtra.

KEYWORDS: Ambedkar; Castes; Untouchability; Dalits; Neobuddhism; Gandhi
Para el mundo exterior, el campeón de la lucha por la emancipación de los intocables\(^1\) de la India fue el *mahātma* Gandhi. Sin embargo, un gran número de indios –y, desde luego, casi todos los dalits– hoy admitiría que la historia ha acabado por otorgar este honor a Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), cariñosamente conocido como *bābāsāheb* (venerable padre).

La India contemporánea es impensable sin esta figura compleja y carismática. Y, aún así, es una personalidad todavía poco conocida allende el Sur de Asia.

**Orígenes**

Bhimrao R. Ambedkar nació en Mhow, un acuartelamiento militar de la India central, en el seno de una familia intocable de casta mahār. A diferencia de la inmensa mayoría de intocables de la época, el niño Ambedkar no creció en el “ghetto” ni su familia

\(^1\) Utilizo el genérico *intocable* para referirme a colectivos históricamente subordinados por la práctica de la intocabilidad. Aunque el término pierde aceptación en la India, es descortés y hasta ilegal, lo utilizo –sin ánimo de herir sensibilidades– a falta de otro mejor. El viejo término *harijan* ha quedado obsoleto. El alternativo *dalit* está fuertemente politizado y lo reservo para los contextos apropiados y para aquellos que expresamente quieren denominarse así. La variante *persona de casta clasificada* (Scheduled Caste), que es la administrativa y políticamente correcta, me suena farragosa y –como todo eufemismo– no remite al contexto: la práctica de la *intocabilidad*. De forma similar, cuando menciono castas intocables como la mahār, la chamār o la paraiyān lo hago con toda empatía y sin desconsideración alguna, a pesar de que estas designaciones contienen una fuerte carga despectiva. Para referirme a los no-intocables opto por el extendido –aunque algo absurdo– concepto indio *de casta*.
pertenecía a las capas más desfavorecidas. Como otros mahārs, su familia había logrado cierta solvencia al servicio del ejército imperial. Su padre, Ramji Sakpal, era profesor de escuela y dominaba el marathi y el inglés. Había sido amigo personal y admirador del mahātma Phule (1827-1890), el gran defensor de la causa intocable en el siglo XIX. Su madre también era mahār devota del sant Kabīr (siglo XV). La pertenencia al Kabīr-panth, junto con las nuevas oportunidades económicas surgidas con el British Raj, habían otorgado a los mahārs y otras castas bajas de Maharashtra un acusado sentido de identidad.

De niño, Ambedkar destacó como estudiante. Un maestro brāhma que creía en él sugirió que el joven Ambavadekar (su nombre real, derivado del de la aldea de origen familiar: Ambavade, en Maharashtra) cambiara el apellido por Ambedkar.

En 1907 se convirtió en uno de los primeros intocables en cursar estudios superiores en el Elphinstone High School de Bombay y en 1912 se graduó en el Elphinstone College. Allí conoció el estigma de casta al tener que estudiar inglés y persa, y no Sánscrito por los recelos de ciertos pānits ortodoxos a que un intocable aprendiera la lengua sagrada. Gracias al apoyo del mahārāja de Baroda (uno de los principales impulsores de los movimientos anti-brahmánicos de Maharashtra), fuertemente impresionado por su inteligencia y aptitud, Ambedkar recibió una beca para estudiar en la universidad de Columbia, en Estados Unidos. En sus años en Norteamérica Ambedkar se empapó del liberalismo y el pragmatismo de John Dewey, uno de sus insignes profesores. Luego, cursó estudios de derecho en la London School of Economics, pero tuvo que dejarlos al caducar su beca.

De regreso a la India, trabajó como funcionario en el principado de Baroda. Allí sufrió de nuev o la discriminación de casta (algunos de sus subordinados se negaban a recibir órdenes de un mahār; o a tocar sus “impuros” papeles; fue expulsado de un albergue al sospecharse de su identidad intocable; etcétera). A pesar de estos esporádicos episodios de prejuicios casteístas, lo cierto es que su juventud no fue difícil.

Trabajó como abogado privado y como profesor de política económica en Bombay. Con la ayuda del mahārāja de Kolhapur (otro aristócrata defensor de las castas oprimidas), pudo regresar a Occidente. Se doctoró finalmente por Columbia en 1927, convirtiéndose así en el doctor Ambedkar, el primer intocable en doctorarse en una universidad.

La lucha por la causa intocable

Su militancia en favor de las depressed classes –como las denominaba el gobierno colonial– puede fecharse hacia 1924, cuando fundó su Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha (asociación para la mejora de la condición de las víctimas del ostracismo social). Aunque las leyendas gustan de presentárnoslo hoy como un joven radical, la verdad es que en sus inicios su tono fue moderado y sus ideas pragmáticas y realistas. Ante todo, y atraído inicialmente por la vía gandhiana, Ambedkar aborrecía de la violencia. De buen principio descartó el marxismo. A diferencia de generaciones anteriores de reformadores sociales, el doctor no quería únicamente la igualdad en términos
espirituales, sino la igualdad social. De ello que en sus comienzos políticos, la religión no constituyera un aspecto relevante de su programa de lucha.

Básicamente, su mensaje se centró en cómo mejorar la condición social y económica de los intocables. Sus primeras acciones consistieron en romper con la ocupación tradicional de los mahārs y coordinar campañas para su libre acceso a los templos en Bombay, Nasik o Pune. Mucho eco tuvo su campaña de 1927 para que los intocables pudieran sacar agua de los pozos públicos de Maharashtra. Su acto más espectacular fue la quema pública de un ejemplar del Manu-smṛti (Leyes de Manu), el principal texto de la vieja ideología brahmánica, lo que le valió la reprobación de otros reformistas hasta entonces simpatizantes de su causa. El gesto muestra a la perfección tanto su visión legalista como la orientalista del poder y la fuerza del texto escrito. Estas acciones poseen hoy una resonancia casi mítica en la historia de los dalits de Maharashtra.

A diferencia de los orientalistas, sin embargo, Ambedkar fue de los primeros en desmarcarse de las hipótesis que hacían derivar la casta de viejos antagonismos raciales. Con bastante perspicacia, estimaba que los escritores europeos proyectaban sus propios prejuicios raciales sobre los indios de antaño. Tampoco secundó a quienes proponían un origen ocupacional. Para Ambedkar, 3000 años atrás, en el período védico, la clase sacerdotal se escindió del resto de la sociedad y se convirtió en «clase cerrada» (en Rodrigues, 2002: 253). Aunque los sacerdotes brāhmaṇs no impusieron el sistema sobre los demás grupos sociales, éstos simplemente se encontraron con la puerta cerrada (vía la endogamia) y, gradualmente, fueron imitando el prestigioso modelo brahmánico. Para Ambedkar, la genuina fractura social en la India no se daba entre brāhmaṇs y no-brāhmaṇs (como para Phule), sino entre los “tocables” y los “in-tocables”.

Fuente: http://www.ambedkar.org/
Su principal estrategia de mejora de las castas atrasadas consistió en negociar unos escaños reservados para los intocables en las demarcaciones donde tuvieran peso demográfico. También reivindicaba una cuota en puestos en el funcionariado, adelantándose décadas a las políticas de acción afirmativa.

Nunca le gustaron demasiado las agitaciones de masas, incluidas las movilizaciones no-violentas de Gandhi. De hecho, consideraba la utopía gandhiana de “regreso” a una autárquica vida aldeana como una filosofía reaccionaria. A diferencia de la mayoría de líderes nacionalistas, Ambedkar consideraba la aldea «un sumidero de localismo y una guardia de ignorancia, mentalidad cerrada y comunalismo» (citado en Béteille, 2006: 84). Poco a poco, Ambedkar fue colisionando con otros aspectos del pensamiento gandhiano, y muy en particular con su fórmula de “mejora” de los intocables. Sólo la aniquilación de la casta (que es el título de uno de sus libros más conocidos) podría emancipar al intocable. En contra del ideal gandhiano en el que el bhangī (la casta intocable más degradada de la India) continuaría limpiando letrinas aunque con idéntico estatus que un primer ministro brāhma/uni, Ambedkar quería integrar a los intocables con medidas educativas, políticas y legales concretas. De la misma forma que los musulmanes recelaban del nacionalismo indio liderado por Gandhi y el Partido del Congreso (y tendían a verlo como nacionalismo hindú), Ambedkar y los intocables siempre vieron el movimiento en pos de la independencia como un nacionalismo de alta casta. De ahí que pudiera afirmar que «somos mejor tratados por los británicos que por nuestros pretendidos padres» (citado en Deliège, 2007: 107).

En realidad, en esta época de agitación nacionalista, Ambedkar y los musulmanes se encontraban en una situación ambivalente. Puesto que estaban negociando con los británicos sus respectivos estatus de “minorías” no podían secundar los movimientos de desobediencia civil.

**Pulso con Gandhi**

En efecto, a partir de 1928, el gobierno colonial convocó una serie de consultas con los representantes políticos de los distintos grupos y minorías. Puesto que dicha comisión estaba constituida únicamente por británicos, el Partido del Congreso (principal portavoz de la lucha anticolonial) la boicoteó. Por tanto, en la primera ronda de conferencias de 1930 ni Gandhi ni nadie del Partido del Congreso participaron. Pero sí acudieron representantes de los musulmanes, los sikhs, los dalits, los cristianos o de la asociación conservadora Hindu Mahasabha. Ambedkar presentó un programa notablemente más radical que sus posiciones moderadas –de escaños reservados– de antaño. Siguiendo el ejemplo de los musulmanes propuso un tipo de electorado separado para su minoría no hindú.2

En la segunda mesa redonda de conferencias de 1931, que iba a tener lugar en Londres, Gandhi decidió participar. Antes de embarcarse, el mahātma probó una audaz

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2 La diferencia entre los escaños reservados y el electorado separado es crucial. En la primera fórmula, que Ambedkar propugnaba hasta 1930, los candidatos intocables son escogidos por sufragio general (por lo que pueden acabar siendo títeres de los grandes partidos, dominados por las castas altas). En la fórmula de electorado separado únicamente los intocables votan a sus candidatos intocables, con lo que se convierten en una fuerza política considerable.
estratagema. Suavizó los movimientos de desobediencia civil y se esforzó en imponerse –con notable éxito– como portavoz único de los indios ante las autoridades coloniales. Pero Ambedkar nunca reconoció en Gandhi legitimidad alguna a la hora de hablar en nombre de los intocables. El choque entre los dos estadistas no se hizo esperar. Gandhi concertó un encuentro –hoy histórico– que acabó por abrir una brecha irremisible entre ambos. Sus posiciones no podían ser más opuestas. En la segunda mesa redonda, Ambedkar ya propuso abiertamente un electorado separado para los intocables con escaños reservados durante 20 años. Sabido es que para Gandhi el principio clásico de los varnas (clases socioespirituales), sobre el que se basaba el sistema ideal de castas, había sido en su origen noble y era digno de recuperar. Para Ambedkar, la aceptación gandhiana de los varnas equivalía a admitir que lo que contaba era el nacimiento en un sector social y no el mérito o el valor individual. Gandhi era enfáticamente contrario a la separación política y religiosa de intocables e hindúes.

Para salir del impasse, las autoridades coloniales idearon una vía de compromiso. Pero, en esencia, reconocían el derecho de los intocables a tener su electorado separado. Inmediatamente, Gandhi comenzó uno de sus ayunos-hasta-la-muerte en protesta por el acuerdo que Ambedkar había sonsacado a las autoridades coloniales.

Dada la popularidad del mahātma, otros líderes políticos intocables se opusieron al programa de Ambedkar y la prensa nacionalista acabó por defenestrarlo. Le acusaron de
antipatriota, comunalista, diabólico, grosero... Gandhi se opuso con proverbial tenacidad (a pesar de que ya hubiera aceptado —in extremis, ciertamente— electorados separados para musulmanes, sikhs, cristianos y anglo-índios). Insistía en que los intocables no constituían otra “minoría” sino que pertenecían a la “mayoría hindú”.

Sin demasiado ojo, las autoridades británicas habían decidido que la solución al tema de la representación de las depressed classes tenía que acordarse entre los propios indios, así que se dirigieron de nuevo hacia Ambedkar, de cuyas manos ahora dependía la vida del mahātma.

Ante el chantaje de Gandhi, Ambedkar tuvo que ceder, so pena de ser responsable de su muerte (y quizá de un brote de violencia comunal en la que los intocables tendrían todas las de perder). De hecho, él fue el único político indio al que Gandhi se opuso con un ayuno. Sin duda, porque sabía que Ambedkar no incitaría a la violencia. Como ha visto Upenra Baxi (citado en Jaffrelot, 2005: 181), el mahātma sabía por experiencia que «los liberales, a diferencia de los revolucionarios, no saben bien cómo enfrentar a un oponente que está dispuesto a morir por una causa». Se la jugó, y ganó. A regañadientes, Ambedkar tuvo que aceptar una versión edulcorada de su propuesta: unos escaños para intocables (pero bastante menos de los propuestos) en las asambleas provinciales, pero elegidos por sufragio general. De facto, eso dejaba la representación de los intocables en manos del todopoderoso Partido del Congreso. Este acuerdo se conoce como el Pacto de Poona [Pune] de 1932. Y como sentenció el mahātma: «Suscribiendo el Pacto de Poona, ustedes aceptan la posición de que son hindúes» (citado en Jaffrelot, 2005: 67). El texto fue luego ratificado por los “líderes hindúes”. Gandhi rompió su ayuno. Tres días después, fundaba la All India Anti-Untouchability League (futura Harijan Sevak Sangh).

Su derrota ante Gandhi sobre la cuestión crucial del electorado separado dejó en Ambedkar un amargo sabor de desencanto. En el clímax de la crisis de 1932, Ambedkar decía:

Había existido muchos mahātmas [grandes almas] en la India cuyo único objetivo ha sido eliminar la intocabilidad y elevar e integrar a las depressed classes, pero todos han fallado en su misión. Mahātmas vienen y mahātmas van, pero los intocables permanecen como intocables (citado en Isaacs, 1972: 385).

Es cierto que tras la fundación de la Anti-Untouchability League (en la que Ambedkar participó en su primera andadura) o al escuchar y leer los pronunciamientos de Gandhi en favor de los intocables (cada vez más contundentes), Ambedkar se reconcilió algo con el mahātma. Pero sus posiciones no se aproximaron más.

En los años siguientes, Gandhi encarnó la imagen del luchador en favor de los oprimidos y Ambedkar pasaría a un triste segundo plano. No obstante, la derrota fue sólo provisional. Por un lado, la destreza con la que manejó el asunto le confirió una incontestable relevancia nacional y un gran respeto por parte de los británicos. Por otro lado, si bien los intocables no tuvieron su electorado y su representación en las asambleas provinciales fue neutralizada —como sospechaba Ambedkar— por los tentáculos del Partido del Congreso, entre 1935 y 1936 las autoridades coloniales emprendieron la tarea de censar y “clasificar” (scheduling) todas las castas y colectivos “atrasados” (backward) para poder aplicar el acuerdo. Décadas más tarde se decidiría que las Scheduled Tribes y las Scheduled Castes (tribales e intocables, o ādivāsis y...
dalits, respectivamente) poseerían discriminación positiva en forma de cuotas reservadas en la administración y la educación. Nada de eso habría sido posible sin la actuación de Ambedkar.


Se entenderá, entonces, que Ambedkar llegara a condenar las campañas en favor de la libre entrada de intocables en templos (que él mismo había favorecido) dirigidas por Gandhi, pues estimaba que estas cuestiones de segunda línea ocultaban las necesidades fundamentales de su comunidad. Pedir la entrada en los templos significaba limosnear un lugar en una religión, el hinduismo, cuyo sistema social los condenaba al ostracismo. En último término, el programa gandhiano de comensalidad, matrimonios cruzados y entrada en los templos dependía de la benevolencia de los hindúes “de casta”, de modo que no representaba una alternativa al status quo. El único punto que el partido del Congreso parecía tener en cuenta al tratar el “problema” intocable era la entrada en los templos. No podía pasar desapercibido que si los intocables finalmente conseguían entrar en los templos de los hindúes de casta eso sería la señal inequívoca de su pertenencia a la “mayoría hindú”.

Con esta estrategia Gandhi, y el partido del Congreso combatían tanto a la sección ultraortodoxa hindú, que se negaba a admitir que los intocables pertenecían a su misma religión, como a los ambedkaritas, que igualmente mantenían –por muy diferentes motivos– la no pertenencia de los intocables a la “mayoría hindú”. Como ya expuse en una obra anterior (Pániker, 2005: 436), la categoría “mayoría hindú” fue un invento de la etnología imperial y del nacionalismo indio/hindú, cuando se convinieron incluir a ahí a un gran número de tribales, intocables y otros colectivos de religión sin nombre. No es del todo legítimo concluir que si un 30% de la población del sur de Asia se declaró musulmana a finales del siglo XIX (proporción a la que habría que sumar un 10% de cristianos, sikhs, budistas, parsis, jainistas…), ello significa que el 60% restante fuera hindú, como se registró en los censos (o en las leyes de 1909 y 1919). Si, como proponía Ambedkar, restaríamos el 10% de intocables de la etiqueta “hindú”, resulta que existiría mucha mayor paridad entre hindúes y musulmanes. El punto era crítico. Ambedkar estaba tratando de redefinir al intocable nada más y nada menos que como un sujeto político distinto: un no-hindú y dalit.

Ambedkar, el político

En 1936 Ambedkar creó el Partido Laborista Independiente. Bābāsāheb continuó rechazando el marxismo. Era escéptico acerca del mensaje revolucionario en la India y consideraba que el Partido Comunista también estaba dominado por los de casta alta. Pero quizás ahí también aparece la mayor contradicción de su pensamiento, tal y como ha mostrado Christophe Jaffrelot (2005: 76), ya que si por un lado quería agrupar a todos los trabajadores y desfavorecidos (como muestra su recurso a la palabra laborista), por otro lado negaba toda pertinencia a la clase, y únicamente tomaba la
casta como base de la sociedad (si bien ahí también mostraba la miopía marxista, ya que para el movimiento comunista era dogma anteponer la lucha de clase a cualquier otra batalla). No sin lógica, su partido quedó reducido a un partido de intocables de Maharashtra. Aún más, a un partido de mahārs, porque apenas logró motivar a otras castas de bajo estatus de Maharashtra, como los māṅgs o los chambhārs. El partido fue reemplazado en 1942 por la Scheduled Castes Federation.

En su nueva estrategia, Ambedkar apostó definitivamente por la casta. Ante todo pretendía que los intocables fueran reconocidos como “minoría” (igual que los musulmanes o los sikhs) y que, como los primeros, no sólo tuvieran su electorado separado, sino el derecho a un territorio separado.

En la década de los cuarenta, Ambedkar manifestó su aprobación por la idea de Pakistán (aunque sólo fuera porque la lealtad de los musulmanes al proyecto común indio le parecía dudosa y porque recelaba de su capacidad de crear un Estado democrático y tolerante). Mantenía que los hindúes eran –a diferencia de los musulmanes– incapaces de crear un frente unido y hablar con una sola voz. Su nuevo partido optó, pues, por marcar diferencias con hindúes y musulmanes. En su programa reclamaba la creación de aldeas separadas para intocables.

A partir de 1940, en plena II Guerra Mundial, el partido del Congreso puso en marcha una contundente campaña de no-cooperación con el aparato colonial y de no-alineación en la guerra, a menos que se concediera la independencia para la India. Ambedkar no secundó esa línea (y, de hecho, alentó a los intocables a que se enrolaran en el ejército indio). Durante estos años, desempeñó importantes cargos en la administración –todavía británica– del país, al mando de “ministerios” como Trabajo o Irrigación.

Las elecciones de 1946 supusieron un revés total para su partido. En parte por su escasa capacidad organizativa (está claro que Ambedkar fue más un jurista, un intelectual y un político carismático que no un organizador), en parte por el sistema de sufragio; aspecto que sólo hizo que reafirmara en la necesidad de un electorado separado. Pero dado su escaso éxito electoral, en esta ocasión los británicos no le consideraron un portavoz legítimo. Únicamente le salvó el hecho de que, ese mismo año, el premier británico declaró que la Joya de la Corona tendría su independencia. Nuevos rumbos se abrían para la India.

Su costado pragmático –y algo oportunista– le animó a escribir al sardār Patel, una de las cabezas del Partido del Congreso, para mostrarle su lealtad al proyecto de construcción nacional. Durante la Asamblea Constituyente de finales de 1946, Ambedkar hizo las paces con el Partido del Congreso. Y cuando el partido optó por Jagjivan Ram como representante de los intocables, Ambedkar se acercó a Jawaharlal Nehru mostrando su lado más conciliador.
El arquitecto de la Constitución

A pesar de su vieja rivalidad con el partido del Congreso, su reputación como jurista estaba fuera de toda duda. Seguramente por presión de Gandhi (que lo quería a toda costa en el gobierno), Nehru le ofreció el puesto de Ministro de Justicia del primer gobierno de la India independiente.

Gandhi fue asesinado en 1948. Ambedkar fue el único hombre de Estado que no hizo declaración pública alguna. Poco después se casaría –en segundas nupcias– con una doctora que conoció en una de sus por entonces frecuentes visitas al hospital, ya que su diabetes empezaba a agravarse.

Como ministro, la gran obra del doctor Ambedkar consistió en dirigir el comité que redactó la Constitución de la India. La empresa le llevó tres años. Irónicamente, se convirtió en el nuevo Manu.

La Constitución de la India, aunque no es propiamente el texto de una sola persona, refleja perfectamente el espíritu de Ambedkar, y él fue, sin duda alguna, su principal inspirador y arquitecto. En realidad, con ello alcanzó su climax como estadista. La Constitución de 1950 es un texto claramente secular, producto de la modernidad liberal e hijo de la tradición legal anglosajona. Pero enraíza igualmente con la vieja tradición india de flexibilidad y debate. De forma inequívoca, el artículo 17 abole la intocabilidad.3 Además, figuran artículos que expresamente exigen al Estado proteger y ayudar en la mejora económica, educativa y social a las Scheduled Tribes y las

3 Nótese que no se abole la casta, como aún se lee cuando alguien que desconoce el tema escribe sobre la cuestión. Lo que desde 1950 es ilegal en la India es la práctica de la intocabilidad. Es decir: negar el acceso a templos o lugares de culto público, negar el acceso a restaurantes, teashops u hoteles, negar el acceso a las fuentes públicas de agua potable, negar el servicio de barbería o de lavandería, negar la participación en ceremonias públicas, negar el acceso a las asambleas municipales, discriminar en instituciones educativas o centros públicos de salud, discriminar en el uso de utensilios en hoteles y restaurantes, forzar a realizar ocupaciones como el retirado de carroña o la limpieza de letrinas, negar la utilización de lugares de cremación o entierro, negar el uso de carreteras o pasos públicos, impedir la construcción o la compra de residencias, negar el acceso a hospedajes y albergues o negar el uso de joyería y ornamentos (Shah et al., 2006: 56-57)
Scheduled Castes. La gran “revancha” del doctor, pues, fue preparar constitucionalmente el marco para la mayor política de discriminación positiva que conocerá el mundo.

Durante las sesiones de la Asamblea Constituyente, Ambedkar manifestó su propósito de agrupar en un único código civil las diferentes leyes personales de los hindúes (en matrimonio, divorcio, herencia, adopción, etcétera). En 1948, Nehru le nombró responsable del borrador del nuevo Hindu Code Bill. Ambedkar topó con una fuerte oposición de los congresistas. Las enmiendas que Nehru tuvo que aceptar –del ala más conservadora de su partido– llevaron a Ambedkar a dimitir.

Legado político

Tampoco debe pasar desapercibido que las elecciones de 1951 (las primeras elecciones generales de la India independiente) se acercaban. Con su dimisión, Ambedkar tenía las manos libres para dedicarse a su partido, la Scheduled Castes Federation.

Sin embargo, los resultados electorales fueron decepcionantes. Fue entonces que maduró la idea de crear el Partido Republicano (que se establecería póstumamente en 1957). El objetivo del nuevo partido sería aglutinar a las masas oprimidas y atrasadas en general. Estas oscilaciones de estrategia reflejan el propio balanceo de Ambedkar entre la lógica de la casta y la de la clase. Cuando basa el partido en la clase, no tiene reparos en aliarse con grupos que representan a estratos socio-económicos parecidos; pero cuando prioriza la casta, entiende que los intocables forman un mundo aparte del resto de indios.


Ataque al hinduismo

Durante todos esos años de acción política, Ambedkar fue autoconvenciéndose de que el estigma de casta no podía combatirse únicamente en términos políticos o jurídicos. Para Ambedkar, la casta era un factor religioso. Según el doctor, 2000 años atrás, la ideología del Manu-smṛti transformó el sistema de varṇas (que en su origen no eran más que clases sociales) en el de jātis (castas endogámicas). Entonces operó la completa degradación de los śūdras (clase servil), los intocables y las mujeres. Aunque los brāhmaṇas no hubieran impuesto el sistema por la fuerza, lo inventaron –una vez convertidos ellos en casta– para proteger sus privilegios. El brahmanismo es el veneno que ha mancillado la religión.
¿Cómo, pues, abolir la casta? La respuesta de Ambedkar (en Rodrigues, 2002: 288) es tajante: «estoy convencido de que el verdadero remedio es el matrimonio [cruzado] entre castas». Eliminada la endogamia, la casta se resquebraja. Y continúa:

La gente no está equivocada al observar la casta. En mi opinión, lo que está equivocado es su religión, que ha inculcado la noción de casta. Si esto es correcto, entonces obviamente el enemigo que hay que atacar no es la gente que sigue los mandatos de la casta sino los Śāstras [tratados] que les enseñan esta religión de la casta (ibid: 289).

El hinduismo es incapaz de proporcionar un sentido de identidad nacional porque sólo exige la reverencia a la casta. El hinduismo no es más que:

una multitud de obligaciones y prohibiciones … En el hinduismo no hay lealtad a ideales, sólo existe la conformidad a las obligaciones … No tengo ninguna vacilación en proclamar que una religión así debe ser destruida (citado en Bayly, 1999: 260).

La conversions al budismo

Desde la década de los treinta, Ambedkar estuvo ponderando –públicamente– diferentes opciones religiosas y había animado a los líderes intocables a «cortar toda conexión con el hinduismo y abrazar otra religión» (citado en Jaffrelot, 2005: 120).

La conversión como vía de escape del sistema de castas ya había sido utilizada por muchos grupos intocables. Los misioneros cristianos hicieron de ello casi su leitmotiv. Pero aunque Ambedkar reconocía que el cristianismo posee un tono abiertamente igualitario, la presencia de atávicos prejuicios de casta (y la poca gracia que les hacía a los cristianos indios una conversión en masa de intocables) desaconsejaba la opción. Los líderes musulmanes –indios y hasta árabes– reaccionaron muy positivamente a la posibilidad de una eventual conversión masiva al islam. Pero si bien Ambedkar asimismo valoraba el igualitarismo del islam, entendía que al ser una religión foránea su conversión conduciría a un aislamiento todavía más penoso para los suyos.

La expectativa de una conversión masiva de intocables ponía bastante nerviosas a las facciones más conservadoras del Partido del Congreso, notablemente al Hindu Mahasabha. Estaba claro que una conversión en masa debilitaría demográfica –y electoralmente– a la “mayoría hindú”. En especial la idea de una conversión al islam levantaba virulentos recelos. Así, en 1936, los líderes intocables del Hindu Mahasabha aconsejaron a Ambedkar una conversión al sikhismo. El mahārāja de Patiala, el más influyente aristócrata sikh del Punjab, bendecía la idea. Ambedkar sacó el compromiso del Hindu Mahasabha de que los intocables podrían mantener los privilegios alcanzados en el pacto de Poona si se convertían al sikhismo. Todo parecía indicar una conversión inminente. Incluso Ambedkar envió a Amritsar una delegación de seguidores a estudiar esa religión.

Fue la oposición de líderes intocables y, sobre todo, la negativa británica a mantener los privilegios para los intocables que se convirtieran, lo que enfrió la eventual conversión al sikhismo. El partido Akali Dal, que representa el nacionalismo etnorreligioso sikh, tampoco estuvo por la labor. Y, poco a poco, Ambedkar fue percatándose de que
el trato sufrido por los sikh dalits a manos de sikh jāts (la casta dominante entre los sikhs) no era mucho mejor que el que recibían de los hindúes de casta. Además, el sikhismo empezó a parecerle excesivamente localizado en el Punjab.

Ya desde los 1930s Ambedkar había manifestado una clara simpatía por el budismo. De hecho, durante los años que tanteó las diferentes opciones de conversión, los líderes budistas —siguiendo el precedente de Ayoti Thāss (1845-1914), un intocable pagaiyan tamil que fundó una sociedad budista— siempre se mostraron abiertos a una conversión de intocables. Gradualmente, fue tomando cuerpo la idea de una conversión al budismo.

En una conferencia de prensa en los últimos años de su vida, Ambedkar confesó que en una ocasión le había dicho a Gandhi que, aunque diferían en el asunto de la intocabilidad, cuando llegara el momento «escogeré la vía menos dolorosa para el país; y éste es un gran beneficio que estoy dando a la India, al abrazar el budismo: porque el budismo es una parte de la cultura de este país» (citado en Rudolph y Rudolph, 1969: 140). Muchos piensan que, efectivamente, esta decisión evitó a la India enormes quebraderos de cabeza. Es conocido el alivio que tuvieron los líderes hindúes con su elección del budismo.

En los años cincuenta se volcó con ahínco en estudiar y profundizar en el budismo (incluidos viajes a Sri Lanka y Myanmar). Su visión de esta religión es, no obstante, bastante sui generis (heredera tanto del activismo mahār, del neobudismo de finales del XIX o del orientalismo occidental). Con bastante ojo, Ambedkar entendía que la enseñanza del Buddha no estaba cerrada y era susceptible de adaptarse y reinterpretarse según las necesidades de la audiencia. Y para Ambedkar, el budismo representa la corriente igualitarista, racional, moral y social del pensamiento indio:

Mi filosofía social está encapsulada en tres palabras: libertad, igualdad y fraternidad. Pero que nadie piense que he tomado mi filosofía de la Revolución Francesa. Mi filosofía tiene sus raíces en la religión y no en la ciencia política. La he derivado de las enseñanzas de mi maestro, el Buddha (citado en Sangharakshita, 1986: 76).

Con ello, Ambedkar tropicaliza los ideales republicanos europeos y los liga a un prestigioso pasado nativo. La Revolución Francesa no logró aportar la igualdad; la Revolución Bolchevique sacrificó la libertad. «Parece —dice Ambedkar (citado en
Ambedkar empezó a reescribir la historia de la India con el budismo como expresión de la verdadera indiанidad. La oposición entre budismo e hinduismo toma en el pensamiento de Ambedkar tonos un tanto maniqueos. Los mitos de origen se cambian. El vedismo pasa a ser la edad barbarica y corrupta de la India. El Buddha fue un genuino reformador que actuó contra el antiguo régimen de la sociedad de castas védica. El rey budista Aśoka frenó el poder de los brāhma/uni1E47s y diseñó una sociedad más justa. El \textit{Manu-smṛti} y la intocabilidad representarían la contrarrevolución brahmánica.

Por supuesto, esta lectura de la historia es personal y sesgada. Y en este contexto el \textit{nirvāṇa} pasa a ser una felicidad accesible en esta vida y el \textit{dharma} budista va perdiendo su cariz renunciatario y contemplativo y se va transformando en una “moralidad sagrada” (radical, racional y mundana).

En 1956, Ambedkar estaba ya seriamente enfermo de diabetes. Decidió entonces dar el paso definitivo de abdicar del hinduismo. El 14 de octubre de 1956, en Nagpur, en el centro geográfico de la India, organizó una ceremonia pública de conversión. Escogió un importante día festivo de los hindúes: la Daśaharā. El mahār y su esposa, vestidos de blanco, se postraron ante una imagen del Buddha. Aceptaron los “tres refugios” y recitaron los “cinco preceptos” budistas. La primera parte de la ceremonia fue conducida en pali (lengua litúrgica del budismo Theravāda) por el cabeza de las órdenes budistas de la India, el monje birmano Bhikku Chandramani. La segunda parte fue dirigida por el propio Ambedkar, un laico, en lengua marathi. Se levantó de nuevo y leyó a la multitud 22 votos que él mismo había concebido para la ocasión. Los cuatro últimos decían así:

\begin{quote}
Renuncio al hinduismo que es dañino para la humanidad y para el desarrollo de la humanidad porque se fundamenta en la desigualdad y adopto el budismo como mi religión … Solemnemente declaro y afirmo que a partir de ahora llevaré una vida de acuerdo con los principios y las enseñanzas del Buddha y su \textit{dhamma} [\textit{dharma}] (citado en Sangharakshita, 1986: 137).
\end{quote}

Luego, se volvió ante los 380.000 oyentes (principalmente mahārs) y pidió que aquellos que quisieran convertirse al budismo se alzaran. Todo el mundo se levantó al unísono. Él mismo administró emocionado los tres refugios, los cinco preceptos y los 22 votos de su cosecha a la multitud.

Un día después dirigió otra ceremonia de conversión para 100.000 personas más. Seis semanas después, bābāsāheb moría. De nuevo, cientos de miles de personas acudieron al mayor cortejo funerario que Bombay jamás hubiera conocido. Una nueva ceremonia de conversión se organizó para aquellos que acudieron a la cremación. Varios cientos de miles de personas fueron iniciadas en Delhi y en Agra cuando arribaron sus cenizas.

\textbf{Una nueva conciencia dalit}

Como hemos visto, Ambedkar poseía una inmensa fe en los principios de la democracia liberal y la modernización. Él fue un jurista, un economista y un político. Sin embargo, sus textos no beben enteramente de los modos de razonar de las ciencias sociales, sino que se adentran en el universo encantado de los mitos y leyendas (Ganguly, 2005: 136-137), y más cuando Ambedkar indaga en el origen de los dalits (designación marathi y
hindi que significa *oprimido* y que Ambedkar empleaba cada vez con más asiduidad para sustituir a la vejatoria *intocable*. Su “crónica de origen” (*purāṇa*) es reveladora.

Para el *doctor*, todas las sociedades antiguas han sido conquistadas en alguna ocasión. En esas situaciones de fragmentación social suelen escindirse grupos autóctonos (de *hombres rotos*, como él los llamaba), que pasan a la periferia y viven en zonas separadas. Cuando los invasores se sedentarizan recurren a las tribus de estos *hombres rotos* en busca de protección, a cambio de alimento. Los intocables son los descendientes de estos *hombres rotos* u oprimidos (*dalits*). Ambedkar sostiene, pues, que los dalits *siempre* han vivido segregados de los hindúes *de casta*. Ahí, su discurso refleja la realidad social de Maharashtra, donde cada pueblo poseía su “ghetto” mahār en las afueras; y donde una de las ocupaciones tradicionales de los mahāhrs era –y aún es– la de vigilante de la aldea. Los mahāhrs, por su parte, esgrimen una serie de derechos sobre los hindúes “de casta”, el más importante de los cuales es el derecho a recibir alimento de los patronos. En cierta manera, en la narrativa ambedkarita los dalits pasan a ser los habitantes originales de Maharashtra y de la India (Zelliot, 1995: 65). Siguiendo a los etnólogos coloniales, hace derivar el nombre mahāraṣṭra –que quiere decir “gran reino”– de mahār.

Si bien en otras partes del mundo, los barrios de *hombres rotos* desaparecieron y esas comunidades pasaron a ser absorbidas por las tribus sedentarias, en la India esto no sucedió. Existió un factor determinante que lo impidió.

Analizando los estudios censales, Ambedkar sacó a relucir que los brāhmaṇs ortodoxos no hacían de sacerdotes domésticos de los intocables. Además, los intocables comían carne y no veneraban la vaca. El hecho de que los intocables no tuvieran sacerdotes brāhmaṇs no sólo se debía al rechazo de estos últimos, mas también a que los intocables no querían tenerlos por sacerdotes. Como bien sabía Ambedkar, los intocables siempre han considerado a los brāhmaṇs seres inauspiciosos e impuros. Para Ambedkar, la única explicación posible a esta paradójica antipatía mutua era la hipótesis que los dalits u *hombres rotos* hubieran sido budistas.

Ambedkar sabe que no tiene evidencia directa para esta hipótesis, pero plantea un cuadro fascinante. Los mahāhrs descenden de las tribus nāgas de *hombres rotos* o dalits que fueron luego víctimas del progromo ārya (brahmánico). Sólo un nāga escapó, gracias a la ayuda del sabio Agastya. Los mahāhrs descenden de él. Estos nāgas serían luego iniciados por el Buddha y se convirtieron en algunos de los primeros budistas de la historia.

El odio de los brāhmaṇs era contra los budistas, no contra los dalits en sí mismos. Por tanto, tenía que existir otra razón adicional por la cual la intocabilidad fue impuesta sobre los dalits. Según bābāsāheb, porque comían carne de vaca. La contrarreforma brahmánica (cuando los brāhmaṇs habían abandonado ya el sacrificio animal y habíanse tornado vegetarianos), entre los primeros siglos antes de nuestra era y la época Gupta (siglos IV-V), atrapó a muchos budistas que comían vacuno en la trampa de la intocabilidad puesto que rehusaron el vegetarianismo. Por tanto, los dalits y los mahāhrs son los habitantes originales de la India, descendientes de aquellos budistas que en su día habían constituido un grupo con identidad separada y que había estado al margen del sistema de castas. Como dice Christophe Jaffrelot (2005: 41), este mensaje posee un «tremendo potencial para la movilización social». De ahí que en la ceremonia de
conversión de 1956 los mahārs regresaran a su religión ancestral a Nagpur, la “ciudad de los nāgas”. Ambedkar dotaba a los mahārs de nuevos mitos de origen y una identidad prestigiosa basada en perspectivas no-sánscritas y no-brahmánicas.

Si uno lee los 22 juramentos de su fórmula de “conversión” notará claramente el tono anti-brahmánico. Cualquier budista se asombraría por la falta de referencias a elementos básicos como el nirvāṇa, el ritual, la meditación… Pero que nadie se lleve a engaño. La formulación ambedkariana es congruente con las más antiguas tradiciones del budismo indio. Precisamente, era su intención trascender las viejas rivalidades entre el Theravāda o el Mahāyāna y formalizar un tipo de neo-budismo (Nāvayāna). Y el hecho es que todos los seguidores de las principales escuelas budistas aprobaron su enunciado del budismo y aceptan a sus seguidores como budistas (Tartakov, 2003: 208).

Ocurre que en el budismo ambedkarita el concepto de liberación individual queda entremezclado con el de liberación sociopolítica. Los factores del sufrimiento, lo que el budismo tradicional llamó duḥkha, son la explotación de casta, el trabajo forzado y la intocabilidad. Como expresa Timothy Fitzgerald (2005: 174), «en los escritos de Ambedkar la soteriología y la política están homologadas». Por supuesto, siguiendo de cerca las enseñanzas del neobudista británico Sangharakshita, muchos ambedkaritas no olvidan el elemento de trascendencia. Lo interesante de todo esto es que la distinción entre una esfera religiosa y otra no-religiosa (político-social), se desdibujan. Algo no tan alejado, con las cautelas necesarias, de la Teología de la Liberación (Omvedt, 2008: 265).

Como ha visto Neera Burra (1996: 158), cuando un mahār dice que es un bauddha (budista) está subrayando que su identidad ha cambiado. Ya no se ve a sí mismo como miembro de una comunidad intocable. Y, por implicación, está exigiendo a los hindúes de casta que reconozcan esa transformación interna. Ello explica cómo la recuperación del Buddha por parte de Ambedkar acabará por divinizar al propio bābāsāheb. Cualquiera que entre en casa de un ambedkarita notará que el ultra-racional economista y jurista es objeto de una adoración muy poco secular. Dice una rima popular de un omnipresente y omnisciente Bhim (Ambedkar):

Bhim está encima, Bhim está debajo  
Bhim está delante, Bhim está detrás.  
Oh, amigo, nada hay aquí sin él,  
está en todas partes, está en todas partes  

Puede que algunos ambedkaritas urbanos hayan eliminado los iconos hindúes de sus hogares, pero no ha sucedido lo mismo en el mundo rural. Allí, el cambio de identidad se expresa de una forma diferente. Por poco que uno conviva con los bauddhas del campo verá que siguen participando en festivales y rituales populares de las divinidades hindúes. Lo que muchos mahārs han hecho es añadir al Buddha y Ambedkar al universo religioso anterior. Los grandes sacramentos de vida siguen el viejo patrón hindú, aunque hayan incluido iconografía del Buddha y Ambedkar. Y lo que es más significativo: los ambedkaritas rurales han empezado a realizar rituales hasta la fecha reservados a los hindúes de casta (Burra, 1996: 168).

Para algunos ahí se encuentra el fracaso final del ambedkarismo. Los dalits han mantenido los mismos rituales, el mismo universo encantado y el mismo
devocionalismo del hinduismo. Al hacer del Buddha y de Ambedkar unos entes trascendentes (y, en ocasiones, al hacer del segundo una reencarnación del primero) han dinamitado la fuerza y el potencial del movimiento de conversión.

Pero yo disiento. Por un lado, los críticos olvidan el talante racionalista e igualitarista del budismo. Si uno lee atentamente los pronunciamientos de Ambedkar, encontrará una interpretación muy racional de conceptos como el *karma*, el renacimiento o el *nirvāṇa*. Pero, al mismo tiempo, al rescatar aspectos sobrenaturales del Buddha, Ambedkar los puede insertar —igual que su narrativa de los orígenes— en su proyecto de emancipación de los dalits. En especial, el despliegue de la compasión (*karunā*) tras la iluminación. Es a esta dimensión salvífica a la que el dalit rinde culto con su devoción (*bhakti*). Cuando el bauddha venera a Bhim no tiene la casta en mente, sino su necesidad de conectar con lo sagrado. No precisa rechazar “revolucionariamente” su pasado (Ganguly, 2005: 198). Esta complejidad no se ajusta a los binarismos clásicos de secular/religioso o tradicional/moderno.

Me parece importante destacar esto para ilustrar –con Debjani Ganguly (2005: 178)– que la casta «continua generando nuevas formas de vida en el presente». La casta es una dimensión muy palpable de la vida cotidiana de millones de indios, sean budistas, sikhs o hindúes. Está entrelazada en su identidad. Y más aún en la de los dalits.

**Conclusión**

A pesar de su talante secular, Ambedkar decidió combatir lo que él consideraba un prejuicio religioso con la conversión religiosa (a riesgo de perder las cuotas que los mahārs poseían y que, entonces, como budistas, ya no podrían disfrutar.) La respuesta a la llamada de *bābāsāheb* fue notable entre los intocables de las áreas de habla marathi y hindi. El censo de 1961 ya reportó 3,2 millones de *neobudistas*. Hoy puede que ronden los 8 millones (Tartakov, 2003: 193).

Sin embargo, el movimiento nunca alcanzó una dimensión subcontinental. Es más, acabó por ergirse como una afiliación cítica entre grupos relativamente prósperos y en ascenso social de mahārs, jātavs y chamārs de la India central. Lejos de *aniquilar la casta* (que es el título de uno de sus libros más famosos), el ambedkarismo representa una de las infinidad asociaciones entre casta, religión y cultura. La endogamia de casta –y subcasta– es ampliamente seguida por los ambedkaritas. Forma parte de su identidad como budhistas, bien que al mismo tiempo lo denostren. La ironía es que el neobudismo ambedkarita se ha convertido virtualmente en una secta más del hinduismo. Como ha visto Christophe Jaffrelot (2005: 163), su conversión no fue una huida, sino una estrategia de emancipación; pero «al escoger el budismo, Ambedkar limitó el alcance de su ruptura con el hinduismo». Como era de esperar, los hindúes de casta todavía ven a estos neobudistas como intocables. Los ambedkaritas han acabado, pues, por reforzar las distinciones de casta. Con todo, para los mahārs y otros dalits el budismo ha comportado una dosis de autoestima valiosísimamente y un nuevo sentido de identidad (no-hindú) decente. Atacando de frente el *síndrome del paria* que tanto ha afectado a esta comunidad, *bābāsāheb* escribió (citado en Zelliot, 1995: 63):
Cuando los hindúes querían los *Vedas* mandaron llamar a Vyāsa, que no era un hindú de casta. Cuando los hindúes quisieron una Epopeya [*Rāmāyāṇa*] llamaron a Vālmīki, que era un intocable. Cuando los hindúes han querido una Constitución, me han llamado a mí.

El legado político de Ambedkar se fue apagando en las siguientes décadas. Ningún líder de talla le sucedió. El Partido del Congreso supo neutralizar a los políticos intocables. Y su póstumo Partido Republicano se perdió en innumerables escisiones y rivalidades internas, víctima de la política de castas. Pero a principios de los años noventa, con el ascenso de los partidos dalits y de castas bajas en el norte de la India, la herencia de Ambedkar eclosionó. En la actualidad, no hay movimiento dalit ni partido político pro-dalit que no lo reclame para sí. Y no existe ciudad en la India que no haya erigido una gran estatua de bābāsāheb Ambedkar. En 1999, los libros de texto oficiales de la India, que años atrás siquiera mencionaban su nombre, fueron aumentados con dos páginas en las que se destaca la contribución del padre de la Constitución.

**OBRAS CITADAS**


ABSTRACT

This paper, which contrasts Rajkumar Hirani’s Lage Raho Munna Bhai (2006) with Richard Attenborough’s Gandhi (1982), is as much a celebration of Bollywood as of Gandhi. It is to the former that the credit for most effectively resurrecting the Mahatma should go, certainly much more so than to Gandhians or academics. For Bollywood literally revives the spirit of Gandhi by showing how irresistibly he continues to haunt India today. Not just in giving us Gandhigiri—a totally new way of doing Gandhi in the world—but in its perceptive representation of the threat that modernity poses to Gandhian thought is Lage Raho Munna Bhai remarkable. What is more, it also draws out the distinction between Gandhi as hallucination and the real afterlife of the Mahatma. The film’s enormous popularity at the box office—it grossed close to a billion rupees—is not just an index of its commercial success, but also proof of the responsive chord it struck in Indian audiences. But it is not just the genius and inventiveness of Bollywood cinema that is demonstrated in the film as much as the persistence and potency of Gandhi’s own ideas, which have the capacity to adapt themselves to unusual circumstances and times. Both Richard Attenborough’s Oscar-winning epic, and Rajkumar Hirani’s Lage Raho Munna Bhai show that Gandhi remains as media-savvy after his death as he was during his life.

KEYWORDS: Gandhi goes to the movies; Hollywood/Bollywood; Rajkumar Hirani; Lage Raho Munna Bhai (2006); Richard Attenborough’s Gandhi (1982)

RESUMEN  Gandhiismo vs. Gandhigiri: El Mahatma, antes y después de su muerte

Este artículo, que contrasta dos películas, Lage Raho Munna Bhai (2006) de Rajkumar Hirani y Gandhi (1982) de Richard Attenborough, celebra tanto el cine de Bollywood como la figura de Gandhi. El mérito por haber resucitado al Mahatma de una forma muy eficaz debería adjudicarse a la primera de las dos, mucho más que a los expertos de Gandhi o a los académicos. Esto es debido a que Bollywood literalmente reanima el espíritu de Gandhi demostrando cómo la sombra de su persona persiste en la India de hoy. Lage Raho Munna Bhai destaca no solamente porque nos presenta Gandhigiri —una manera totalmente nueva de hacer de Gandhi en el mundo— sino en la representación suspicaz de la amenaza que el pensamiento de Gandhi plantea para la modernidad.

1 This excerpt is Section XIII of the first part of a work in progress called “The Death and Afterlife of Mahatma Gandhi.” The subtitle of the section is also the subtitle of Claude Markovits’s revisionist history called The Un-Gandhian Gandhi. The book was first published in India by Permanent Black with the subtitle “Gandhi’s Posthumous Life,” which changed the following year in the Anthem Press London imprint. Markovits, attempting a “non-traditional biography,” tries to go beyond—or beneath—perceptions to locate the “real” Gandhi in history.
Además traza una diferencia entre Gandhi como una alucinación y la existencia del Mahatma después de su muerte. La buena aceptación de la película – las ganancias de los cines ascendieron a casi un billón de rupias — no solamente indica el éxito comercial, sino que pone de manifiesto hasta qué punto caló hondo entre el público indio. Sin embargo, la película no demuestra solo el genio y la inventiva del cine de Bollywood, también celebra la persistencia y el poder de las ideas de Gandhi, que han podido adaptarse a unas circunstancias y a un tiempo poco corrientes. Tanto la épica de Richard Attenborough, ganadora de un óscar, y *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* de Rajkumar Hirani demuestran que Gandhi sigue sabiendo utilizar los medios de comunicación con la misma astucia que empleaba durante su vida que después de su muerte.

**PALABRAS CLAVE**: Gandhi y el cine; Hollywood/Bollywood; el Gandhi de Richard Attenborough; Rajkumar Hirani; *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*

As he approaches the end of his monumental monograph on *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*, Robert Payne concludes somewhat wistfully,

> The years passed, and the murder of Gandhi became a fact of history, strangely remote and strangely final. The case was closed, the murderers have been punished, many of the witnesses were dead, and it seemed hopeless to revive an inquiry which must in the nature of things remain incomplete and insubstantial. (1969: 646)

I have, quite in contrast to Payne, endeavoured to show that the case is far from closed; the Mahatma’s death continues to haunt and tantalize us. The almost compulsive return to this topic, witnessed in the number of books and studies, decade after decade, is only one proof of this fact. Another, perhaps more substantial, corroboration of this is the spurt of interest in Gandhi from two most unexpected of sources, Hollywood and Bollywood. Though there have been many celluloid depictions of Gandhi, two stand out as being especially notable, Richard Attenborough’s *Gandhi* (1982) and Rajkumar Hirani’s *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (2006). Of the many attempts to capture Gandhi on celluloid, I consider these two feature films to be not only the most successful and spectacular, but also most inviting of our special consideration. That is because they employ two different narrative modes and mimetic styles of representing Gandhi, thus, albeit unintentionally, complementing one another with uncanny symmetry.

Movies had already become the world’s newest and most powerful medium during Gandhi’s life. He himself was filmed several times, starting with some American news and documentary companies’ attempts to interview him for Western audiences. One of these early efforts is commonly available on YouTube. This supposedly earliest talkie on Gandhi was shot by Fox Movietone in May 1931 at Borsad, near Anand in South Gujarat, on the eve of the 2nd Round Table Conference which took place in London. It begins with the journalist unloading his heavy cinematographic equipment from a bullock cart after he arrives through the Borsad ashram gates. This rather self-conscious self-representation functions both as a
means to familiarize the audience with the new medium of film, and to show viewers the
great efforts that the media has taken to reach and film Gandhi. Gandhi speaks very softly, in
a whisper, while the journalist tries his best to draw him out. Earlier, Gandhi had insisted that
his interviewer walk with him, so as not to take up too much of his time or cut too much into
his schedule, during one of the former’s constitutionals. The journalist finds Gandhi walking
too briskly for his (the journalist’s) comfort. Eventually, the two end up sitting on the floor,
Gandhi, bare-chested, spinning as he talks, while his interlocutor, quite uncomfortable and
overdressed, tries cleverly to “trap” Gandhi with some of his questions. Gandhi, on the other
hand, already a past master at this game, not only disarms him with his humour but, when
required, evades answering directly or being drawn into saying anything controversial.
Without actually knowing it, Gandhi is revealed to be quite media-savvy.

Called “Gandhi Talks,” the film shows a still sprightly if ageing Mahatma of feeble
voice, quite averse to being photographed. As he said in the Harijan of 21st September 1947,
opposing the proposal to make his statue in Bombay, “I must say that I have dislike even for
being photographed; nevertheless, photographs have been taken of me” (Gandhi, 1999, V.96:
366). To return to this first talkie on Gandhi, except for the dynamic opening sequence, the
film is rather static, with the two figures almost frozen on the floor. Gandhi, we quickly
realize, is rather easy to exoticize to the West: prohibition, child marriages, and sartorial
peculiarities—all become grist to the journalistic mill. Of course, to add to his exoticism,
Gandhi does not sit still, but plays, now and then, with his toes as he talks. His interviewer
asks him whether it would be proper for him to dress as he does when attends the Round
Table Conference. Gandhi replies that he would be uncomfortable wearing anything else than
his customary attire, which, of course, is also a political statement in that it represents how a
majority of the masses of colonized India dress, in bare essentials, upper bodies bare. Politics
and piety, the two themes of Gandhi’s life—civil disobedience and satyagraha—form part of
the exchange, which is marked by wit and humour, so typical of Gandhi. When asked if
Government will yield to his demands, Gandhi says he doesn’t know. “But you are hopeful?”
Gandhi replies with a smile, “I am an optimist.” On the other hand, what if he is imprisoned?
“I am always prepared to go to jail” retorts the clever Mahatma. Indeed, the exchange shows
how carefully he measures his words. When the journalist attempts to plant words into his
mouth, Gandhi returns, “That is more than I can say.” Quite prophetic and essential to our
inquiry is the unexpected question, “Would you be prepared to die in the cause of India’s
freedom?” At that time, in the early thirties, Gandhi does not seem to be too pleased: “It is a
bad question” he says, neither negating nor affirming its implications. Perhaps, what he wants
to say is “I hope it will not be necessary, which is why I prefer not to think of it.” But it is quite likely that somewhere deep inside him he knows but does not wish to face up to that knowledge.

While Gandhi speaking to the press was often filmed, it was something rather functional rather than artistic as far as he was concerned. He simply wanted to get his message across and did not hesitate to do so through the new medium. Gandhi’s attitude to feature films, however, was not very flattering. In June 1944, after Kasturba’s death, Gandhi spent some time with a prominent Porbandar business family, the Morarjees, in their Juhu mansion. His hosts arranged for him to see the movie Mission to Moscow, the special screening of which was attended by about a hundred prominent Bombayites along with Gandhi. The film was a big hit in those days. Sarojini Naidu was also present. It seems that Gandhi objected to the low dresses of the ladies and to couples in a close embrace (Payne 1969: 509). He thought that such films would have a negative effect on public morality. He also saw Ram Rajya, a mythological, which he liked better, but, according to Payne, “to the end of his life he showed a deep dislike for films and cameramen” (1969: 509). I am not quite sure that this is true because whether it was the radio, which he used quite effectively, or movies, Gandhi, the great communicator, was not averse to trying the latest media. He knew the advantage of reaching millions through them.

One way to enter into the question of how Gandhi was depicted in the movies is to examine the following three images, which signify three different attempts to frame Gandhi on the silver screen. All of them, obviously, resemble the Mahatma, but which one is the “real” Gandhi? On looking closely, we will be able to identify these images. The still on the left is from Richard Attenborough’s Gandhi, while the one on the right is from Lage Raho Munna Bhai. In both these movies, Gandhi is played by actors, the then unknown, but now famous Ben Kingsley and, the still obscure, Dilip Prabhavalkar respectively. But what of the photo in the middle? That image represents Gandhi as himself. But the question remains: why is that representation more “real” than the other two? Is it because in it Gandhi plays himself while in the other two he is portrayed by professional actors? Playing himself, however, we may not forget, is also a form of portrayal. Self-representation is also representation; there is no way to get to the “real” Gandhi without some process of mediation. Even a photo of Gandhi, so accurate and life-like to all appearances, is also a text that invites interpretation. In this case, the “real” images of Gandhi that were crafted during his own lifetime become the sources of the later cinematic depictions, thus basing the “reel” Gandhi on the “real” Gandhi.
But the cinematic Gandhis also depart in significant ways from the documentary Gandhis. All, in the end, invite interpretations, including comparisons between them. The documentaries serve as a rich archive of images which are later adapted for a variety of purposes, including sculpture and portraiture. But this ensemble is itself subject to interrogation in the manner in which it seeks to frame and signify the Mahatma’s life.


Of the various attempts to portray the “real” Gandhi on “reel,” the best instance is clearly the *Mahatma: Life of Gandhi 1869-1948*. This is a hugely ambitious, comprehensive, and painstaking assemblage of a vast array of audio-visual material that constitutes possibly the longest of biographical documentaries ever. Made in 1968 by the Gandhi National Memorial Fund in cooperation with the Films Division of the Government of India, it was scripted and directed by Vithalbhai Jhaveri who also recorded the audio commentary that runs through it. This 30,000 feet documentary was divided into thirty-three reels. The initial six reels cover a little over the first half of Gandhi’s life till he is forty-five. These years include the twenty-one he spent in South Africa. The remaining thirty-three years of his life from his return to India 1915 to his murder in January 1948 extend over some twenty-seven reels that also depict important facets of the history of India's freedom struggle. With a total length of about 330 minutes, the film is over six-and-a-half hours long. It also includes the earliest filming of Gandhi in 1912 during G. K. Gokhale’s visit to South Africa. Overall, *Mahatma: Life of Gandhi 1869-1948* embodies the most carefully collated and reliable visual
archive on Gandhi. As such it is a “source” of most other cinematic representations of Gandhi, including the two I shall discuss.

The three photos serve to remind us not only of the relationship between the two fictional accounts of Gandhi, Attenborough’s and Hirani’s, but also how they engage with what we know about the historical figure. But without trying to gauge the “reliability” or “authenticity” of the two feature films or to evaluate their truth value or mimetic accuracy, it might be instructive to juxtapose the two modes of representation and the two narrative grammars, with the two ways of recuperating Gandhi’s legacy so as to draw larger lessons from them. The first question that strikes us is the challenge of filming Gandhi. From Jhaveri’s text, we realize that though photographed a lot, Gandhi was not filmed as often. Actual “talkies” of him are even fewer. From scant live records in the first half of his life when he was relatively less famous to later cinematic depictions is thus quite a leap.

That is one reason why Richard Attenborough’s Gandhi becomes so important, even epochal. It is the ultimate biopic. An expensive multi-national effort, combining expertise and actors from five continents, the film became somewhat controversial because it was filmed with Government of India support and investment. Quite naturally India-detractors, not to mention Gandhi-baiters, dismissed it as propaganda. Longer than most Hollywood movies, it stretches into three hours and eleven minutes, thus requiring special screening times all over the world. It is a lavish production in 70 mm, with six track sound. Shot on a massive scale, often on actual locations specially made available by the Indian government, it not only featured world famous actors and an international star-studded cast, but also thousands of extras that made up crowds, mobs, and background fillers. Gandhi was a great success, with world-wide impact. Nominated for nine Oscars, it won the Academy awards sweepstakes, bagging eight awards, including one for the best picture. Its global collections exceeded $100 million; the film is still in circulation and continues to move international audiences. One of its greatest contributions was that it made Gandhi a global icon thirty-five years after his death.

Attenborough’s Gandhi, I would argue, is very much about the life of Gandhi seen through Western eyes. As Attenborough himself put it in the companion book published when the movie was released, “We were attempting to discover, and then dramatise, the spirit of this extraordinary man” (1982: 101). Indeed, Attenborough’s retelling removes the Mahatma from a limited, exotic, anti-colonial context and reterritorializes him as a 20th century saint. As Darius Cooper in a review of the film observes, “Attenborough's three-hour
film on Gandhi concentrates primarily on the Mahatmaness of the man, obliterating most human nuances that made Gandhi the unique person that he was” (1983: 47). The narrative follows Christian hagiographical conventions, making it essentially the vindication of a saintly life. Such an interpretation is possible, in the first place, because Gandhi’s remarkable life—and martyr’s death—lends itself so readily to this. In what was one of the most astute obituaries on him, George Orwell, who rejected sainthood as an ideal, famously quipped that “Saints should always be judged guilty until they are proved innocent….” but went on to pronounce a favourable verdict on Gandhi (2003: 347; 347-57).

The image of Gandhi as a modern-day saint is a common one. Markovits shows how Gandhi was iconized in a bewildering, sometimes contradictory, array of images: “as a Bolshevik, a fanatic, a trouble-maker, a hypocrite, an eccentric, a reactionary, a revolutionary, a saint, a renouncer, a messiah, an avatar. He was likened both to Lenin and Jesus Christ, indicating the whole scope of representations” (2004: 13). These various perceptions, however settle into two major tropes after his death: within India, he was the “Father of the Nation” and outside “an apostle of non-violence” (ibid). The growth of the latter iconography of the saintly Gandhi in the West, Markovits shows, had many contributors including the Rev. Joseph J. Doke, an English Baptist missionary in South Africa, who wrote a book eulogising Gandhi as early as 1909. Doke did not stop short of comparing Gandhi with Christ (Markovits, 2004: 15-16). In an essay significantly titled “Saint Gandhi” Mark Jurgensmeyer traces the canonization of Gandhi in the West as a saintly figure in the Christian tradition. A Unitarian pastor, Rev. John Hayne Holmes declared in a sermon in New York in April 1921 that Gandhi was not only a saint, but a saviour (ibid: 17).

Earlier, Willy Pearson, another English clergyman, was the first to proclaim Gandhi’s sainthood, comparing him with St. Franscis of Assisi (Markovits, 2004: 16) while later Romain Rolland’s immensely influential book, Mahatma Gandhi (1924), translated in many European languages, was to confirm this iconization (ibid:17). Attenborough’s cinematic hagiography clearly belongs to this tradition.

Of course, Attenborough used Hollywood filmmaking conventions, staging his scenes elaborately, as other makers of “epics” such as David Lean had done before him. Gandhi, though hagiographical, follows a mimetic style of filmmaking in which cinema, the visual image itself, is supposed to portray or reflect “reality.” Cinematic realism is shored up by accurate set and costume design, painstaking research, art direction, method acting, shooting on location, adherence to “unities” of time and space, and “documentary” style camera work and editing.
When Attenborough discussed the project with Nehru way back in 1963, the latter told him that “the spirit and fundamental truth of Gandhiji’s life should be apparent in all that we might attempt to convey” (Attenborough, 1982: 68). Later, Indira Gandhi, who actually sanctioned the funds for the film, was also keen that the Government not interfere with the script, but “merely satisfy themselves that, related to the subject matter, the manner in which the film was envisaged was a proper one” (Hay, 1983: 86). After she had seen the film, a satisfied Indira Gandhi publically declared, “The film has captured the spirit of Gandhiji” (Attenborough, 1982: 228). Attenborough’s own aims were also clearly stated at the start of the film: “to try to find one's way into the heart of the man,” and to be “faithful in spirit to the record” (Hay, 1983: 87). In his review, noted historian of South Asia, Stephen Hay, shows how the film often took liberties with history, compressing, amalgamating, exaggerating, inventing, as the narrative need arose (1983: 87-88). Attenborough himself was quoted in the New York Times as admitting “we cheat[ed] like mad” in compressing and combining historical events (ibid: 90). But though the film was riddled with inaccuracies, it came across as being historically accurate and psychologically credible.

Lage Raho Munna Bhai (2006), in contrast, is not about the Mahatma’s life at all though it is most certainly about his afterlife. We might also consider it a hugely successful and popular attempt to represent Gandhi, but from a totally different style of filmmaking than Attenborough’s. Some might dismiss it as another Bollywood potboiler, with an improbable plot, full of strange happenings. Yet, as we shall see, the film has much going in its favour. The basic story concerns the transformation of a lovable Bombay hoodlum called Munna, whose normal business is threat, extortion, “protection,” and other such illegal activities. However, he falls in love with the voice of a radio jockey named Jahnavi, who has a popular radio programme called “Good Morning Mumbai.” On the occasion of Gandhi’s birthday, she decides to run a special quiz on the Father of the Nation. Munna, wishing to impress her, kidnaps several professors and forces them to give him all the right answers. The result is that he wins the quiz and is invited to Jahnavi’s show. There, believing his bluff that he is a Professor of Gandhian studies, Jahnavi unexpectedly requests him to speak on Gandhi, his “favourite” topic, to some seniors in the “Second Innings House,” where she also resides. Munna now realizes that he must read up on Gandhi or face exposure. In the process of spending three days and nights at a Gandhi library, which no one else frequents, he begins to “see” Gandhi. This figure of Gandhi, whom he first thinks is a ghost, supplies him with the

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2 For some hard-hitting criticism against the film, see Duara (2006) and Ganesh (2006).
answers to his and others’ questions. Gandhi now promises to help him out during his talk at the Second Innings House.” Of course, only he can “see” Gandhi so his secret is not revealed. But unknown to Munna, his sidekick and friend, Circuit, has accepted the commission of clearing the “Second Innings House” for an illegal takeover by a real estate tycoon, and the “villain” of the movie, Lucky Singh. This is how the plot unfolds, gradually “forcing” Munna to adopt Gandhigiri (the Gandhian way of doing things) as opposed to Gundagiri, or the gangster’s way, all in order to woo his ladylove.

Despite such an improbable plot, I believe this film needs to be taken seriously for a variety of reasons. A purely practical one is its great impact factor. It is among the highest grossing Indian films, with a revenue of over 100 crores or a billion rupees according to Box Office India figures (boxofficeindia.com). Audiences all around the world, not only in India, loved it, going to see it several times. It won several national awards and was shown tax-free in Mumbai and Delhi. It now has regular reruns on TV and during flights, having become somewhat of a classic. That its subject is Gandhi, obviously, distinguishes it from other “hits” that performed similarly at the box office. That a Gandhian film could do so well is thus not just noteworthy, but invites further analysis. It was as if it became India’s answer to Attenborough’s Gandhi, but offered a new way of “doing” Gandhi in our times, suggested by the neologism it coined, “Gandhigiri.” The film, moreover, inspired copy-cat instances of this method, with several reports of how one of its techniques, sending roses to adversaries, was successfully duplicated in many parts of the world. According to newspaper reports, the film caused a spurt in the sales of books on Gandhi and several schools organized group screenings (Zeeshan, 2006). Summing up its unusually strong impact, Sudha Ramachandran quoting from Outlook magazine, says, “Lage raho Munnabhai marks the magnificent, fun-filled return of Gandhi to mass consciousness.”

The film was well-received and reviewed not just nationally, but also internationally. Amelia Gentleman in the International Herald Tribune lauded the film’s special appeal and achievement; Lage Raho caused “real excitement” and became “the unexpected box-office hit of the year”:

With its big Bollywood soundtrack and dance routines, the movie brings Gandhi firmly into the mainstream and theaters have been packed for the past three weeks. The Congress Party recommended that all party members see the film. The Delhi authorities declared that tickets to the film would be sold tax free because of its assiduous promotion of Gandhian values. (Gentleman, 2006)

Similarly, Mark Sappenfield of the Christian Science Monitor pointed out how the film was not piously preachy but a hands-on way of engaging with Gandhi: “Gandhi gets his hands
dirty. He appears as an apparition only visible to the wayward gangster, counselling him on how to help others deal with everyday problems” (Sappenfield, 2006). Swati Gauri Sharma in The Boston Globe wanted a version of Gandhigiri in the United States which “encourages people to take up Gandhigiri, Kinggiri, or Kennedygiri. If it worked for Bollywood, it could work for Hollywood” (Sharma, 2006). A few months after its release, a special screening of the film was arranged on 10 November 2006 at the United Nations. Introduced by the then U.N. Under-Secretary Shashi Tharoor, this was the first Hindi film to be shown at the U.N.O. Director Rajkumar Hirani, writer Abhijat Joshi, and actor Boman Irani were present as the film met with thunderous applause (Gits4u.com, 2006). As the Indo-Asian News Service (IANS) reported, “An evening that had started with massive security arrangements in the sombre UN setting, concluded in a festive atmosphere in the lounge of the UN with diplomats from other tables joining in raising a toast for the film” (Indo-Asian News Service, 2006). Eventually, the Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh, also got to see the film. He said it “captures Bapu's message about the power of truth and humanism” (Gits4u.com, 2006). The following year, on 15 June 2007, the U.N. General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution declaring 2nd October, Gandhi’s birthday, as the “International Day of Non-Violence” (Chaudhury, 2007). The film was also a great hit at Cannes and has been shown in university campuses all over the world.

But what is also remarkable is that it seemed to have been made with the conscious attempt to recuperate Gandhi for contemporary India, as its director Rajkumar Hirani said. He was shocked at how little Indians knew about Gandhi and this prompted him to do something about it. Hirani narrates an incident during the filming which to him was symptomatic of this ignorance. The boy who served tea on the sets kept asking for the name of the film, which was still tentative then, “Munnabhai Meets Mahatma Gandhi.” When told by the music director, Shantanu Moitra, the boy said, “Munnabhai to theek hai, yeh Mahatma Gandhi kaun hai?” [Munnabhai is fine, but who is this Mahatma Gandhi?] (Sen, 2006a). Hirani continues:

So this is the sad state of affairs today. I was shocked. And it's not just the chai-wallah. A few days ago on TV a lot of politicians were asked India-related questions on the news channels, and I can't believe a lot of them don't know October 2 is Gandhiji's birthday! Many didn't know his first name. They kept saying, “What's in a name, we respect his ideals,” but come on! How can you not know his name? (ibid)

Hirani plays on these incidents in the quiz in the movie where viewers are asked the name of Gandhi’s mother. Given the constraints of the medium, Hirani could not be overtly didactic; instead he had to create a story that would enable him to interpret and expound his own ideas of Gandhi: “If I stop you and say something about Mahatma Gandhi, you'll brush me off
saying ‘boring’. To preach is very boring, and nobody wants free advice. But if it's
entertainment, then this changes. If you explain something to a kid through an interesting
story, he'll be hooked” (Sen 2006b). But there is no doubt that given his sense of purpose,
Hirani was repaying a traditional Hindu debt not just to his forefathers but also to the “Father
of the Nation.” His act of remembering Gandhi was a way not just to pay tribute to, but to
revitalize the Gandhian spirit as a way to reiterate current-day India’s connection with the
Mahatma.

The writer of the film, Abhijat Joshi, himself a professor of English and Creative
Writing at Otterbein College, Ohio, spent several years researching on Gandhi before
working on the script for *Munna Bhai*. Joshi, growing up in Ahmedabad and imbibing a good
deal of Gandhian ideas, actually wrote a screenplay for a TV series on Gandhi called “Post-
dated Cheque.” This was a phrase that Gandhi himself had used to describe the promises of
Dominion and autonomy in the Simon Commission’s proposals in March 1942, which he
likened to a “post-dated cheque on a failing bank” (Frykenberg, 1972: 468). Unfortunately,
Joshi could not encash his post-dated cheque; the project was abandoned. But he persisted in
his pursuit of Gandhi inspired by some of the surviving freedom fighters he had interviewed
in 1997: “These people fought hard for the country's freedom. They are also witness to the
present sorry state of the nation, but they refused to give up hope” (Joshi, 2006). When it
came to *Lage Raho*, Joshi shared the concern of the producer Vidhu Vinod Chopra and the
director Rajkumar Hirani that the film not become too solemn: “It was important for us to
dispel the myth about Gandhi being a sedate, ascetic person. We wanted to show his other
side – witty, humorous, light-hearted and creative” (ibid). Thus, unlike some typical
Bollywood film, *Lage Raho* is well-researched and has a serious academician as its script
writer.

Bollywood, no doubt, does not pretend to be a realist cinema; instead, it is
sentimental, not mimetic, but mythic, aiming at simulation (also stimulation) not fidelity.
Hirani quotes one of his own lead actors, Boman Irani, who played Lucky Singh, about the
kind of movie he was trying to make: “Boman put it very well that day, when he said that
there are some comedies described as ‘Leave your brains at home when you go to watch this
film.’ He said, ‘No, for this film take your brains with you; it'll touch you.’ And take your
heart along too” (Sen, 2006a). That is why *Lage Raho* is as much about Bollywood as it is
about Gandhi.

The film was a sequel to the immensely popular *Munna Bhai M.B.B.S*. The main
caracter and his associate were already well-known, as was the antagonist, played once
again by Boman Irani. Given the compulsions of the star system, the main character could not be Gandhi at all, but the already popular Munna Bhai, the petty Bombay gangster, with a heart of gold. Gandhi, in that sense, is almost an “extra,” in this case quite literally a poltergeist if not extra-terrestrial. He haunts the lead character as a “ghost” or apparition, as he has done the whole nation since his death. Only in this film the haunting is made literal, actually shown on the screen in the form of Prabhavalkar who plays Gandhi. Furthermore, as the hero pretends to be a Gandhian, an expert on Gandhi, a professor, the whole film therefore becomes a Gandhian tutorial, disguised as mass entertainment. Bollywood, as I have always maintained, is not just a cinema of entertainment, but of edification. Gandhi as a “haunting presence” in a corrupt post-colonial nation becomes an instantly recognizable and powerful tool for the director to bring out the ills of society and to propose solutions. Gandhi, as the film shows, is not so much an iconic external presence, but rather a “chemical locha” (dissonance), an internal, conscience-arousing, destabilizing force in the body politic. Such a representation brings to mind Sarojini Naidu’s eulogy on Gandhi’s death: “May the soul of my master, my leader, my father rest not in peace, not in peace, but let his ashes be so dynamically alive that the charred ashes of the sandalwood, let the powder of his bones be so charged with life and inspiration that the whole of India, will after his death be revitalised into the reality of freedom. … My father, do not rest. Do not allow us to rest” (Naidu & Paranjape, 2010: 289). A Mahatma is not just a great soul, but someone who may be defined as more active and powerful after his death than when alive.

When we compare Lage Raho to Gandhi we see that the Bollywood blockbuster is not hagiographical, but practical; it is not about Gandhism, but Gandhigiri, a new coinage that signifies doing Gandhi in the real world. It shows how Gandhi the exemplar resists appropriation but invites transformation. The film is by no means naïve. It squarely shows modernity’s challenge to Gandhi. As the scenes with the psychiatrists are meant to ask, is Munna’s Gandhi merely a hallucination, easily dismissed as the hero’s pathology? Is the rest of corrupt society sane, while Munna is clearly in need of medical attention? Or is Gandhi much more than a hallucination—is he actually Munna’s and the nation’s “conscience” which once awakened, will never be silenced like Gandhi’s own still, small, but extremely insistent and powerful inner voice? Going by the action of the movie, Gandhi’s ghost cannot so easily be exorcised. Gandhi is not merely an illusion or a figment of Munna’s imagination, because he produces a chain reaction not only in Munna but in several other characters. Gandhi is a

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3 See Bollywood in Australia: Transnationalism and Culture, edited by Andrew Hassam and Makarand Paranjape (2010) for a more detailed version of this argument.
positive force for change—the “conversion” of Lucky Singh (tribute to Bollywood’s power of make-believe) is his final triumph.

The import of this entertaining “tutorial” on Gandhi is thus nothing short of an enquiry into Gandhian praxis through a rejection of both Gundagiri (gangsterism), Munna’s original vocation, and Gandhism (Gandhivaad), Munna’s fake “profession” of Gandhian values. Through actual praxis, Munna makes Gandhi his own lived experience and reality, rather than merely spouting the Mahatma’s words. Munna becomes a neo-Gandhian himself, fighting Lucky Singh and the whole Indian establishment, which uses money and muscle power to rule over and exploit the disempowered masses. That is why, in the end, Jahnavi calls him the “best Professor ever” because Munna, like Gandhi, practices, and does not merely preach. In the film, both the instrumental use of violence and cynical lip-service to Gandhi are rejected in favour of a genuine “satyagraha,” insistence on the force of truth. In the end we realize that Gandhi is neither ghost, nor apparition, but an idea that will not be easily killed. In a deeper sense, Gandhi cannot be “framed,” boxed, contained, or packaged and the film testifies to his continuing relevance: “I was shot down many years ago,” says his character in the film, “but my ideas will not die by three bullets, my thoughts will create a chemical imbalance in some mind or the other. Either you put me inside a frame and hang me up on your wall or think over my thoughts.” Doing Gandhi (Gandhigiri), the film suggests, is the way that a new generation must think through Gandhi or put his ideas in practice. Indeed, this is the only way to “exorcise” his disturbing presence in our midst. Munna’s transformation is not from gangster to decent bourgeois, law-abiding citizen; it is from a violent thug to a viable satyagrahi, who also questions and struggles against bourgeois complacency and reaction. It is this demonstration of the viability of satyagraha in contemporary India that gives the film its more serious underpinning. Gandhism vs. Gandhigiri is actually doxa vs. praxis, therefore going to the very heart of the Gandhian project.

The appeal of Lage Raho is so special because it does not fetishize Gandhi but liberates him from statues and portraits, thus recuperating his energy to real-life struggles. Hirani does so in the comic as opposed to Attenborough’s solemn mode, thus humanizing and familiarizing Gandhi—hence Bapu, term of endearment, not Mahatma, a distancing honorific, is used throughout the film for him. Gandhi’s legacy is thereby harnessed to critique post-colonial India. Through multiple examples of corruption and callousness, Lage Raho, like Gandhi’s own Hind Swaraj, foregrounds the “condition of India” in our own times. It also shows how Gandhian efforts in non-violence and truth force can still help
transform the situation, if applied diligently, sincerely—and with good humour. If nothing else, the film shows how the afterlife of Gandhi still continues to influence and correct our conduct in contemporary India.

I have said that *Lage Raho* is as much a celebration of Bollywood as of Gandhi. That is because it is to the former that the credit for most effectively resurrecting the Mahatma should go, certainly much more than to Gandhians or academics. For Bollywood literally revives the spirit of Gandhi by showing how irresistibly he continues to haunt India today. Not just in giving us *Gandhigiri*—a totally new way of doing Gandhi in the world—but in its perceptive representation of the threat that modernity poses to Gandhian thought is *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* remarkable. What is more, it also draws out the distinction between Gandhi as hallucination and the real afterlife of the Mahatma, which is no illusion or pathology at all, but really the repressed conscience of the nation roused once again in the service of the nation. The film’s enormous popularity at the box office is not just an index of its commercial success, but also proof of the responsive chord it struck in Indian audiences. But it is not just the genius and inventiveness of Bollywood cinema that is demonstrated in the film as much as the persistence and potency of Gandhi’s own ideas, which have the capacity to adapt themselves to unusual circumstances and times. Both Richard Attenborough’s Oscar-winning epic, and Rajkumar Hirani’s *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* show that Gandhi remains as media-savvy after his death as he was during his life.

To this end, the film deliberately questions the fetishization of Gandhi, his appropriation by the state. It critiques the Gandhi of statues and portraits and banknotes, and instead recuperates his energy to real-life struggles. By making Gandhi if not its central character, at least its driving force, *Lage Raho* engages with the history of contemporary India going back to colonial times; to where we must go in order to trace the roots of the current Indian state. As an eloquent critique of the various corruptions and inefficiencies of post-colonial India, the film evokes Gandhi as an alternative and exemplar. The current state of affairs is shown to be deplorable; all three branches of the government, the executive the legislature and the judiciary, are shown to be either corrupt or hamstrung by bureaucratic and procedural bottlenecks. They are incapable of serving the needs of the common people of India, the *aam aadmi*, or of upholding the rights and dignity of the poorest of the poor. It is in such a scenario of all-pervading inefficiency, lack of accountability, and the consequent prevalent cynicism in society that we see the space for a “fixer” like Munna Bhai and an unscrupulous real estate developer like Lucky Singh. The latter wants to occupy and usurp
land and properties in Bombay and the former with his muscle power, obliges by evicting tenants, securing permissions, and smoothening irregularities. The strong prey on the weak in such a society as is evident when Lucky Singh takes over the “Second Innings House,” forging its lease documents and evicting its senior citizen occupants when they are on a holiday in Goa. It is a world in which pensioners are denied their right to livelihood because some corrupt official is sitting on their files in the hope of a bribe. It is a world in which municipal officers are kidnapped and released only when they agree to bend the rules or look the other way when rich builders and contractors violate the building laws and the zoning regulations. Every man has his price and the rich and the powerful have the ability to pay it.

In a telling scene, Munna’s endearingly loyal sidekick Circuit (short for Sarkateshwar—“lord of the beheaded”) tells Munna that he knows how to take care of Gandhi’s ghost: when Gandhi sees the “durdasha” (the degeneration) of contemporary India, he will flee right back into the books from which he has emerged to haunt Munna. Gradually the film shows Gandhi on celluloid, not so much addressing the nation as helping its contemporary citizens tackle their civic as well as social problems. Gandhi becomes an antidote, a way of countering some of the worst ills that plague India today. He thus becomes the means of not just critiquing post-colonial India but of improving it. Just as Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj started with a reflection on the condition of colonized India, Lage Raho uses the metaphor of Gandhi also to comment on and examine the condition of contemporary, post-colonized India. In choosing a low-life protagonist such as Munna and showing his gradual transformation into a satyagrahi, the film becomes a Gandhian text of struggle and hope.

I have been trying to argue that the film though aimed at popular audiences does not necessarily trivialize either Gandhi’s legacy or his thought. On the contrary it is a serious engagement with the Mahatma in the form of not so much a resurrection but his afterlife. The very familiar Mahatma becomes more than just a “familiar,” that is the friendly neighbourhood ghost, but an enduring, challenging and even vexing presence in the national consciousness. Literally he is a ghost that cannot be laid to rest. The film reminds us of Sarojini’s statement on Gandhi’s death. Gandhi does not allow us to rest but creates a chemical locha (dissonance) in our brains if we are to go by what happens in the film. Bollywood is not known for serious content. Indeed one might despair of the possibility of a profound engagement with any issue of note in a medium that is supposed to cater to the lowest common denominator and whose common currency is cheap and meretricious doling outs of clichés and trivialities. Indeed the central question for us in this film is, how authentic
is its treatment of Gandhi? Is it a fake and counterfeit sop to the masses, which may be cynically exploited for the masses? Is the film just about the marketing of the Mahatma?

My conclusion is that while the film does engage with Gandhian thoughts seriously, it cannot be pigeon-holed as a traditionalist or purist exposition either. The film, it seems to me, displays a great deal of ambivalence towards violence in its scheme of things, repeatedly showing the efficacy of violence and the defeat, at least partial, of non-violence. Instead of fetishizing non-violence, Munna Bhai looks at it as a part of a larger arsenal that needs to be employed to combat social evils and corruption. To that extent, the film’s take on non-violence is less Gandhian and more in keeping with the traditional Sanatani practices. While the traditional expounds the dictum “ahimsa paroma dharma” (truth is the highest dharma), it does not rule out righteous violence altogether, especially, and as a last resort, according to the Mahabharata, when all other recourses have failed. Sanatana dharma, it would seem, espouses the ultimacy of non-violence even if it is somewhat ambivalent as to its immediacy; Gandhi on the other hand upheld both the immediacy and ultimacy of non-violence. Yet Gandhi also supported the use of armed forces to repulse the Pakistani mercenaries’ invasion of Kashmir. So there does seem to remain a certain degree of doubt in the movie about Gandhi’s non-compromising abhorrence of violence, either at the personal or national level. Munna Bhai, in contrast to Gandhi, seems to adopt a more contemporary, even practical approach, preferring non-violence, endorsing and espousing it, but not ruling out the use of mock-violence to threaten adversaries into submission, as in the climax of the movie. One is reminded of Sri Ramakrishna’s advice to the snake that was converted to non-violence and found itself almost battered to death. The sage said to the snake “I asked you not to bite, but I did not ask you not to hiss.” In Gandhi’s world, both biting and hissing seem to be forbidden. The practice of ahimsa does not accommodate either. But as far as Munna is concerned, even if he has given up biting, he still retains the option of hissing rather effectively now and then, especially with the aid of Circuit. While it would be erroneous to conclude that the film merely instrumentalizes non-violence reducing it from a defining principle in action to a practical ruse, it would still be fair to say that its commitment to non-violence is neither as uncompromising nor as faithful as Gandhi’s.

When it comes to the other foundational idea, truth, Munna Bhai shows a much greater consistence and adherence to it, quite in keeping with the Gandhian ideal. In fact if we were to go by the film’s idea of what constitutes Gandhism, not just Gandhigiri, then it would be an abiding and enduring commitment to truth, both at the practical (vyavaharik) level and
the spiritual (adhayatmik) level. From Jahnvi’s declaration at the beginning of the film, through Munnna’s admission that he is not the professor he pretends to be, to Simran’s admitting that she is a manglik at the end of the film, it is truth that emerges as the highest value. To that extent, the film’s understanding of Gandhi is centred more on truth than on non-violence. Thus we even get a contemporary adaptation of Gandhism for our times, where despite the exigencies, contingencies and temptations of a materialist-consumerist ethos, maintaining faith in truth becomes the way out of both the morass of individual inertia and civic dysfunctionality. Gandhian ortho-praxy is observed as an adherence to truth more than to non-violence: this becomes its defining characteristic. The afterlife of the Mahatma, then, is a call not just to non-violent action, but even more so to satyagraha in the original sense of the word, as an insistence on truth. The film suggests that we can repay our rishi in, our debt to the Mahatma, by giving up a life lived in “bad faith” to achieve an existential authenticity which can only derive from the renewal of our commitment, both as individuals and as a nation, to truth. The film, in other words, reminds us that it is only when we walk the path of truth that we will attain Svaraj. When we turn our backs to truth, we will lose much that the founding fathers of our nation achieved through their struggle and sacrifice.

The film is therefore a uniquely creative exposition on neo-Gandhism. To be neo-Gandhian is not to parrot old shibboleths and slogans; it is not to imitate the external appurtenances of the Mahatma’s life. Rather it is to become exemplars ourselves at whatever level it is given to us to do so. Munna Bhai is an exemplary re-definition of the efficacy of Gandhi in our times. That it made a lot of money only shows that Gandhi still sells; it does not mean that the film has merely and cynically commoditized him or has marketed a stereotypical version of him. For years I harboured the feeling that Gandhi was becoming more and more irrelevant to India, that we were turning our backs on him, that Gandhian institutions were declining, that Gandhians were dying out and the new breed of politicians using Gandhi as a smokescreen for their misdeeds had taken their place. But Munna Bhai has demonstrated in unexpected ways that it is not so easy to finish off the mahatma. That indeed his afterlife will continue to inspire if not haunt us for many years to come. Perhaps, the best recent example of this is the Aam Aadmi Party, a newly formed political outfit, which has ridden to power in the national capital territory of Delhi in 2014 on a wave of popular protest against the dominant political culture of the land.

I elaborated Gandhi’s life through Lage Raho Munna Bhai because it shows us one way to counter the after-effects of Nathuram’s parricide. The mass repression of the murder of Gandhi may be undone by his continuous resurrection through our own form of
Gandhigiri. Munna not only makes peace with Gandhi’s ghost, but also uses him to change his own life. In the end, the ghost is laid to rest not through an act of exorcism but through absorption, assimilation, and emulation. The creative application of Gandhi, the exemplar, in our personal and social-life worlds is the way that Gandhi’s haunting of the nation may be turned not just therapeutic, but transformative. The after-shocks of parricide are healed by such life-giving to powerful ideas which hover in the atmosphere of the land, so to speak, till they find fit vehicles, like Munna, to carry them forward. The incessant reapplication of and reengagement with Gandhi’s ideas and life renders him an ever-living presence in our midst, thereby negating the logic of his assassination. Killing the Father, then, is not the same as eliminating his influence or presence. If his presence is constantly revitalized, if he is thus remembered, he continues to remain in our midst, not as a spectral presence but as a live source of inspiration. Indeed, the revival of Gandhi that Munna effects is, perhaps, more powerful and significant than his assassination at the hands of a misguided zealot.

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*Indi@logs* Vol 1 2014, pp. 103-122, ISSN: 2339-8523


EL MONO GRAMÁTICO Y EL SABIO ALQUIMISTA. ALGUNAS REFLEXIONES EN Torno a la Poética de Octavio Paz en El Mono Gramático

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Recibido: 18-09-2013
Aceptado: 24-11-2013

RESUMEN
El presente artículo es una comparación entre la poética de Octavio Paz en El Mono Gramático y un autor indio del siglo XI Abhinavagupta, a quien llamamos el Sabio Alquimista en referencia a la teoría india de la emoción estética: el rasa. Una idea subyacente en ambos autores es que el lenguaje ordinario enmascara la realidad, mientras que el lenguaje poético se resuelve en una abolición de la escritura que nos enfrenta a una realidad indecible. Se comparan un total de seis características distintas y se llega a la conclusión que la mayor discrepancia entre ambos autores es la naturaleza de esa realidad innombrable que revela la poesía. Para el autor indio se trata de una realidad inefable y gozosa: la conciencia pura. Para Paz es una realidad insosportable y enloquecedora, aunque al mismo tiempo fascinante. La diferencia es cultural, pues la tradición india adora a esa realidad innombrable mientras que la modernidad occidental desconfía de un absoluto inmensurable e impositivo. En este sentido Paz ejemplifica el dilema del hombre moderno: angustia ante esa realidad anterior al lenguaje, pero también una fascinación que busca en el arte y la poesía su modo último de expresión.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Octavio Paz; Abhinavagupta; Mono Gramático; rasa; poética; lenguaje

ABSTRACT The Monkey Grammarian and the Sage Alquimist. Some Reflections on Octavio Paz’s Poetics in El Mono Gramático

This article is a comparison between the poetry of Octavio Paz in The Monkey Grammarian and a 11th century Indian author, Abhinavagupta , whom we call the Sage Alchemist in reference to the Indian theory of aesthetic emotion: rasa. An underlying idea in both authors is that ordinary language masks reality, while poetic language, as the abolition of ordinary language, has the power to unfold a previous reality that is beyond language. Six different characteristics are compared between the two authors and the conclusion is that the greatest discrepancy between them is in the nature of that unspeakable reality that poetry reveals. For the Indian author it is a joyous and an ineffable one: pure consciousness. For Paz it is an intolerable and maddening reality, though at the same time a fascinating one. The difference is a culturally significant one as the Indian tradition worships that ineffable reality, while Western modernity is rather suspicious

of it. In this sense Paz exemplifies the dilemma of the modern man: anxiety about the reality prior to language, but also a feeling of wonder that looks to art and poetry as the only means to express that reality beyond words.

**KEYWORDS:** Octavio Paz; Abhinavagupta; Mono Gramático; *rasa*; poetics; language

La frase *el mono gramático* expresa metonímicamente al propio Octavio Paz, mientras que *el sabio alquimista* se refiere directamente a la figura de Abhivanagupta y figuradamente a toda la tradición poética sánscrita. Estas líneas se proponen, pues, mostrar como el punto de vista de Octavio Paz, por lo menos en *El mono gramático*, se acerca al de Abhinavagupta en particular y, en general, a ciertos presupuestos del tantrismo. Con esto, no obstante, no pretendo, por lo menos aquí, buscar posibles influencias de un texto en relación a otro, sino más bien resaltar la universalidad de ciertos conceptos independientemente de su contagio histórico.

Antes de nada, debo hacer un pequeño paréntesis para introducir rápidamente a Abhinavagupta. Abhinavagupta es sin duda alguna una de las personalidades más interesantes del Medioevo indio (siglo XI). En él se combinan felizmente la erudición y una visión creativa capaz de renovar el bagaje cultural heredado. Su personalidad es además multifacética. La tradición india ha registrado en primer lugar su labor de crítico literario y recientemente está redescubriendo con gran admiración su contribución filosófica como representante de la escuela Trika del shivaismo de Cachemira. Abhinavagupta fue además un sacerdote y un maestro espiritual con considerables responsabilidades religiosas.

Su interés por la poesía -y decir aquí poesía equivale casi a decir teatro, pues para Abhinavagupta la poesía asume su plenitud en la forma dramática- no es, por decirlo así, desinteresado, pues concibe el teatro como un "ritual estético que purifica las emociones mundanas" (Rajasekhara, 191: 60) Yo lo califico aquí como “sabio alquimista” para indicar así una concepción muy química, o casi debería decir culinaria, del mecanismo poético. Poetizar consiste en “dar sabor” al ingrediente básico (la emoción) de un plato (la poesía) mediante la mezcla acertada de sus componentes: las causas, los efectos y las circunstancias que acompañan a la emoción. Abhinavagupta sabía muy bien que la
emoción, precisamente a causa de su emotividad, no es apta para el consumo estético. Las “emociones ordinarias” son eficazmente placenteras o dolorosas y provocan reacciones de aceptación o rechazo, mientras que la “emoción estética”, aun cuando se arrope con el manto de las lágrimas, es siempre “deleitable”. Abhinavagupta contestó de una forma muy estructurada a una pregunta clave de la estética occidental: ¿Cómo se suscita la emoción (estética)? No podemos entrar aquí en los detalles de esta respuesta, pero una de las conclusiones de Abhinavagupta nos atañe directamente. Como ya hemos dicho, la función poética del lenguaje convierte una emoción ordinaria, es decir, una pasión, en una emoción estética y la emoción estética es, por decirlo de alguna manera, el reverso de la pasión. El nombre de esta emoción estética en sánscrito es *rasa*, que significa literalmente “sabor, zumo, esencia”. El alambique de la poesía destila la emoción ordinaria y nos la devuelve convertida en su zumo o esencia: el licor del *rasa*. La ingestión de este licor produce el asombro estético (*camatkāra*). Para Abhinavagupta, la naturaleza de esta *delectatio* es extraordinaria, la palabra que él utiliza es *alaukika* (lit. no-mundana), ya que la percepción del *rasa* no transita por los caminos ordinarios del conocimiento (la percepción, la inferencia, la autoridad verbal, etc.), sino a través de un sendero epistemológico exclusivo. Y puesto que para Abhinavagupta, al igual que para la mayoría de los pensadores indios, la quintaesencia de la realidad es precisamente el Gozo Absoluto, la experiencia estética es gozosa porque nos revela momentáneamente la naturaleza de esta realidad última.

La idea básica que subyace a esta proposición es tan conocida en el contexto indio como en el occidental, aunque en el primero su presencia se haga más conspicua. El mundo en el que vivimos es la representación de una realidad con mayúsculas y se encuentra por lo tanto a cierta distancia de esa realidad inefable. El mundo es reflejo, el mundo es lenguaje y, por lo tanto, engaño, en tanto en cuanto no puede reproducir con absoluta fidelidad la copia original, esa trascendencia inabarcable. El discurso poético es engañoso y torcido, hace un uso constante de la exageración y de las semejanzas contradictorias, y es por lo tanto el engaño de un engaño que paradójicamente nos hace vislumbrar el esplendor de una realidad sin nombre.
Dice Octavio Paz en *El mono gramático*:

El poeta no es el que nombra las cosas, sino el que disuelve sus nombres, el que descubre que las cosas no tienen nombre y que los nombres con que las llamamos no son suyos. La crítica del paraíso se llama lenguaje: abolición de los nombres propios; la crítica del lenguaje se llama poesía: los nombres se adelgazan hasta la transparencia, la evaporación. En el primer caso, el mundo se vuelve lenguaje; en el segundo el lenguaje se convierte en mundo. Gracias al poeta el mundo se queda sin nombres. Entonces, por un instante, podemos verlo tal cual es –en azul adorable. (Paz, 1988: 96-97)

Y añade más adelante:

...el camino de la escritura poética se resuelve en la abolición de la escritura: al final nos enfrenta a una realidad indecible. La realidad que revela la poesía y aparece detrás del lenguaje –esa realidad visible sólo por la anulación del lenguaje en que consiste la operación poética– es literalmente insoportable y enloquecedora. Al mismo tiempo sin la visión de esa realidad ni el hombre es hombre ni el lenguaje es lenguaje. La poesía nos alimenta y nos aniquila, nos da la palabra y nos condena al silencio (113-114)

A partir del capítulo 18 abundan en *El mono gramático* las reflexiones sobre la poesía y el lenguaje. A continuación intento recoger y esquematizar algunas de las ideas principales esbozadas por Octavio Paz en esos capítulos:

1) “El paraíso está regido por una gramática ontológica: las cosas y los seres son sus nombres y cada nombre es propio” (96). La gramática ontológica equivale a la naturaleza inocente antes de la expulsión del paraíso terrenal: el reino de los nombres propios. A esta gramática ontológica se le contrapone la gramática propiamente lingüística que corresponde a la naturaleza caída: el reino en donde impera la arbitrariedad del signo. La convención humana se ha vuelto ahora la medida del mundo y el mundo se confunde con su percepción humana.

2) La doble naturaleza del lenguaje: a) lenguaje lingüístico o simplemente lenguaje, que es a su vez la crítica del paraíso y b) lenguaje poético: la crítica del lenguaje se llama poesía que no es sino una forma de lenguaje, “la poesía es número, proporción, medida: lenguaje –sólo que es un lenguaje vuelto sobre sí mismo y que se devora y se anula para que aparezca lo otro, lo sin medida, el basamento vertiginoso, el fundamento abismal de la medida. El reverso del lenguaje” (114).
A esta doble naturaleza le corresponde un doble movimiento: a) El lenguaje es distancia, “hunde sus raíces en ese mundo pero transforma sus jugos y reacciones en signos y símbolos” (*ibid*). Es escritura en busca de su significado. El lenguaje expele sentido y a continuación corre tras él. El lenguaje está en un continuo fluir. El lenguaje es movimiento y b) el lenguaje es también el recurso contra esa distancia, ya que el lenguaje puede devorarse a sí mismo. Se trata en este caso de un lenguaje que no fluye sino que esta presente –es lenguaje inmóvil que no va a ninguna parte. También se equipara el lenguaje con la lectura, la disolución del texto y con la expulsión del sentido por la escritura.

A este doble movimiento le corresponden sendos destinos. Al ser un movimiento de evolución e involución, es natural que el punto de partida de uno sea el punto de llegada del otro y viceversa. Para el primer tipo de movimiento, que es camino, que es escritura, el destino es la captación del sentido. Pero el lenguaje poético no es camino sino tiempo cristalizado. “La poesía no quiere saber qué hay al final del camino; concibe el texto como una serie de estratos traslúcidos en cuyo interior las distintas partes–las distintas corrientes verbales y semánticas–, al entrelazarse o desenlazarse, reflejarse o anularse, producen momentáneas configuraciones. La poesía busca, se contempla, se funde y se anula en las cristalizaciones del lenguaje” (134). El fin del camino es la búsqueda del sentido. Pero el lenguaje poético no busca el fin, ni el sentido.

Finalmente, tenemos también en este texto la doble perspectiva del lenguaje. La perspectiva de la poesía es simultánea o convergente, en contraposición a la perspectiva lineal o divergente, centrífuga, del lenguaje ordinario.

Dichas o escritas, las palabras avanzan y se inscriben una detrás de otra en su espacio propio: la hoja de papel, el muro de aire. Van de aquí para allá, trazan un camino: transcurren, son tiempo. Aunque no cesan de moverse de un punto a otro y así dibujan una línea horizontal o vertical (según la índole de la escritura), desde otra perspectiva, la simultánea o convergente, que es la de la poesía, las frases que componen el texto
aparecen como grandes bloques inmóviles y transparentes: el texto no transcurre, el lenguaje cesa de fluir (133).

3) El poeta, al disolver los nombres, muestra el mundo tal cual es.
4) La visión poética es sin embargo fugaz.
5) La visión de la realidad que revela la poesía es aterradora porque carece de medida, pero al mismo tiempo es también por eso fascinante.
6) La equivalencia ontológica entre la identidad que revela la poesía y el mundo fenoménico se expresa por el lenguaje ordinario. “El cuerpo es siempre un más allá del cuerpo” (123) dice Octavio Paz: “La poesía busca, se contempla, se funde y se anula en las cristalizaciones del lenguaje. Apariciones, metamorfosis, volatilizaciones, precipitaciones de presencias. Esas configuraciones son tiempo cristalizado: aunque están en perpetuo movimiento, dan siempre la misma hora—la hora del cambio. Cada una de ellas contiene a las otras, cada una está en las otras: el cambio es sólo la repetida y siempre distinta metáfora de la identidad” (134). Y añade nuestro autor más adelante: “Ilusión de la inmovilidad, espejismo del uno: la identidad está vacía; es una cristalización y en sus entrañas transparentes recomienza el movimiento de la analogía” (135).

Hablando de cristalizaciones me gustaría remarcar el modo significativo en que Octavio Paz escoge sus metáforas. En El mono gramático, Octavio Paz contempla a menudo el lenguaje como vegetación en crecimiento. En este sentido, lo opuesto al lenguaje como vegetación no es el desierto o el páramo estéril, sino el cristal de cuarzo. Ciertamente, el cristal es tan yermo como un terreno baldío, la única diferencia es que el cristal es translúcido, luminoso y contiene por lo tanto la semilla de todo desarrollo posterior: la clorofila está todavía ausente, pero no la luz.

De entre todos estos puntos que hemos destacado, todos, menos uno, corresponden muy de cerca a las ideas sostenidas por Abhinavagupta y por la escuela Trika del shivaismo de Cachemira. Echaremos un rápido vistazo a esta situación:
1) La gramática ontológica corresponde al tercer nivel de la palabra, el lenguaje que ve (*pasyantī*) o la voz de la intuición que internamente revela el significado de las palabras y externamente el de los objetos denotados (Dyczkowski, 1989:196). Aunque en este texto utilizo la palabra “lenguaje”, nos encontramos aquí evidentemente más allá del ámbito lingüístico. En este lenguaje natural, tal y como fue descrito por A. Avalon en su libro *The Garland of Letters*, las palabras son las cosas y las cosas son las palabras, ya que la palabra es el sonido sutil que emiten las distintas energías del objeto en el momento de su formación. No es un lenguaje onomatopéyico, pues la onomatopeya es el sonido externo que produce un objeto en contacto con otro objeto. El nombre natural reproduce la estructura interna de lo nombrado. Pronunciar el nombre equivale a convocar las energías que entran en la formación de dicho objeto y por lo tanto a manifestarlo. Para la tradición india, el lenguaje natural se desarrolla en la esfera causal del universo, no está compuesto por sonidos toscos como los del lenguaje articulado y no puede ser escuchado por la oreja humana ordinaria.

Es muy interesante analizar el recorrido asociativo que culmina en la formulación de esta gramática ontológica por parte de Octavio Paz. El punto de partida es la realidad exterior, concretamente la percepción indiferenciada de la arboleda en el crepúsculo. Esta percepción indiferenciada (*nirvikalpa-pratyakṣa*) ha sido convenientemente clasificada por los filósofos indios pertenecientes a la escuela del *nyāya* y representa la primera etapa de la percepción en el sentido ordinario del término. Cuando los sentidos entran en contacto con el objeto, éstos aprehenden en primer lugar su categoría como sustancia, es decir su “existencialidad pura y libre de atributos”. No sólo no se perciben sus cualidades como objeto individual perteneciente a una especie, sino que tampoco se percibe el universal que determina su especie. Es decir: el cántaro aparece simplemente como “algo que es” sin la noción genérica del cántaro. Dice Octavio Paz:

> La arboleda se ha ennegrecido y se ha vuelto un gigantesco amontonamiento de sacos de carbón abandonados no se sabe por quién ni por qué en mitad del campo. Una realidad bruta que no dice nada excepto que es (pero ¿qué es?) y que a nada se parece... (134)

A continuación, Octavio Paz se da cuenta de que la comparación de una percepción indiferenciada es simplemente una contradicción debido a su carencia de cualidades, e
inmediatamente rectifica poniendo como excusa para su metáfora la relación entre la improbabilidad de los sacos de carbón y la ininteligibilidad de la arboleda. A su entender la ininteligibilidad le viene de su exceso de realidad, es decir: el hecho de que en este tipo de percepción se perciba sólo el ser del objeto, pero no los atributos entendidos como imposiciones limitativas sobre esa existencia o realidad bruta. Esta realidad excesiva la hace irreducible a otras realidades, lo que le lleva a afirmar la particularidad irreconciliable del objeto. Cuando esta particularidad irreconciliable se traslada del eje espacial al temporal, el resultado es que el objeto cambia a cada instante, ya que esta particularidad se aplica a cada uno de los momentos sucesivos. Esto hace que Octavio Paz caiga circunstancialmente en la tentación budista del “todo es momentáneo”. Pero Octavio Paz no se satisface con esta postura y recurre a las impresiones de la percepción ordinaria para rebatirla. Octavio Paz considera que el objeto no puede ser sólo momentáneo, pues en instantes sucesivos la arboleda conserva siempre su “arboleidad”. Esto le enfrenta con un dilema: la arboleda posee una realidad propia y al mismo tiempo queda englobada dentro del concepto universal de “arboleda”. Su existencia única le da derecho a un nombre propio, pero el pertenecer a una especie le arrebata ese mismo derecho. La primera opción corresponde al paraíso o al mundo platónico de las ideas y el segundo caso pertenece al mundo terrenal o a los universales encarnados en sus objetos. Así, aunque el punto de partida es plenamente platónico, el punto de llegada como veremos más adelante se acerca mucho al del shivaismo de Cachemira que reclama para sí la realidad efectiva de esos objetos individuales.

La doble dirección del lenguaje es conocida en la India desde la época del Rgveda. En el caso del shivaismo de Cachemira, y desde el punto de vista de la práctica espiritual, el lenguaje revertido capaz de deshacer el embrollo lingüístico se identifica con el mantra. Abhinavagupta es más preciso y atribuye estas propiedades al lenguaje poético. Aquí señalaremos tan sólo que tanto el mantra como la poesía son formas de lenguaje revertido porque en ambos casos los significantes no tienen una denotación fija, es decir son plurisignificativos. En ambos casos su poder de connotación se expande enormemente, lo que permite ir más allá de la literalidad de los fenómenos descritos y nadar contra la corriente (cf. Dyczkowski, 200).
Para Abhinavagupta, la inspiración (*pratibhā*) que permite al poeta el desenmascaramiento de las argucias del lenguaje está directamente relacionada con Parā Vāc o la palabra suprema que no es sino la luminosa y vibrante conciencia del ser puro (Masson & Patwardhan, 1985: 13): Es el estado salmodiar primordial antes de la creación. Ese rumor del verbo es la esencia de todas las cosas. Pero para Abhinavagupta la ligazón directa entre el poeta inspirado y la Palabra Suprema hace que el primero se convierta en una especie de demiurgo paralelo capaz de recrear mundos inusitados que fascinen a su audiencia. Está fascinación es al mismo tiempo liberadora, pues está enraizada en la conciencia pura del ser. De hecho, se trata de una noción muy antigua: en la Edad de Oro, el poeta, el bardo, es siempre un visionario.

No he podido encontrar referencias explícitas a la brevedad de la experiencia estética en Abhinavagupta, pero todo hace suponer que para Abhinavagupta esta fugacidad está sobrentendida como una de las distinciones entre la experiencia estética y el trance místico. Para Octavio Paz, la visión de la realidad sin medida fruto de esta experiencia estética ha de ser necesariamente momentánea para que sea tolerable para el hombre. Creo que Abhinavagupta opinaría que solo el yogui es capaz de soportar la visión prolongada de esa realidad sin medida y que para el hombre ordinario que no se ha liberado de sus pasiones la visión de la realidad tiene que ser necesariamente momentánea.

La equivalencia ontológica entre la realidad trascendental y el mundo fenoménico es una de las coincidencias más interesantes entre ambos autores. Para el shivaísmo de Cachemira, la no-dualidad es entendida como una coextensión de la diversidad y de la identidad. Ambas quedan igualmente comprendidas en el seno de lo absoluto. La ignorancia del espíritu no es sino la ignorancia de la verdadera naturaleza de la materia (cf. Dyczkowski, 37-40). Sin embargo, y nos encontramos aquí ante una discrepancia fundamental, Octavio Paz muestra también una clara tendencia a identificar, tal como lo hacen algunas escuelas budistas, esta realidad trascendente con el vacío (Bhattacharya, 1990: 19-24).
Finalmente, para Octavio Paz, “la realidad que revela la poesía y que aparece detrás del lenguaje… es literalmente insoportable y enloquecedora” (113) nada más alejado de los presupuestos de Abhinavagupta que concibe esa realidad como una masa gozosa y radiante de consciencia pura. De hecho, creo que ésta es la divergencia más notable entre los dos y Octavio Paz hace hincapié en ella: “Y esa visión nos abate, nos enloquece; si las cosas son pero no tienen nombre: sobre la tierra no hay medida alguna” (97) añadiendo éste también más adelante: “la noche me salva. En otras palabras: no podemos ver sin peligro de enloquecer” (100). De hecho, esta realidad insoportable y enloquecedora que revela la poesía se equipara con ese recinto vacío que simboliza el claro del bosque en el cuadro de Dadd: el lugar de la aparición que es, simultáneamente, el lugar de la desaparición, un templo de la nada erigido en honor de la inquietud obsesiva de una eterna espera: “entre el nunca y el siempre anida la angustia con sus mil patas y su ojo único” (106).

Me parece a mí que esta diferencia entre ambos significados es sintomáticamente cultural. Por un lado, la tradición india corteja y adora a esa realidad innombrable. Por el otro lado, la tradición occidental ha desconfiado siempre del absoluto inmensurable, compartiendo el temor a perder la medida de las cosas y por lo tanto el lugar en el mundo, la noción ética y la eficacia de la acción. En este sentido, Octavio Paz ejemplifica bien el dilema del hombre moderno: angustia ante esa realidad anterior al lenguaje, pero también una fascinación que no siempre encuentra el modo de expresarse:

Y a medida que la noche se acumula en mi ventana, yo siento que no soy de aquí, sino de allá, de ese mundo que acaba de borrarse y aguarda la resurrección del alba. De allá vengo, de allá venimos todos y allá hemos de volver. Fascinación por el otro lado, seducción por la vertiente no humana del universo: perder el nombre, perder la medida (100).

En El mono gramático se combinan con mucho acierto y en una prosa poética notablemente fluida tanto las descripciones muy luminosas de la realidad exterior, como las reflexiones igualmente cristalinas que desmenuzan la actividad mental del propio autor. En este sentido, el texto se encuentra en una ondulación continua entre estas dos
formas de componer. El paisaje externo proporciona el estímulo para que la escritura se interna por el dominio mental del autor y al mismo tiempo el paisaje interno se transforma, las ideas se vuelven árboles, las frases lianas, hasta que la conciencia emerge de nuevo a la objetividad del mundo exterior en el estado de vigilia. Este vaivén entre el adentro y el afuera es propio de la conciencia, pero Octavio Paz consigue algo más al convertir la oscilación en un recurso estilístico: este trasiego continuo de idas y venidas consigue borrar -o por lo menos atenuar- la frontera que separa ambos mundos. Se diría que el texto busca, al igual que el santón de la página 69, “la ecuanimidad, el punto en donde cesa la oposición entre la visión interior y la exterior entre lo que vemos y lo que imaginamos” (69). En El mono gramático, Octavio Paz convierte la especulación poética en poesía y la descripción lírica en filosofía, aunando con gran acierto sus dos vertientes más conocidas: la de poeta y la de ensayista. Pienso que a Abhinavagupta le hubiese complacido enormemente esta síntesis que encarna efectivamente una de sus grandes preocupaciones: la reconcileación entre la figura del poeta y la del filósofo.

**Obras Citadas**


THE CLASSICAL MUSIC CULTURE OF SOUTH INDIA

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Received: 16-07-2013
Accepted: 07-01-2014

ABSTRACT
The paper sketches briefly the cultural and political context against which one may study the classical South Indian concert called the Kutcheri. It goes on to trace the development of the modern concert and then concentrates on the devotional poetry of Tyagaraja who is the foremost composer in the tradition. The paper demonstrates the centrality of Bhakti (devotion) as an emotion and its role in creating a link between the composer, the singer, the song and the audience.

KEYWORDS: Kutcheri; Bharatanatyam; National discourse; Bhakti (devotion); Tyagaraja’s songs

RESUMEN La cultura musical clásica del sur de la India

El artículo esboza brevemente el contexto cultural y político en el que se puede analizar el concierto de música clásica del sur de la India conocido como Kutcheri. Rastrea el desarrollo del concierto moderno y se centra en la poesía devota de Tyagaraja que es el más importante compositor en esta tradición. El artículo constata la importancia de Bhakti (devoción) entendida como emoción y su papel en la creación de un vínculo entre el compositor, el/la cantante, la canción y el público.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Kutcheri; Bharatanatyam; discurso nacional; Bhakti (devoción); las canciones de Tyagaraja

The South Indian music concert is called a Kutcheri, and its present form is more or less linked to the founding of the Music Academy in Chennai (then Madras) in 1927. The Academy organizes an annual conference which has become world-famous and a much looked forward to social event. Even those who are not particularly musical like to attend these concerts as they have become an important marker of social status. The music season in this institution and elsewhere in Chennai has an emphasis on South Indian cuisine and the display of various arts and crafts. It is therefore also a commercial event. Thus both the professional musician and the layperson find something in this season to look forward to.

A strict and methodical organization of the music concerts is another feature of the Music Academy event and no musician will take more time or sing less than the allotted time. Thus there is a pressure on the musician to fine-hone the concert and to time it scrupulously.
Usually a concert is about two and a half hours, a far cry from the more expansive musical feasts of the Courts and temples in an earlier day. Karnatak music is to be distinguished from Hindustani music, the latter forming the North Indian Classical tradition. The term Karnatak also has strong connections with the state of Karnataka from where the chief Karnatak composer, Purandaradasa, came. Purandaradasa was responsible for systematizing the basic lessons from simple notes to *gitams* (short easily memorizable verses) and *kirtanas* (more elaborate compositions with at least three verses) and he provided the basis for the efflorescence in South Indian music which took place in the nineteenth century. So the concert proper is a modern variation or avatar of the larger and longer musical feats of an earlier day. It is also a modulation from the *Bhajana* (devotional group singing) tradition which is still alive and vigorous and which is known for its accelerating rhythms, naming of the Lord and devotion tending towards enthusiasm and frenzy. The classical Kutcheri on the other hand establishes a strict frame work of rhythm within which permutations and combinations are encouraged, the beat or *tala* remaining the same and constant. The Kutcheri then is a formal and stylized version of what used to exist prior to the establishment of the Music Academy and the Sabhas (organizations which promote music and musicians and organize events) and in its two or two and a half hours’ duration a severe classicism is demanded from both the musicians and their audiences. There is a clear and well recognized way in which a Kutcheri may be organized (PGV Ramanan & Mohan Ramanan, in Marathe and Mukherjee, 1986). One begins with a *varnam* which is an exercise to get the voice, tone and rhythm under control. Then follow *kritis* or *kirtanas* (a stylized composition) apostrophizing one or other Deity. A concert begins invariably with an invocation to Ganapati, the remover of obstacles, and then goes on to detail the qualities of other Deities like Kartikeya, the commander-in-chief of the army of the Gods, the brother of Ganapati, both of whom are children of Ambal, the Mother Goddess and Siva, the Destroyer. Then follow compositions on Vishnu, the Preserver, and His manifestations such as Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana* and Krishna, the great philosopher hero of the *Mahabharata*, and so on. After the bulk of these *kritis* have been rendered along with *Raga Alapana* (melodic variations of a limited number of notes which are distinct from other combinations of notes) and *Neraval* (elaboration of a phrase from the *kriti* to bring out not only the poetic excellence of the phrasing but also to demonstrate the musician’s imaginative grasp of melody and rhythm) and *Swaram* (rhythmic variations of notes with all kinds of mathematical calculations getting musical expression), we have the major piece which is the *RTP* or *Ragam, Tanam and Pallavi*. The *Raga* chosen for exhaustive elaboration...
is the main Raga of the concert, while other Ragas chosen are detailed less comprehensively. The main Raga is sung for roughly double or triple the time taken for the elaboration of minor Ragas; the Tanam (musical rendering of the word Ananta - which means eternal in Sanskrit - in rhythmic variations) is sung, and a complicated rhythmic exercise called a Pallavi is demonstrated. After this we have the Tukadas (literally fragments and short compositions), the Javalis and the Padams (both forms usually associated with dance and celebrating divine love), but also part of a music concert. Then comes the mangalam or auspicious conclusion.

A Karnatak musician has to be proficient in Raga (melody), Bhava (feeling and mature handling of devotional experience) and Tala (Rhythm) and know at least five or six languages which are the basis for kritis. Knowing what you are singing is important and enhances the value of the concert. Above all devotion is basic and the alpha, beta and gamma of Karnatak music is Bhakti or devotion. The Kritis themselves are part of the Bhakti literature of India and a composer like Tyagaraja, on whom I shall say more a little later, was a great devotee of his favourite God, Rama, the hero of the Ramayana. In the compositions we see every mood and tone of voice, every inflection of devotion and every attitude of the devotee from grief at the loss of contact with the Deity to ecstasy at union. Suffice it to say here that Karnatak music is a well developed tradition and the musical Trinity of Tyagaraja, Dikshithar and Syama Sastri are at the centre with musicians and critics enabling this to happen. It is canon formation and without for a moment questioning the undoubted artistic merit of the Trinity it is necessary to historicize things and remember that the nationalist movement which was strong at the time appropriated the arts for nation building and in identity formation. The mythification of the Trinity needs to be seen as a religious exercise calculated to promote a sense of reverence for hoary tradition and by implication Hindu India.

The trajectory has been, as Lakshmi Subramanian points out, from the Tanjore Court to the modern Sabha or the Proscenium stage (Subramanian, 2011). In the Court the musician sang under patronage and was well rewarded for his efforts. A class of performers in music and dance called the Devadasis, dismissed by the British ruling class as Nautch girls (derogatory for dancer), was also prominent in temples, but nationalist sentiment, combined with the moral posture of the British colonial masters, brought in legislation to ban Nautch and the practice of dedicating women to the Deity. The fear that Devadasis encouraged immorality and prostitution was responsible for this nationalist counter-attack (Saskia Kersenboom, 1987; Soneji, 2012). The evolution of the Karnatak Kutcheri must be seen in the context of the sanitizing zeal of the reformers. Dance which was originally the preserve of the Devadasi community and called Sadr modulated in the twentieth century into Bharatanatyam. As the
term suggests it is the dance of Bharata (the Hindu name for India), based on the principles of the aesthetician Bharata’s *Natyasastra*. From the overt body consciousness and emphasis on *Srngara* or Beauty in *Sadr* the emphasis was now on *Bhakti* or devotion and a stylized classical body language shorn of overt sensuality. It must be noted that Beauty and Devotion are in a dynamic mix in *Bharatanatyam* and should not be seen as binary opposites, but the emphasis was clearly on Beauty being subsumed under Devotion (Sriram, 2007; Leela and Samson, 2010). The connection between the *Kutcheri* and *Bharatanatyam* is close and the development of *Sadr* into *Bharatanatyam* and the Bhajana tradition into the Kutcheri may be seen as parallel phenomena. Both participate in national discourse. When we speak, as we will do now in this essay, about the Kutcheri, it will be necessary to remember this piece of historical sanitization and recognize the form with all its beauty as having elided the woman and the subaltern and foregrounded the Brahminical. The Brahmins are the intellectuals in Hindu society and they are at the top of the caste structure of Hindu society. When we say Brahminical we allude to their role in keeping the scriptural tradition intact and in our context anyone who preserves the essence of the artistic tradition is Brahminical. The *Kutcheri* was for a long time the preserve of the male and dominated by the Brahmins. But the subaltern element of women and male players of the wind instrument, the Nagaśwaram, broke through caste taboos to set up a tradition of their own. This was made possible by the likes of Bangalore Nagarathnamma, who played a great role in enabling women artists to break the Brahminical male hegemony. One needs to also laud the work of eminent women artists like M.S. Subbalakshmi, M.L. Vasantakumari and D.K. Pattamal who broke through to enter a male bastion and took it by storm (T.J.S. George, 2004 and Indra Menon, 1989). Their careers enabled a large number of women to take up a career in music, and women performers now probably outnumber male ones at the Sabhas and at the annual *Aradhana* (observance of the anniversary of the death) of the saint Tyagaraja in Tiruvariyar. Similarly non-Brahmin players of the Nagaśwaram (a wind instrument associated with the lower-caste barber community) are now permitted to play inside the *Samadhi* (place of burial), which for a long time was not allowed by Brahminical orthodoxy (Sriram, 2007). The concert today bears the mark of these elisions and these inclusions. The *Padams* and *Javalis*, which were the Devadasi forte, are now sung as *Tukadas* at the end of a concert as light pieces after the heavy classical fare has been exhausted. During the days of the *Sadr* and the Devadasis they were central to the repertoire.
I shall briefly now consider the Trinity of Karnatak music, which as noted is central to the musical tradition. True, there was an efflorescence of Karnatak music in the nineteenth century (Ramanujachari & Raghavan: 1958). Of the Trinity comprising Tyagaraja, Dikshithar and Syama Sastri, the most popular is Tyagaraja. His compositions are usually – to quote William Wordsworth - a ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’ and he moves the listener both with his lyrical beauty and the intensity of his devotion. In Hindu culture one chooses a favourite manifestation of God and worships Him in a variety of ways. Tyagaraja’s Ishta (favourite) Deity was Lord Rama, the iconic hero of the epic Ramayana. In Dikshithar’s compositions, mostly in classical and learned Sanskrit, there is a Miltonic grandeur and the architectonics of a Dikshithar composition resemble the great temple gopurams (towers) of the South of India (Ramanan in Narasimhaiah, 1994). In his compositions we see emotion recollected in tranquility, while in Tyagaraja, as we have suggested above, there is a Wordsworthian spontaneity. When we come to Syama Sastri we see a beautiful combination of Tyagaraja’s emotional appeal and Dikshithar’s classicism. Sastri usually pleads with Kamakshi, his Ishta Devata (favourite Deity) who is the Mother Goddess of the South Indian pilgrimage centre Kanchi. He is the child pleading before the Mother. I have already suggested that the apotheosis of the Trinity is coterminous with the formation of the Music Academy. The alteration of Sadr into Bharatnatyam is linked to developments in politics where the Nationalists and the Moderates between them were contending for supremacy and finally Gandhi came out successful as the undisputed leader of Indian nationalism. It is not an accident that M.S. Subbalakshmi was a protégé of C.R. (Rajagopalachari), the foremost disciple of Mahatma Gandhi in South India, and even sang in later years at the UN a song composed by Rajaji, as C.R. is called. It is also significant that the Tamil Isai movement promoted the compositions of the fiery patriot Subramania Bharathi and all three women singers – M.S. Subbalakshmi, D.K. Pattammal and M.L. Vasanta Kumari – sang his compositions. Musicians were, in a subtle way, drafted into the nationalist cause and it is reasonable to suggest that both the music Kutcheri and the foregrounding of the Trinity had much to do both with aesthetics and with representing the Nation.

Having put these political concerns behind us, we may now concentrate primarily on an exploration of the aesthetic qualities of Karnatak music and in particular the Bhakti tradition. Bhakti or devotion, as I have said, is central to South Indian music and Beauty gets subsumed under it. Indeed one could say that one’s appreciation of the Beauty of a composition is in direct proportion to the Bhakti in it or the intensity of it. The composer is a Bhakta (devotee), the singer who sings the composition is a Bhakta, transmitting the Bhakti of
the composer and the listener is also in a Bhakti-filled mood receiving the musical experience which will not be complete until all three – composer, singer, listener - are part of this discourse of Bhakti.

Bhakti is a psychological category and in the communicative act which a Karnatak Kutcheri is, both the singer and the listener, also called a Rasika, are going through a psychological process. The singer internalizes the compositions of, say, the Trinity and arrives at a spiritual state, then transmits this state to the Rasika (literally one who absorbs the Rasa or essence of the music) and leaves him or her in a state ‘calm of mind, all passion spent.’ Karnatak music is from beginning to end spiritual in its dimensions and is closely linked to religious devotion. Now Bhakti can be designated an emotion for the purposes of this paper. When India’s Adi kavi, or First poet, Valmiki, composed the Ramayana it is said that he was moved by the spectacle of the killing of a Krauncha bird by a Nishada hunter and the sight of the mate in grief moved the poet to curse the hunter in a particular rhythm. This we know is the Anushtup meter and the entire poem, it is said, was the direct result of Valmiki internalizing the rhythm and giving expression to his sorrow (Soka). From Soka comes Sloka (verse). After all it is the poet Shelley who says that “our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts.” In the context of the spiritual process, is there anything more excruciating and sorrowful than separation from God? Devotees have given varied expression to this. Karnatak music is part of that spiritual quest for oneness with God and the condition of this separation from God is the warp and woof of the compositions of the greatest composers. In Karnatak music the emotion of Bhakti is central, and in what follows we will attempt an exploration of how Karnatak music not only expresses emotion from the point of view of the composer and the musician but also affects the emotional nature of the Bhakta (devotee), the listener or the recipient of the message in music. It is a three-way process. We have the composer — say a Thyagaraja or a Muthuswami Dikshithar or a Syama Sastry or an Annamaya. They have, along with many other composers, given us a repertoire of Kritis (compositions) which keeps a musician busy throughout his or her life. The musician learns the kritis by the Vedic method of Sravana Bhakti (listening with devotion) and internalizes the nuances and beauties of the Kriti, which is made up of Sahitya or a core of words which have signification, set in a Tala or rhythm (we have a minimum of 32 rhythms with permutations and combinations amongst them) and a Raga or a melody which is a strict demarcation of the notes which may be used and the nuances or Gamakas which the musicians may allow themselves. As Muthuswami Dikshithar put it in his Kalyani kriti, “Bhaja Re” music must
have “Bhava, Raga and Tala”. That is to say it must have an emotional mood, a melody in which to express that mood, and a rhythmic pattern which will give structure to the composition. Free verse is unknown to Karnatak composers and Tala is akin to metre. As Coleridge and other theorists have put it, metre is meant to control the emotion and give it significant form by aestheticizing what otherwise would be inchoate.

For a moment put yourself in the composer’s place. You are affected by the beauty of the Lord, you recognize your affinity to Him, and you also know that you are separated from Him and that your purpose in life is to seek Him and to merge with Him. You compose a kriti. Here is one:

_Emani Vegintune Sri Rama Rama_
_Emani Vegintu Nentani Sairintu_
_Na Muddu Devudu Nanu Basenayyaayyo_
_Palinci Lalinci Palumaru Kaugulinci Telinci_
_Nanu Para desy Seya Doceno_
_Adina Muccatana Dantarangamu Ninda_
_Nidu Ledani Yunti Nin Daka Sarivarilo_
_Edabayaka Tyagaraju Nelu Sri harini Dolli_
_Badalikarcci Naceyi Battinadi Talcucu_

(Ramanujachari & Raghavan, 1958: 477-78)

This is Tyagaraja’s kriti in the Huseni Raga set to Adi Tala. It says: “Oh Rama! How can I live and how long am I to endure it? My beloved Lord has forsaken me. After treating me so long with endearing affection, embracing me often, and cheering me up, have you now thought of abandoning me as a stranger? The sweet words you spoke to me and the way in which you previously took me by the hand and rid me of my troubles, have so filled that heart that I have till now considered myself unequalled.” (Ramanujachari & Raghavan, 1958: 478).

The circumstances of Saint Tyagaraja’s life may be briefly enumerated. He was born in 1767 and mastered the art of music from an early age. For our purposes it is apposite to note that Tyagaraja was moving around what is now the Kaveri region in the Tanjavur district of today’s Tamil Nadu state, where he internalized a mode of Bhakti which had become prominent there – the tradition begun by Narayana Tirtha, Sadasiva Brahmendra and Bodhendra. They chanted the Lord’s name, and it is called Nama Siddhanta and is considered as the most potent means of realizing and remembering God. Tyagaraja also learnt from the
reformist zeal of Purandaradasa, called the Pitamaha or Grandsire of Karnatak music. In this tradition the strain of Rama Bhakti, derived from Ramananda, Tulsi Das and Bhadrachala Ramadas, also influenced him, as did also the various Bhajana Mathas (organizations where devotional music was sung) dotted all over the Tanjavur area which popularized the Nama-Sankirtana and Rama Bhakti. The Hari Katha, derived from the Maratha country but now domiciled in Tanjavur, also had its impact on Tyagaraja. Being the heir to this rich tradition of Bhakti, the emotional makeup of the composer made him ready for the trials of the spirit. It is in this context that one reads the Kriti just quoted.

Tyagaraja in the piece goes through several emotional nuances. There is the admission that he has been close to his ideal Rama whom he had spoken to endearingly, thinking it would last. But it is not to be. He is a sinner and he has lost contact with the Lord. He has to struggle and endure this separation. He even scolds and points an accusing finger at Rama saying that he is uncaring, insensitive and cruel. Tyagaraja can take these liberties (he is even more candid in other kritis) and he feels the separation from Godhead keenly. His pride that he had exclusive contact with Rama is now punctured and he gives expression to what Christian mystics term the ‘Dark Night of the Soul’ in his closing lines. It is by all accounts a moving piece of poetry. And this is the first point I want to make. Karnatak music is not abstract and there is a strong base of Sahitya or text to make it concrete. First of all the musician rendering the composition will have to know the meaning of the song. The words are important and contribute to the emotional experience.

It is at this stage that the musician intuits the essential harmony between the Bhava or emotion which is sad, regretful and plaintive in the Kriti. The choice of the Raga Huseni in the kriti mentioned above seems appropriate because the rendition in that Raga of the Sahitya seems to harmonize. The Adi Tala also gives the necessary length and duration for the exploration of the mood and the meaning of the composition. Everything bespeaks integrity and organic unity with no distracting element of aporia to violate that integrity.

At this point it will be helpful to invoke the notion of Sahrdayata in Sanskrit aesthetic tradition The Kavi or composer expresses himself or herself in the full flow of a creative imagination at work. This is called Kavayitri Pratibha or creative imagination. The aesthetic emotion is internalized by the recipient or the listener. He or she has what is called Bhavayitri Pratibha or the responsive imagination. Now a listener who has this quality of the imagination clearly is a Sahrdaya or one who is after the heart of the singer, who in turn is after the heart of the composer. Thus a line of communication between the composer, the singer, the song
and the Rasika is set up and all stages in this communicative process are informed by the emotion of Bhakti.

Tyagaraja’s compositions express the full range of Bhakti. There is a ninefold division of Bhakti and Tyagaraja explores all nine. Devotion may be expressed according to the Narada Bhakti Sutras, a widely recognized treatise on devotion, in nine ways. These are: Sravanam (listening to the name of the Lord), Keertanam (singing His praise), Smaranam (remembering the Lord’s play and attributes), Paadasevanam (service of the divine feet), Archanam (worship), Vandanam (prostration), Daasyam (servitude), Sakhyam (friendship) and finally Atmanivedanam (self-surrender). A devotee can begin anywhere but the end of all devotion is atmanivedanam or self-surrender and total absorption in the Deity. Karnataka music, and Tyagaraja’s, moves through all these modes, but ultimately the singer and the listener, with the assistance of the composer, aim at self-transcendence and at obtaining a state of beatitude which subsume both beauty and devotion. Devotion and music, as the Seer Ganapathi Satchidananda says, go together.

All music has evolved out of Om, the mystic syllable which symbolizes the Absolute. To worship God through music is called Nadopasana. Nadopasana or Shabdopasana is a great meditation. It washes the mind of fears and evil thought and fills the mind with peace and tranquility. Bhojana (food) is for the development of the body, so is Bhajan (singing in praise of God) for the development of the soul. (Swamiji, nd).

Tyagaraja’s music may be understood in the context of this statement by Swamiji. In his compositions, while all the moods are developed or explained, this final absorption is the unifying thread linking all.

Thyagaraja, as I have pointed out elsewhere, is a mystic musician, and as I said, explores all nine modes of devotion (Ramanan, 2012). For him total identification with Lord Rama is the end to be desired. Separation brought on the despair which Christian mystics call the Dark Night of the Soul and when he realizes God he is ecstatic and in a state of beatitude. In several songs he has failed to realize this identity between the ‘I’ and ‘Thou’, the subject and the object. In one Kriti he despairs and in anguish to cries out:

Where has he hidden himself? When will
He have the mercy to come to me? (Ramanan 2013: 54)

And in his Goulipantu Kriti ‘Entapapinaiti’ he says:
Oh Rama! What a sinner have I become? What shall I do? How can I bear? Having once had darsan of Sri Hari the dispeller of all sorrows, can any one bear separation from him? Having treated me before with affection, has he now taken into his head to tease me with a deceitful mind? Was it ordered by Brahma that I should undergo suffering, abandoning my hopes? I do not find my beloved Lord. I have been regarding service to Him as my life’s sustenance. My fate has come to this. The Lord whom I used to worship with ecstatic love is not with me now.

(Ramanujachari & Raghavan 1958: 477).

Tyagaraja sees himself as bride to Rama’s husbandhood. This is in the great tradition of Bridal mysticism. He gives expression to it in ‘Eti Janma iti Ha’ in Raga Varali by saying:

Oh Rama! what a life is this? Why did I have it at all and how long am I to bear it? Life will be useless and the heart parched up, if it is not given to one to have frequent vision of the peerless and beautiful Lord and exchange of words with him, to see to one’s eyes’ content your chest with shining pearl necklace and your youthful face, and to embrace, to satiation of the swelling desire, you, who can sense others’ minds and delight in music. What is the life of one not blessed with your sight and whose heart is thereby parched up? (Ramanujachari & Raghavan 1958: 484).

Elsewhere Tyagaraja says:

Oh my Lord! Why is it that you do not talk to me? Is it fair that others should laugh at me? What is the reason for your being angry with me? I have always danced to your tune. ‘Palukavemi na Daivama’ (Raga Puranchandrika) (Ramanujachari & Raghavan 1958: 485) -

and finally, in yet another kriti, he says:

Oh Ramachandra! What else is there for me to aspire for when you take one by the hand and cast your benign look on me?
When my look and your look fit in with each other properly, who can know the happiness that I then will derive?

(Ramanujachari & Raghavan 1958: 487).

I shall conclude by quoting myself:

This brief exposition of Tyagaraja’s Bhakti mysticism, I trust, demonstrates how the ineffable spiritual state of mystic oneness gets musical expression in the Kritis of Tyagaraja. If that state is undifferentiated, then Tyagaraja lived in that state for long periods. We must, however, see the varied moods, modes and stages of Bhakti, in fact as the morphology of that undifferentiated state, indeed giving local habitation and a name to what otherwise would be ineffable, and because ineffable, ungraspable. Listening to Tyagaraja’s Kritis with devotion and reverence allows us lesser mortals to experience the mystical state, ever so slightly (Ramanan 2012: 55).

**WORKS CITED**


I didn’t know it then, but when my husband and I arrived in Manitoba in September 1966, we were two of the pioneers of the Indo-Canadian community, that numbered about fifty. All immigrants from Asia who came about the same time we did, were likewise pioneers, for Manitoba in the early 1960s was predominantly white and Eurocentric. There was a Chinatown in Winnipeg, as in most other cities, but it was small and stereotyped as though running a laundry was the only occupation the Chinese had. Over the last fifty years, each of Manitoba’s fifty plus ethnic communities has become three hundred times bigger and perhaps it is time to place on record some of the early steps in the growth of a community and the vast differences between then and now. Here, I will talk only about the community from India with a few anecdotes to spice up the reading.

This was before Canada got its own flag. We, the early immigrants, were pretty ignorant about our rights and responsibilities as landed immigrants, and Winnipeggers were even more ignorant about us. When someone came to our door to collect information for the electoral list, I said that perhaps I was not eligible to vote since I was born in India, and she heartily responded, “That is okay, dear, we all belong to the same mother country.” At the time I was hesitant to tell her that India had got rid of the British flag twenty years earlier. Today, We have Indo-Canadian elected members of the Legislature and school boards and such, and non-Indian members of the various political parties regularly visit our places of worship at election time to show their support for the community. However, our numbers in public offices is not large. We still seem to be in more traditional jobs. We could certainly do with more workers in the field of journalism, police force etc.

A majority of the fifty individuals were associated with the university, as students or faculty. There were a few school teachers and doctors, but no businessmen, not even anyone
running a spice-and-convenience store. Since the grocery stores – they were not called supermarkets – sold the spices so essential to Indian cooking in mini-size bottles that would have scarcely sufficed for a week’s meals, we quickly found out how to get one-pound spice jars sent by bus from a store in Vancouver, consignments that had to be picked up from the Bus Depot downtown. The first spice store opened in the early 1970s and one day I overheard the store-keeper advising a white customer who had come in because she had heard there were spices that could keep away ants from her vegetable beds. He sold her a bag of crushed red chilies saying that would surely keep away all unwanted creatures if sprinkled around the base of her beds or plants. My neighbour, an excellent gardener, still buys a jar of red-chili powder every spring for the same purpose.

At that time, Bangladesh was not yet born, and the handful of people from Pakistan and the fifty or so people from India saw themselves as from the same ethnic group. The community, though small, started developing various cultural wings as early as mid 1960s. The India Association was one of the earliest to sprout and we participated in the newly-started Folklorama, an annual festival of multiculturalism where various ethnic communities showcased their cultural heritage of music and dance at various centres across the city.

Today 15,000 of Winnipeg’s population of 700,000 trace their origins to south Asia. Not only are there separate organizations of Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and SriLankans, but various organizations formed by smaller linguistic groups such as the Punjabi, Gujarati, Malayali, Bengali, Tamil, Karnataka etc. The India Association has now lost its cohesive power to bring the community under one umbrella and its only significant work is towards the one-week annual event of organizing the India Pavilion at Folklorama. Perhaps this disintegration of a central body is peculiar to the Indian community and not seen in other ethnic communities. Perhaps it is due to the many major languages of India, and the fact that language, next to religion, seems to be the adhesive base of all groupings.

Whereas the university was at one time the place of work for the majority, today the professions range across the board, with entrepreneurial businesses having the largest population. Indeed, the Indo-Canadian Business Directory of 2012 lists 150 businesses owned or largely run by Indo-Canadians, ranging from Snow Removal to Real Estate, Auto-Repair to Wedding Planners. There are a dozen spice stores and a dozen restaurants, and as many beauty-salons, and clinics for alternate health-care.
In the 1960s, there were no places of worship for Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus. Today, there are eight gurudwaras, six mosques, four Hindu temples, and at least one Buddhist meeting place, and of course we have a great many Christians going to different churches. However, unlike the Koreans and Chinese, we do not seem to have any church that has a large membership from the community. Communal worship seems to be growing across all religious affiliations. Religion could become a divisive factor, but we are not there yet. Places of worship have been targeted by perpetrators of hate crime but such instances are few as of now.

In those early days, we of the Hindu community, celebrated various festivals in groups at our homes, while the main annual celebration of the festival of Deepavali was held at some community centre or church basement with a potluck dinner and songs and dances. Then, in the early 1970s, the Hindu Society of Manitoba was formed. Community members who were knowledgeable in the rituals got a license to officiate at weddings, and the temple was the site for the few weddings that took place.

Today, there is one or other special worship held at the main Hindu Temple every day. Customs and rituals that average Hindus have given up in India are practised conscientiously at these events, and the attendance is sizeable. As for wedding celebrations, they have been moved out to large banquet halls of five-star hotels, with special licenses to have the sacred fire lit in the banquet hall (the fire-crew on red-alert) and with the guest list going well beyond five hundred invitees on an average. This phenomenon really needs some sociological study. What makes immigrants take on practices that they might not have followed in India? What makes the bride and groom, one of whom is often not a Hindu, agree to these traditional rituals and lavish display of ostentation? Do they do it to satisfy their parents? Do the parents act out of some outmoded sense of “it has to be done this way?” Do the young people really feel any emotional attachment to the religious rituals? Or is it the Bollywood extravaganza of the affair that appeals to them. This is for sociologists to study.

In those days, immigration to Manitoba from India consisted of very well-educated people, fluent in English. But because we looked different, others assumed we did not know English. I had a friend from India who was single. She got friendly with another new immigrant (who was from Europe) who spoke no English at all, and they decided to go to Folklorama pavilions together. Whenever they were addressed by anyone, like the driver of the bus they took for instance, the other person assumed the white woman knew English and addressed her
rather than my friend. Also, it was always interesting to watch the expression on the listener’s face during my walks when I told any neighbour I taught English at the university.

Today, a great many Indo-Canadians, women mainly, speak no English at all, and never will. I have a friend who sells home-made Indian snacks and I regularly go to her place to pick up purchases, and we have long conversations with her speaking in Gujarati and me in Hindi. I don’t understand much of what she says and she too probably understands little of what I say! There are numerous government-subsidized agencies that teach English to immigrants who don’t know either of Canada’s official languages but where is the need to learn English – one can get by very comfortably because even in supermarkets, one only needs to see the picture on the packages to buy what one needs to.

In those early days, everyone knew everyone else in the community, and we met in large groups for dinner almost every weekend at people’s apartments, for most of us lived in apartments. The few of us who already had children would lay them to sleep on the host’s bed or on the carpet in the second bedroom, and cluster in the living room, twenty of us squeezed on sofas, chairs, ottomans. We were all in one room, and so the talk moved from men’s topics – cars and India’s politics – to women’s interests – the best place to buy kitchen tools, groceries, or on recipes (since we came from different regions of India, this was always good to share). Today, most of us, even new immigrants, live in houses, and given the larger space, gender separation occurs without one being aware of it – the women converge in one room or part of a room, the men in the other, while the children play in the basement, and only the babies still sleep on the hosts’ or guest bed. This gender segregation is worth a study. As communities grow and prosper, and people don’t need to be crowded in a single room, are we entrenching old ways of social interaction?

There are two other interesting points about the partying aspect of Indo-Canadian life. One is a new phenomenon I just heard about – house-builders are advertising the concept of a two-kitchen custom built home, one kitchen for the party-crowd built in the modern open-floor plan within the living room area, and the other for the actual cooking, behind scenes! This is an innovative idea, for Indian cooking is rather elaborate and aromatic (or odoriferous if you will). The other aspect of the partying life is more problematic. In the wake of Canada’s Family Reunification immigration policy, a great many parents were sponsored into the country starting in the 1980s. The place within the family that is accorded to the seniors merits an in-depth study.
While some still rule the family as in India, others find themselves dependent on their adult son and daughter-in-law, and sometimes end up as unpaid baby sitters, cooks and cleaners, relegated to their basement suite while the family party on the main floor. Perhaps we are looking at a small number of cases, but it would be very relevant in the sociological context as to the quality of life experienced by sponsored seniors, especially widowed mothers.

Sad to say, there is no literature on any of the above aspects, neither literary nor sociological. As I have said in one of my early essays, “Ganga in the Assiniboine”, immigrants do not turn to developing their creative talents till they have gone through the settlement process in terms of their own job, children settling down within the school system etc. and so it is natural that no one turned to writing in the first twenty years of community history. But there have been no writers in English in the city other than myself. No one in the community reads my works. Thanks to a literary minded staff writer of a community newspaper published six times a year, most of my books are reviewed when they first appear, but hardly a handful have bought any of my books, if sales records of the local major bookstore is any indication. There are one or two who write in Punjabi but they have not fared any better as far as the community’s reading habits go. Tyrrell Mendes was one of the early poets but he has turned to photography and drives through Manitoba photographing old churches! Winnipeg’s public libraries now stock quite a few Punjabi, Hindi and Gujarati books, reflecting the demand for them. But these are mostly books by writers living in India, not by writers living here.

So, Manitoba is a desert as far as Indo-Canadian literature is concerned. But it is the same story with most of the other provinces, an average of one writer per province except for the provinces of British Columbia and Ontario. Gurdev Chauhan is making an effort with his South Asian Ensemble, published out of Ontario, and Sadhu Binning is still active in British Columbia. However, in every province there are numerous community newspapers, published mainly for advertising local businesses and social events.

In the history of Indo-Canadian writing in English, an impetus was given when Moyez Vassanji and his wife Nurjehan Aziz started The Toronto South Asian Review in 1981. It provided a forum for the South Asian diaspora as also for the Caribbean diaspora. In 1993, it was renamed Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad and the revised mandate opened it to other writers as well, but the journal was discontinued a few years later. Today TSAR, as it is called, is a publisher of books only.
THE GROWTH OF A COMMUNITY

In conclusion, the Indo-Canadian community in Manitoba has come a long way from its beginnings in the 1960s and is flourishing in many ways, but it is now too big to be held under a single social umbrella. Instead we have several active sub-communities knit by language or religion.

To record the beginnings, I started a blog <indocanadiansinmanitoba.blogspot.com> but I am afraid I have not concentrated on the project and it is still floating in cyberspace, waiting for me.

WORKS CITED

I

Two events that took place in the early years of the contemporary upsurge of dalit politics sometimes spoken of as the ‘second wave,’ give us a sense of the complexities of the question of women in these movements. They also help us appreciate the originality and depth of the new propositions in the writing by dalit women represented in this collection.¹

In 1985 and again in 1986, activists of the Dalit Sangharsh Samithi (DSS) along with other groups, notably the women’s collective, Manavi, tried to stop the yearly bettaleseve (nude worship) in the Chandragutti temple. Generally undertaken in fulfilment of a vow or a request for a boon, the seve involved bathing in the Varada river and then running up—a distance of about five kilometres—to the temple, naked. Those taking part in the ritual were mainly dalit and backward class women. The reformists were mostly dalit and progressive/rationalist men and upper-caste women who felt that the practice was humiliating to dalits—upper caste women were never involved in such rituals, they pointed out—and that the State had a responsibility to stop it. The humiliation was aggravated, they said, in the changed circumstances, in which the press and a large numbers of voyeuristic outsiders, armed with cameras, arrived to gape at the show. Their opponents, of course, argued that this was a matter of faith and tradition and was undertaken freely. No one was coercing the women.

What took place in 1986 turned out to be something of a fiasco for the dalits, rationalists and feminists. A major intervention had been planned to dissuade the women, and if necessary to use

¹ This is an edited excerpt from the “Introduction” to collection of contemporary dalit writings from South India in English translation, edited by K Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu.  From those Stubs, Steel Nibs are Sprouting: New Dalit Writing from South India, Dossier 2: Kannada and Telugu. New Delhi: Harper Collins 2013.
the force of the State to stop the ritual. But it was the worshippers, no doubt also encouraged by the temple authorities, who forced the reformers to retreat. They turned violent, ‘beat up some of the social workers; cameras were broken and policewomen were stripped’. (Radhika, 2012: 310)

The event was debated for months and has been extensively written about. We only want to point here to a situation, typical of the early years of the dalit and feminist movements, in which dalit women, claiming a right to tradition or identity, appear pitted against well-intentioned activists who are dalit men and non-dalit women.

Again, in 1995, this time in Andhra Pradesh, we encounter a stalemate of a similar kind. Following the publication of a startling and generally well-received collection of dalit poems, *Nishani* (Thumbprint), the feminist writer–intellectuals and activists Volga, Vasanth Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran made an intervention in the debate on dalit literature. Clearly stating that they considered the dalit movement and dalit poetry progressive, they argued for the need to strengthen dalit and feminist connections. They objected to the language used in the poems, which they described as the language of the ruling patriarchal classes and insulting to women. It was regrettable that abusive terms referring to women’s body parts were being claimed as dalit culture. True, it was an upper-caste culture that had stigmatized these terms, but was it not possible to develop a new language, one that does not humiliate women, to express anger and hatred? Dalit poetry, they said, needed to invent a new and more egalitarian language. (Volga et al, 2000: 115-120)

The poets (all men) did not respond positively to the critique. They did not think of themselves as disrespectful of women and felt misunderstood. Readers joined the fray. Some quickly criticized the response as an upper-caste attack on a new movement and its poetry, and described the feminist movement as brahminical and ‘Hindu’. Others argued that it was the upper castes who consider the everyday behaviour and ordinary language of dalits as violent or vulgar. It was this politics of language and culture that should be the focus of discussion, not vulgarity. This time it was a face-off between dalits and feminists. The silence of dalit women, and their absence from the world of dalit literature, was palpable.
II

Women writers, intellectuals and activists feature prominently in the Tamil and Malayalam collections as well in the texts from Kannada and Telugu compiled in this dossier (Dossier 1). The names of Bama, Sivakami and Sukirtharani are often among the very first to be mentioned by anyone asked to list significant contemporary dalit writing in Tamil. In Telugu, Gogu Shyamala and Joopaka Subhadra enjoy growing respect as activists and as writers, as do Challapalli Swaroopa Rani, Jajula Gowri and Vinodini. The adivasi leader, C.K. Janu, is rarely spoken of as a woman activist, but as the interview with her so clearly indicates, being a woman is a significant part of her experience. Her interviewer, Rekharaj, is among a small but effective group of dalit women who have made their mark as public intellectuals. In Kannada, the status of Du Saraswathi and B.T. Jahnavi, both of whom began writing in the late 1980s and are widely recognized, also directs our attention to the sad fact that few women writers or thinkers emerge from the earlier, otherwise awe-inspiring Dalit Sangharsh Samiti or the dalit–bandaya contexts of the 1970s and 80s.

Without exception, these writers are critical of existing feminism, which they describe as upper caste in its assumptions about women, its understanding of women’s lives and women’s issues, its concept of India, and not least, in its personnel and leadership. Vinodini, who cut her teeth as a critic and writer on the Telugu feminist poetry of the 1980s, observes that it was only after she became involved in the dalit movement in the 1990s that she realized that feminism had dulled her consciousness of being a dalit woman. ‘Feminism made me overlook the fact that there was a problem worse than patriarchy: caste.’ Questions that were asked by feminists, Vinodini points out, take on a radically different form in the dalit context: ‘The issues here are not of attraction, desire and so on, but of hate, of being detested, spat upon. Remember what happened to Bhanwari Devi in Rajasthan? What does it mean, when a person is raped by a man, his son, his son-in-law at the same time? Is the object of this violence simply a woman? What is she? Chalam’s Rajeswari is a brahmin girl. [Rajeswari is the protagonist of the novel *Maidanam* by the well-known Telugu

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writer, Chalam (1894–1979), a crusader for women’s emancipation.] I feel I don’t really know her. 

[People like me] do not experience her rage and lust. In the context of our lives, the cold war between husband and wife that feminism talks about seems so thin, so empty.’ (Vinodini, Dossier 2: 742). The protagonist of the powerful story by her carried in this collection is a dalit woman who thinks she can forget her caste. P. Sivakami’s 1998 *Asiriyar Kurippu* (translated as *Author’s Notes*) is also a critical reflection on the secular–feminist ease with which she herself had set up the critique of patriarchy in her 1995 autobiographical novel, *Pazhhayani Kazhidalum* (translated as *The Grip of Change*). Also palpable is Joopaka Subhadra’s anger about the assumptions made, even in people’s movements, that upper-caste women merit more attention and require different living conditions. She complains that only upper-caste women and their issues receive recognition by the media, by the leaders of people’s movements as well as by ‘mainstream’ feminists, who simply assume they can speak for dalit women. The wild flowers that bloom and die in Challapali Swaroopa Rani’s poem are dalit women—scholars and intellectuals included—who fade and die unappreciated.

Despite this critique, however, the mark of feminism is evident both in the grain of the voice and the ideas of these writers and intellectuals. Bama’s feisty village women are feminist (without-using or knowing the term) in their rebellions and their support for each other. Both Du Saraswathi and Vinodini lay out engrossing questions of body image, ‘pure and impure’ sexualities and explore the traumas of growing up as dalit women. Sukirtarani’s finely crafted poems are a brave and moving engagement with sexuality that draws on the feminist reclamation of desire and sexual pleasure. B.T. Jahnavi’s ‘Vyabhichara’ (Adultery) was regarded outrageous when it first appeared, more so since it came from a woman writer. One might say that the critique in these works is not so much of feminism, but of a caste-blind elite feminism and its authority. Dalit feminists claim feminism and look to African-American feminists, Latino and African feminists for inspiration. Rekharaj calls herself an ‘unavoidable companion of the feminist movement in Kerala’. She points out, however, that she feels more at home in the dalit movement than among feminists, although she is also unhappy with it. In the dalit movement, she observes: ‘There is an appreciation of feminist questions, but also a pervasive assumption that allows it [the dalit movement] to think of “women” as upper caste … patriarchy is taken for granted …’
This conceptual and political connection between feminism and the dalit movement is evident also in the fact that among the many new ideas that the legendary Pondicherry-based little magazine *Nirapirikkai* introduced to its eager and predominantly male readership were those of feminists from across the world. Lovely Stephen’s account of the Dalit Women’s Society (DWS) in Kurichi near Kottayam records the lectures and discussions that it enabled and the springboard it provided to the group of dalit students who went on to become leading intellectuals and artists of the 1990s and after. T.M. Yesudasans’s visionary ‘prologue’ for dalit studies, included in the previous dossier, was first presented at a meeting organized by the DWS. New research being done on important early dalit women leaders, such as Velayudhan Sadalakshmi (a political worker and Andhra Pradesh’s minister for endowments in the 1970s) suggests that they trod an imaginative and deeply political path in elaborating and consolidating dalit politics.

In her analysis of the suicide of Rajani—a college student who had secured a ‘merit list’ admission to a computer science course—Rekharaj points out that banks require surety for loans, and since in Kerala, the ownership of property is caste-based, dalits students do not get loans. Without the loan, Rajani was unable to pay the professional college’s fees. Her experience points to the predicament of dalit students who are ‘forced to study outdated courses in government institutions at a time when self-financing colleges are offering course geared towards … job opportunities.’ Rajani, she observes, ‘committed suicide because of her inability to continue in the professional course, given the inadequacy of the government stipend and the refusal by banks to provide a loan … In this context there is absolutely no reason for Rajani’s sexual life becoming a topic of discussion. However, the equation that a dalit woman is a bad woman/an immoral woman persists on the strength of social prejudice.’ Such events, she concludes, require ‘closer scrutiny and greater alertness’ than existing liberal, Marxist or feminist analyses provide.

The potential of such scrutiny and alertness is evident in Gogu Shyamala’s ‘Radam’ (A Festering Sore), in which she takes up an ‘evil’ that social reformists have engaged with for over a
century—that of women who are ‘dedicated’ to the temple as devadasi, jogini or basavi, and are then considered sexually available to the upper-caste men of the village. Shyamala tells the story from the point of view of a young dalit girl who discovers, only when her father hurries her out in the middle of the night to catch a bus on which she must escape, that she has been ‘selected’ to perform this task in the village. They quickly bundle up a few belongings and steal out of the village before the patel get wind of their plans. She is uprooted and lonely in the social welfare hostel to which he takes her, worried about what will happen to her father in the village, but temporarily safe. He returns to face the landlord’s wrath. There is a murderous attack on him and, fearing for his life, he leaves the village. The family loses the small piece of land they owned. Her mother struggles to raise the other children after the father leaves. Shyamala poses the jogini question as one that must be understood in a political geography of caste as described from the madiga quarter. It is a question in which sexuality, land, childhood, schooling, caste violence and family life all come into play. So does the desire for education and escape from a power that is upper caste and patriarchal. The father, who in another story returns from his wanderings, weary and anxious, and suddenly turns violent, accusing his wife of having cheated on him, is her ally here, and the child’s too; they pull together in the story of her escape.

Reformist talk (of abolition or eradication of a social evil) rings hollow in this setting. So does its elite moralism. The utopian urge here is for self-determination, for freedom, for the right to refuse and escape, not the need to cleanse or upgrade from tradition into modernity and the monogamous family. Epochal promises—of eradication, legal protection, progress, equality for women—fade in the complex formation and uneasy temporality of this festering sore, but the critical energy and the utopian aspirations of the narrator-protagonist open onto a future that may be without these guarantees, but is worth fighting for—personally.

Similar reformulations that have transformative potential for the feminist understanding of violence within the family, and perhaps to begin a new discussion on the theory of violence itself, may be found in Shyamala’s story ‘Mother may only be a small basket and Father an
Susie Tharu

elephant, but a small basket ...', as well as in Anu Ramdas’s article ‘My Man’. Using the example of the family of migrant dalit construction workers who acquire the coveted (because it comes with the right to put up a residential shelter at the site) position of ‘watchman’, she writes: ‘Only a seasonal migrant labourer knows how precious this offer is, and uncannily so does the contractor. It took me some time before I fully realized this move up almost always involved the sexual exploitation of the watchman’s wife and his female relatives by the contractors and their contacts.’

There were frequent family feuds, and both husband and wife carried scars of those encounters. Ramdas comments, ‘She’d cry when people enquired about her scars, receiving sympathy and advice; he remained coldly silent to similar queries, never letting anyone know his feelings about subjecting his wife to verbal and physical violence and being the recipient of counter violence.’ The point here is not that both parties are equally guilty of violence. The questions she asks are altogether different: ‘This was violence between two individuals—man and woman, husband and wife. Or was it? How much of this domestic violence is linked to the violence that society bequeaths this couple? How much chance do they have of avoiding the many forms of violence including domestic violence, as migrant dalit labourers? ... [Between these two], domestic violence was basically about betrayal. Whose betrayal? Hers. She was supposed to mythically avoid sexual exploitation while still ensuring a roof over the family. He was supposed to mythically protect his wife from sexual exploitation while still ensuring a home. Society’s. Society was expected to mythically not take advantage of chronically disempowered persons, whose labour, bodies and minds it could manipulate at ease.’ The analysis, alert as it is to the dense layering of the issue, ends with: ‘I knew them as wonderful parents to three children with mutual dreams of a different world for them. Tenderness between this married couple and the children bring back fond and nourishing memories.’

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3 This is the title story of a collection
4 http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5364:my-man&catid=119:feature&Itemid=132 accessed on 27/7/12; some changes have been made in the text’s layout.
Analysts often write about dalit women’s issues as those in which questions of caste and gender ‘intersect’. What we find here, however, is not an intersection of issues (caste, gender) that have separate real lives elsewhere (in the dalit movement; in feminism). As these writers wrestle with questions that touch their lives and lay claim to a political subjectivity, issues of land, water, housing, bank loans, education, political leadership, family, domestic violence, sexuality, history, literature, food, play, friendship, laughter, anxiety, fear and a hundred other things come into sometimes uneasy confluence. There is a critical engagement with the Left and even the primarily reformist, Ambedkarite understanding of these questions, as well as with that of feminism in its early days. The frames that these writers propose —say for an understanding of domestic violence, suicide, or sexuality—are more comprehensive than those of what now appears more and more clearly as an upper-caste feminism. We like to think that in the idea that patriarchy is better described analysed as a caste patriarchy, as well as in the actual issues these writers and thinkers raise, there is promise for a renewal of the woman’s question as well as the dalit question.

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