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# LETTER <sup>FROM THE</sup> EDITOR

It is with great pleasure that I present to you Volume I, Issue II of the *Columbia Undergraduate Journal of South Asian Studies*. The editorial collective has been astounded by the quality of the submissions to the journal. For Issue II, we received over twenty-five essays for consideration. These pieces came to us from around the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, and India. The number and geographic distribution of the submissions we have received only serves to reiterate our mission in founding this journal: undergraduates from around the world are studying South Asia in an academic setting and are producing quality scholarship.

Issue II, like Issue I contains essays drawn from many different fields: history, urban studies, political science, women's studies, and diaspora studies. After months of deliberation, the editorial collective came to the conclusion that the work presented in this issue represents the best undergraduate work in a highly competitive group of essays. We hope you enjoy Volume I, Issue II of the *Columbia Undergraduate Journal of South Asian Studies*.

And finally, this Issue will be my last in my tenure as editor-in-chief. It has been quite an  enjoyable experience bringing this journal into fruition. Of course, I have not accomplished this on my own: my sincerest thanks go to the faculty and staff at Columbia University, as well as the hard-working editors of the Journal. Thank you all for a wonderful year.

Nishant Batsha
July 2010

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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**COLLIN SCHENK** is a senior at the University of Pennsylvania majoring in Health and Societies with a concentration in International Health. His research on this topic was used to prepare members of Pratit International for their humanitarian efforts in Kolkata's slums. He is currently researching the social determinants of health in the city's slums by taking oral histories in two basti communities.

# WHERE DELHI IS STILL QUITE FAR: HAZRAT NIZAMUDDIN AULIYA AND THE MAKING OF THE NIZAMUDDIN *BASTI*[1]

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**ABSTRACT:**

This study aims to examine the nature of the relationship between the dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya and the neighborhood that surrounds it, the Nizamuddin *basti*. The paper begins with an explanation of the life and history of the Saint himself before moving on to a consideration of activities at the shrine, especially the thoughts and practices of devotees, and their ways of connecting to the figure of the venerated Saint. The experience of the devotee is divided into two sections, the first dealing with the devotees' connection to the historical figure of the Saint himself, the second with the significance of the dargah's physical location in the Saint's teachings and the practices of his devotees.

Having examined the Saint and his dargah, the essay moves on to an analytical look at the historical circumstances surrounding the development of the Nizamuddin *basti*, from its early stages as a miniscule settlement for the caretakers of the shrine, to its current, denser condition. The historical conditions surrounding the formation of the *basti* are then related to its form today and the ways in which it sustains itself as an urban unit. Through the entire discussion, I suggest that connection to community, land, and place is the unifying link between the life and teachings of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, and the *basti* that took his name.

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## Introduction

In the midst of the historical monuments and posh colonies of South Delhi, the dense tangle of streets known as the Nizamuddin *basti* is an anomaly. As one approaches from Lodhi Road to the West, the *basti* presents a worn but determined face of crooked brown houses, pushing out over the dried up *nallah*, or storm drain, that forms the Western boundary of the neighborhood. From this vantage point, the crowded assemblage of narrow buildings appears no more penetrable than the locked, gated, and guarded walls of the wealthy colonies along Lodhi Road. That the Nizamuddin *basti* is its own, self-contained world, something apart from the Delhi that surrounds it, is obvious at first glance. I embarked on this project in the hopes of discovering how the dargah at Nizamuddin has remained one of the city's most-visited holy places. This investigation led me, perhaps inevitably, to an examination of the neighborhood that surrounds it. How does a place like the *basti* survive in the heart of modern Delhi? What has produced it? What holds it together?

Every question about the *basti* leads eventually to the dargah that sits at its centre and the life of the Saint buried therein. The dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia is the unquestionable historic, religious, and geographic origin of the neighborhood, the reason it came into existence, and the reason it continues to draw visitors from the world over; its survival through fully seven hundred years of Delhi's turbulent history parallels the *basti*'s survival through gentrification in neighboring colonies, the Delhi Development Authority's fight against haphazard construction, and the neighborhood's confused, liminal status in the DDA's development plan. Researching the Saint led always back to the place where he lived; researching the *basti* led continuously to the foundations laid there by the Saint. The essay that follows presents the histories of the Saint and the *basti* as parallels, both sharing the important thread of connection to place and community.

I began by exploring the Saint both as a historical figure and as an object of veneration for modern devotees, using when possible first-hand interviews with them. I supplemented my own interviews, which were of course restricted by my inability to converse in Urdu, with secondary source materials that recorded the experiences of other devotees at the dargah, as well as some that dealt directly with its history. After speaking to the custodians of the dargah, I was given an English translation of a diary purportedly written in the Saint's lifetime. Despite encountering other such documents, I used this as my central historic text simply because it was chosen by a

devotee as exemplary of the Saint's teachings.

Despite the fact that the Saint died some seven centuries ago and the *basti* continues to thrive today, tracking the history of the *basti* proved far more challenging than uncovering that of the Saint himself, requiring both the testimonies of residents, as well as the knowledge and expertise of scholars. When possible, I spoke to residents of the *basti*, otherwise using the information gathered by consultants at the Aga Khan Foundation who, in their work for that organization's development project in the *basti*, have conducted extensive interviews with members of the community otherwise difficult for me to access. Textual sources dealing extensively with the history of the *basti* were difficult to come by as most historians have preferred to focus on the dargah itself, while other sources that might have proved useful were largely in other languages. Most importantly, though, the history of the Nizamuddin *basti* has taken on a life of its own in the minds of its residents and visitors, a life as complex, as cloaked in mystery, and as reverentially guarded as the life of the Saint. The past of the Nizamuddin *basti* is preserved not through history, but through hagiography.

It has been my aim neither to reveal a central truth nor to make overarching claims about the neighborhood I have studied. I have merely tried to point out similarities and confluences between the world of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya's dargah and the neighborhood that surrounds it. In so doing, I have concluded that, even as the dargah becomes less and less relevant to the daily lives of the *basti*'s inhabitants, the teachings of the saint persist, as generative now in the production of an identity for the Nizamuddin *basti* as they were seven centuries. The importance of place and community, of syncretism and hospitality, of resistance to invasion remain omnipresent in the deep devotion of the *basti*'s residents to the land on which they live and, more importantly, the community that sustains them.

### Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya

"Nizamuddin Auliya was one of the pillars of Islam."
"Not was. *Is* one of the pillars of Islam."[2]

My two interlocutors at the *'urs*—celebrated on the anniversary of the Saint's death—were not really disagreeing, nor were they debating some minor theological quibble. The continued life of the holy man is a central feature of his spiritual importance,

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[2]  Anonymous Sufis, conversation with author, 15 April 2009, Nizamuddin dargah, New Delhi, India.

and yet this celebration, the most important of the year for any Sufi Saint, commemorates the day of his physical death.  The day before when I had visited the Dargah to speak with its custodians, two members of the Nizami group of families who claim direct descent from the Saint's sister, I described the *'urs* as a death anniversary.  Syed Tahir Nizami corrected me: "It is a wedding anniversary—the day the beloved is united with Allah."[3]  These two features of the Sufi Saint—his eternal presence in the world and his intensely loving relationship with the divine—are essential for the community of worshippers at his tomb today.  It is because the Saint's spirit persists at the dargah that the faithful feel they can communicate with him, and because of the Saint's special closeness with the divine that they feel their prayers will be heard more clearly by Allah through him.  During the *'urs* people travel from all over the world to visit the place of the Saint's burial; the Saint, despite his special status as intermediary between humanity and the divine, remains grounded in the place of his burial, where his *earthly* body remains.  It is a historical figure buried here to whom people pray, and coming here to pray is an act of historical as well as spiritual connection.

*The Historical Figure and his Teachings*

Hazrat Nizamudin Auliya was born in Badayun, Uttar Pradesh to parents that had migrated from Bokhara in Central Asia.[4]  Among the first important Sufi Saints born on the subcontinent,[5] Nizamuddin Auliya encouraged the development and spread of medieval Sufi practices amongst Hindus of North India through his emphasis on equality, charity, and religious syncretism.  By incorporating traditional ritual practices of the subcontinent—most famously the use of music in worship—Nizamuddin and other great Saints of the Chishti order indigenized Islam on the subcontinent, so much so that scholars and religious figures, both those sympathetic to and those opposed to Sufi practices, have attempted to trace its origins to India.[6]  The Saint's popularity across the subcontinent has not abated in the intervening centuries; indeed, the dargah has survived as an actively worshipped site even through the constant political and geographic upheavals that have shaped Delhi's long history.[7]  The Saint came to the environs of Delhi, specifically the

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[3]       Syed Tahir Nizami and Farid Nizami, interview by author, 14 April 2009, Nizamuddin dargah, New Delhi, India.

[4]       H. Sajun, trans., *A Diary of a Disciple of Nizamudin Aulia* (Lahore: Talifat-e-Shalidi, 2001), 30.

[5]       Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, "The Early Chishti Dargahs," in *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History and Significance*, ed. Christian W. Troll (New Delhi: Oxford University Press,1989), 3.

[6]       Sir Richard Burton, "The Sufis of Sindh," in *The Sufi Mystery*, ed. Nathaniel P. Archer (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2007), 137.

[7]       Siddiqui. *Muslim Shrines in India*, 18.

town of Ghiyaspur on the outskirts of the Sultanate city at Siri, and established his *kanqah* (or "hospice"[8]) after being directed there by his predecessor in the Chishti *silsilah*, Sheikh Baba Farid in Ajodhan.[9] Hazrat Nizamuddin stayed in Ghiyaspur for the remainder of his life, drawing disciples to his *kanqah* through miraculous acts and teachings of the basic Chishti tenets: "love and devotion to God, cultivation of moral virtues, and selfless service to humanity."[10]   His success amongst all populations and his openness to followers of all religious backgrounds has lent to his reputation as a great missionary in the name of Islam.[11]   Some specifics of these teachings have been preserved in several texts from the period including the Diary of Rajkumar Hardev, a Deccani Prince-cum-disciple, and the *Fawa'id al Fu'ad*, an important text in the *malfuzat* tradition, texts recording conversations between Sufi saints and their disciples.[12]

The former example does more to recount the social world surrounding the *kanquah* of Nizamuddin Auliya than anything else, and yet in so doing it captures the atmosphere of divinity, charity, and religious conciliation around the Saint at its center.  Hagiographic tales like "The Miraculous Handkerceif" and "The Story of the *Halwa*,"[13] deal with the Saint's extraordinary powers, but more importantly demonstrate his wisdom, his beneficence, and his position of authority even amongst powerful political figures.  As a document composed by a Hindu Prince who becomes a disciple of this humble Muslim teacher, the *Diary* gives pride of place to the Saint's teaching on religious tolerance and cultural syncretism.  In an episode early in the text, the Saint encourages his favorite disciple, the poet Amir Khusro, "to write in the Hindi language so that the Muslims may feel inclined toward the Hindus in their everyday speech."[14] Even today Hindus familiar with Khusro's poetry will point out that almost all of it is written in Hindi or a related dialect rather than Persian[15] (though this 'fact' has been vehemently contested).[16]

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[8]         A. R. Saiyed, "Saints and Dargahs in the Indian Sucontent: A Review," in *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History and Significance*, ed. Christian W. Troll (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 242.

[9]         Sajun, *Diary of a Disciple*, 31.

[10]        Abdur Rahman Momin, "Delhi: Dargah of Shaykh Nizmauddin Awliya," *Marg* 56:1 (2004), 15.

[11]        Siddiqui, *Muslim Shrines in India*, 11.

[12]        Joel Lee, "Sayyid, Sweeper, Butcher, Pir: Hierarchy and Inclusivity in a Fourteenth Century Sufi Text" (unpublished essay, Columbia University) 9.

[13]        Sajun, *Diary of a Disciple*, 85-6, 89.

[14]        Ibid., 10.

[15]        Soni Suvarna Goswami, conversation with author, 10 April 2009, Jai Singh Ghera Ashram, Vrindavan, India.

[16]        Dr. Mohammad Wahid Mirza, *The Life and Works of Amer Khusrau* (Lahore: Panjab University Press, 1962), 5.

In fact, this instance of linguistic diplomacy is secondary compared to the religiously syncretic move that preceded it, namely the acceptance and inclusion of song in Chishti religious practice. In the 13th-14th centuries, the use of music in Muslim religious practice was tremendously controversial, illustrated by the episode near the conclusion of the *Diary* when an emissary of the King interrupts an evening of *qawwali*—the devotional music developed by the Chishti order—crying " 'By the King's command, under punishment by the sword, stop this non-*Sharia* practice! […] I know that you are a favorite servant of God, but now you are committing a sin and I have been appointed by the King to stop this sin.'"[17] As this passage demonstrates, the use of song in devotional practice, derived from the indigenous musical-religious traditions of the sub-continent, stood far outside the orthodoxy of contemporary Muslim practice.[18] By the end of the episode, the King's emissary has cut all of the ropes that hold up the tent, but it does not collapse, a miraculous occurrence that the Saint explains thus: " 'I along with my companions were absorbed in the remembrance of God through this *qawwali*, and it is God who has held up this tent without its ropes.' "[19] This episode highlights three of the most important features of the Saint, all of which remain important for the modern life of the dargah, namely his miraculous closeness with the Divine, his disregard for religious orthodoxy in favor of syncretic religious practice, and his flouting of political authority.

While the first two points—the miraculous and the syncretic—are more apparently important for worship at the dargah today, the political overtones of the episode described above, and several others in the *Diary*, should neither be overlooked nor discounted in relation to the modern dargah. In a celebrated story, Nizamuddin Aulia is believed to have said (and I paraphrase here), "My *kanqah* has two doors. If the Emperor enters through one, I will leave through the other."[20] (In the case of King Sultan Mohammed Tuglaq, who famously visited the Saint's *kanqah*, the Saint supposedly predicted his royal ascendancy, so his relationship with him is that of teacher to follower, rather than subject to King.[21]) The Saint used political resistance as a vehicle for his messages of humility, mercy, and religious tolerance. The story of the Miraculous Handkerchief, in which the Saint's used handkerchief allows the reigning monarch to see into the homes of his subjects, not only reveals the Saint's

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[17]   Sajun, *Diary of a Disciple*, 153.
[18]   Amar Nath Khana, *Pilgrim Shrines of India* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2003), 72.
[19]   Sajun, *Diary of a Disciple*, 153
[20]   Kamaal Hassan, conversation with author, 7 March 2009, dargah of Sheikh Ala Uddin Sabir, Khaliyar, Uttarakhand, India; Interview with Syed Tahir Nizami, 15 April 2009, Nizamuddin dargah, New Delhi.
[21]   Sajun, *Diary of a Disciple*, 184.

miraculous powers but also his compassion when he says "man is quick to embark on the wrong path. I gave him the handkerchief so that he might become aware of the oppressed and the needy people's problems and so he could protect them from oppression."[22] In another episode, the Saint's rejection of the notion of *zimmi*—a non-Muslim under the protection and control of a Muslim ruler—carries both political and religious resonance: " 'We are all God's *Zimmis*. No human being can be another's *Zimmi*.' "[23] This political element in the Saint's teachings appealed directly to oppressed classes, making his *kanqah* a haven for people of low social status, the poor, and, in the case of the *Diary*'s writer, even Hindus, who found themselves subordinated under Muslim rule. Though the Saint's position vis-à-vis hierarchical social structures is hardly cut and dry, the overarching message of his teaching as it has survived into the present deliberately disregards class distinctions.

*Connecting to the Man*

Even the least complex draw to the dargah—the miraculous—has as its basis a human connection to the person of the Saint. Many devotees, including devotedly monotheistic Muslims, come to the dargah due to the Saint's reputed ability to grant wishes and desires, yet these Muslim devotees make an important distinction between the Saint's role and Allah's in performing the miracles they seek. For the devotees to whom I spoke, the Saint acted as intercessor, hearing the prayers offered at the dargah and taking them directly to Allah, who actually grants them. It is not uncommon for visitors to seek a cure to infertility or illnesses; others come seeking exorcisms. It is worth repeating that it is specifically through the Saint's privileged connection to Allah that he is able to perform these miracles. As Nizamuddin Auliya said himself in a story related above, he does not perform miracles, per se, Allah performs them on the behalf of him and his followers. In an article on the dargah and its devotees, Desiderio Pinto relates an exemplary statement made by a worshipper at the dargah: " 'He was a man like us. Therefore he is able to take our case to God, intercede on our behalf, and make us more acceptable to him.' "[24] The Saint's humanity—importnatly *not* divinity, allows his devotees closer connection to him, and it is by this connection to the mortal that the miraculous can occur. As Pinto points out, though, many devotees—perhaps even *most*—"visit the dargah on a regular basis […] without the intention of acquiring

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[22]     Ibid., 86.
[23]     Ibid., 21.
[24]     Desiderio Pinto, "The Mystery of the Nizamuddin Dargah: The Accounts of Pilgrims" in *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character History and Significance*, ed. Christian W. Troll (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 122.

anything from the saints, the pirs and pirzades";[25] the miraculous is secondary to the spirit of connection and love experienced at the dargah. The devotee prays, then, via a kind of divine social network that begins with what devotees describe as a personal, individual, loving relationship between themselves and the Saint.[26]

Prayer is but one means by which a devotee can enter into this Sufi network. By its very nature, the Sufi tradition functions as an ancient chain of historical figures stretching back to the Prophet himself. Referred to as a *silsilah*, this genealogy passes from one Sufi *Pir* (teacher) to his *kaliph* (disciple) in an enormous family tree, with orders and branches within orders proliferating through a series of Saints, disciples, and devotees down to the present day. In her book on *qawwali*, Regula Qureshi notes that, even as a Westerner and a woman (doubly an outsider in the inner circles of Sufi tradition), "once part of the Sufi 'network' that extends all over the subcontinent" she gained access to participate in events and practices nearly anywhere she wished. She had become part of the extended Sufi family.[27] I experienced a similar kind of initiation at the *'urs* of Sheikh Alauddin Sabir in Khaliyar. While sitting amongst a group of Sufis in the expansive *kanqah* that had been formed around the dargah for the several days of celebration, one of several Sufi elders, clearly esteemed by those around him, began divesting himself of his many necklaces. When he placed the last of them around my neck, he repeated to me several times that the stone in the necklace (the same as the stone in his ring) was my connection to him specifically, and to the Sufi tradition, more broadly; it was, he said, my "life stone."[28]

One does not typically enter the social order on a mere whim, or merely by being present at the dargah (my situation was unique, and, I expect more a gesture of hospitality than of initiation). A full initiation into a Sufi *silsilah* requires intent and the permission of the *pir*, a process described in Rajkumar Hardev's *Diary*, and which, according to those Sufis to whom I spoke at the dargah, remains more or less the same today. In fact, the process itself is not particularly complicated. On more than one occasion I was reminded that entering the Chishti *silsilah* (the largest Sufi order in South Asia) requires neither intricate rituals nor formal conversion. Instead, a devotee asks his *pir* for *baiat*, which, according to one *pir* that I met during the *'urs* in Nizamuddin, can be translated as

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[25]     Ibid., 117.
[26]     Ibid., 119.
[27]     Regula Qureshi, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context, and Meaning in Qawwali* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), xv.
[28]     Anonymous *Pir*, conversation with author, dargah of Sheikh Ala Uddin Sabir, 7 March 2009, Khaliyar, Uttarakhand, India.

"connection."[29]  Usually performed with a simple joining of hands, *baiat* initiates the devotee into the line of teachers and pupils who keep alive the esoteric teachings of the various Sufi *silsilahs*. The teachings and traditions of the order are passed by a simple act of intellectual, spiritual, and physical connection.  Today, physical presence is not necessary for the pledging of *baiat*, but connection via another *pir* is. Uzma, a Pakistani woman who has lived in Austria for twenty years whom I met at the *'urs* in Nizamuddin, has her *pir* in Jabalpur (a small city not far from Delhi in Uttarakhand), a place she had not visited until the day before I met her.  Instead, she met with a *pir* in Pakistan who connected her with his *pir* in Jabalpur.  In spite of the physical remove, the symbolic act of connection must still be undertaken by the disciple, in Uzma's case via another *pir*.[30] Sufi saints, then, do not float in a sacred vacuum, but rather are historically embedded in a time and a place within the line of teachers and disciples.  This historical thrust is manifest in the structure of the Dargah itself, where the Saint's tomb occupies a central place and is surrounded by the graves of his disciples, which receive varying levels of devotion depending on their respective historical statures. When devotees pray at the dargah, they are praying to a specific historical figure who remains connected to the place and the time in which he lived.

### Connecting to the Land

Though modern global realities have opened up possibilities of geographic remove, physical presence with the *pir* remains ideal, as evidenced by Uzma's trip to India; clearly the draw of place still plays importantly in the sacred grammar of worship at the dargah of Nizamuddin Auliya.  Though Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya remains among the most prominent figures in South Asian Islam, the major holy spot associated with him is the dargah at the heart of his namesake neighborhood, the place of his burial, the place where his *physical* remains lay. Of course, it is the persistence of the Saint's *spirit* that draws worshippers and disciples to the dargah, yet it is due to the presence of his bodily remains, the fact that this is the place where he chose to be buried, that devotees think of the dargah as "the place where he is 'most certainly present.'"[31] Worshippers travel great distances to this and other Sufi shrines, particularly at the time of the *'urs* when homes are opened to traveling devotees, and food, or *langah*, is provided in great quantities to any who want it.  These periods of pilgrimage, in fact, have a transformative effect on the

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[29]        Pir Mohammad A. Awan, interview by Author, 15 April 2009, Nizamuddin dargah, New Delhi, India.

[30]        Uzma Zafar, interview by author, 15 April 2009, Nizmauddin dargah, New Delhi, India.

[31]        Pinto, "Mystery of the Nizamuddin Dargah," 118.

neighborhood, and not an entirely positive one. The dargah in Nizamuddin actually sees its busiest time in October when it becomes an important stopping point on the route to Ajmer, where the *'urs* of Shaikh Mu 'inuddin Chishti is celebrated. During this period immense crowds descend on the neighborhood, crowds so large as to put a considerable strain on the area's resources and infrastructure.[32]

On my visits to the Dargah during the Saint's *'urs* in mid-April, during which the crowds are somewhat smaller, though still formidable, I encountered a delegation from Pakistan (many visiting Delhi for the first time), a couple that has lived in Austria for the last twenty years, and a man from Northern Virginia. By some means or another, each of these far-flung individuals traces his or her spiritual lineage to the man buried here in Nizamuddin. The traditions of hospitality still practiced at the *'urs*, and the event's ability to draw thousands of people from across India, the subcontinent, and the world,[33] come directly from the historical figure of the Saint. Now as then, the Saint's reputation for generosity and hospitality is known across the subcontinent. As was the case with Rajkumar Hardev, visitors of many backgrounds come from great distances and are offered hospitality and food by the Saint and those who make their residence nearby. Coming to the Saint's dargah today is, in a sense, equivalent to attending his *kanqah* in the fourteenth century; the devotee comes to be in the presence of the saint, to seek his aid, and to offer respect.

The tomb of the Saint, which has been built, rebuilt, and renovated over the centuries under the patronage of aristocrats, sultans, and kings, exerts a sort of gravitational pull on the neighborhood, the dargah complex, and the people that occupy both. The closer one gets to Nizamuddin, the greater the density of tombs and graves. From the monumental structures of the Lodhi Gardens, to Humayun's tomb and its adjacent graveyard, to the numerous small dargahs and anonymous graves dotting the neighborhood itself, these tombs were built on these sites primarily for their closeness to the sacred energy of the Saint.[34] "It was a basically a shortcut to heaven if you were buried close to the Saint," explained Shveta Mathur, a consultant for the Aga Khan Foundation's revitalization and preservation project in Nizamuddin, adding that the entire area was once one large graveyard.[35] Similarly, a walk through the

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[32]     Shveta Mathur, interview by author, 30 April 2009, Aga Khan Foundation Offices, Jangpura, New Delhi, India.
[33]     Sajun, *Diary of a Disciple*, 70.
[34]     Dr. Mary Storm, on-site lecture, 9 March 2009, Humayun's Tomb, New Delhi, India.
[35]     Mathur, interview by author, 30 April 2009.

neighborhood of Nizamuddin finds the density of population and commerce increasing the nearer one gets to the dargah.

Inside the dargah complex, the 16th century, Mughal-built marble dome occupies the same place in relation to the 14th century Jama'at Khanah Mosque—claimed by some to be the oldest active mosque in Delhi[36]—as the pool of sacred water used for ablutions in Mughal period mosques. Surmounted by a lotus, the dome even resembles a delicate fountain. Though I do not want to make too much of the symbolism embedded in this architectural gesture—after all, the Mosque is not a Mughal period mosque—it is interesting to note that, just as the faithful purify themselves through ablutions before approaching Allah in prayer, so too do devotees say that the Saint "is able to take our case to God, intercede on our behalf, and make us more acceptable to him.' "[37] The Saint effectively becomes the sacred font, purifying the prayers of his devotees such that God will hear them. At any time of day other than the five standard prayer times, a visitor to the dargah will find most devotees facing the tomb of the Saint rather than Mecca to the west. Trance-inducing *qawwali* is always performed facing the dargah. Once during the evening prayer, I observed a member of the Nizami family offer his prayers facing Mecca as tradition dictates, but finish by turning to face the tomb and offer his prayers in that direction as well. The saint and his tomb fulfill an important role in the geographic symbolism of the faith practiced at the dargah, never superceding Mecca or the Prophet (the dome of the tomb, for example, is lower than the highest point of the adjacent mosque), but functioning in a similar way, drawing its devotees with a magnetic force second only to that of Mecca itself. The dargah, and the Saint buried there, act as an axis, or *qutb* (also an honorific for a Sufi holy man) connecting the earthly world to the divine. When devotees touch the grave itself—or in the case of women, the marble screen surrounding it—they are touching an axis that runs from the tangible earth to the heavens, connecting themselves to the divine through the Saint, thus realizing the individual connection to the divine, and the presence of the divine in every person, so essential in Sufi thought.[38]

### The Nizamuddin Basti

What is the relationship between the modern place surrounding the dargah, and the historical structure and person that form its center? It goes without saying that the historical location to which devotees are so drawn is far from the same place it was when

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[36]      Khana, *Pilgrim Shines of India*, 74.
[37]      Pinto, "Mystery of the Nizamuddin Dargah," 122.
[38]      A.M.A Shushterry, "Philosophy, Training, Orders, and Ethics," in *The Sufi Mystery*, ed. Nathaniel P. Archer (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2007), 65.

Nizamuddin himself lived there. Once a humble town outside the imperial city to its south, Ghiyaspur—which, according to the popular mythology, became Nizamuddin immediately following the Saint's death—now stands at Delhi's geographic and cultural heart. In the intervening centuries, tombs, mosques, forts, and capitals have risen on all sides of Nizamuddin, and often next door. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Purana Qila sprung up just to the north, and not long after, the Emperor who began it added his grandiose and celebrated tomb to the graves of those that sought burial within the auspicious environs of the Saint's final resting place. Shahjahanabad, Lutyens' New Delhi, the post-Independence colonies, and now the seemingly endless urban development sprawling across Haryana and Uttar Pradesh—Nizamuddin's dargah has borne witness to all this over 700 years of Delhi's history. There is a famous tale that was repeated to me on multiple occasions, although it does not appear exactly this way in Hardev's *Diary*. The Saint decided to construct a *baoli*, or step-well, near the site of what would later be his dargah, which involved men who were also working on the construction of the Emperor's new city at Tughluqabad. Seeing the Saint as competition, the Emperor ordered Nizamuddin to desist in his project. According to Kamaal Hassan, my first contact at the dargah, the Saint refused by saying, 'your city will be a ruin, but my well will still be here.' Kamaal relayed this story to me while we stood looking down into that well, which is adjacent to the dargah. "He was right," he said. "Here is Hazrat's well, and Tughluqabad is in ruins."[39] He neglected to point out that the restoration work currently underway thanks to the Aga Khan Foundation only started when one of the *baoli*'s walls began to collapse; this was irrelevant. The continuity of the place was the central point.

### A Village, a Slum, a Master Plan

Ironically, despite the fact that residents of Nizamuddin will often tell you that their neighborhood is one of the oldest in Delhi, the settlement now known as the Nizamuddin *basti*—the village-like tangle of alleys directly surrounding the dargah—has only existed in its present form for about sixty years.[40] A photograph displayed prominently in the Jangpura offices of the Aga Khan Foundation, taken from the dome of Humayun's Tomb in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, shows a view over the ruins of the surrounding area (Appendix A). The many-domed skyline of this photograph reveals a plethora of buildings, many still standing, others long since lost. Noticeably absent from the photograph are the modern colonies of South Delhi,

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[39]     Kamaal Hassan, conversation with author, 19 February 2009, Nizamuddin dargah, New Delhi.
[40]     Tara Sharma, interview by author, Aga Khan Foundation offices, 30 April 2009, New Delhi.

and any indication of permanent settlement around the Dargah. Given the frequent claims of the antiquity of the neighborhood, and the labyrinthine streets most nearly akin to those found in Delhi's medieval neighborhoods, I was surprised to discover that the Nizamuddin *basti* is, in fact, a very recent phenomenon. While the dargah itself has existed in some form or another for seven centuries, worshipped continuously, and attracting the patronage and veneration of kings, it was not until the flood of refugees following Partition that a major settlement around the dargah appeared on Delhi's map.[41] For centuries, the area surrounding the dargah was essentially a graveyard with a small settlement occupied exclusively by the *pirzade*, families claiming descent from the Saint. In the years preceding Partition, no one outside the *pirzade* community could enter the settlement, let alone live there.[42] According to development consultants at the Aga Khan Foundation, major development around the dargah—the kind visible in the *basti* today—did not appear on maps of Delhi until the early 1940s, and even then only as small *pucca* houses.[43]

The confusion surrounding the historical status of the settlement at the Nizmauddin *basti* has undoubtedly been exacerbated by similar confusion over the area's status in Delhi's developmental plans. Following 1962, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) set into motion a plan that divided the city into self-sufficient zones, each with areas designated for commercial, residential, and public uses, and allowances made for those preexisting settlements that would be absorbed in the massively expanded city.[44] Since the implementation of the first Master Plan, Delhi has engulfed nearly 400 of these settlements, officially classified as 'urban villages.' Though the 1999 DDA Zonal Plan for the New Delhi area refers to the Nizamuddin *basti* as an old village, the map shows no such special designation for the area (see Appendix B).[45] In fact, the map does not distinguish in any way between the *basti* and the wealthy colony of Nizamuddin West that merges with it to the South.[46] Neither does the Nizamuddin *basti* appear on the DDA Land Management webpage's list of acquired villages.[47] My contacts at the Aga Khan

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41      Ibid.
42      Patricia Jeffrey, *Frogs in a Well: Indian Women in Purdah* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000), 10.
43      Sharma, interview by author, 30 April 2009.
44      Ranjana Sengupta, *Delhi metropolitan* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2007) 45-6.
45      Delhi Development Authority, "Zonal Development Plan: Zone (Division-'D' New Delhi)," http://www.dda.org.in/planning/zonal_plans.htm (accessed April 23, 2009).
46      R.S. Gusain, *Zonal Development Plan: Zone (Division-'D' New Delhi)* (New Delhi: Delhi Development Authority, 1999), 65.
47      Delhi Development Authority, "Village and Khasara Details," http://www.dda.org.in/ddausers/LMIS/default.aspx (accessed April 23, 2009).

Foundation were both under the impression that the *basti* qualified as an urban village. They cited the unrestricted building in the area as evidence that it must be exempt from standard New Delhi residential building codes. Conversely, a 1990 article in *Economic and Political Weekly* states clearly, "Nizamuddin is not '*laldora* land', a status that enables a Delhi 'village' to claim beneficial commercial subsidies and to build without restrictions common in Delhi's planned sectors."[48] Much of the character of the settlement as it appears today is the direct result of its strange, liminal status in Delhi's urban bureaucracy.

The commercial life of the *basti*, focused almost exclusively on sales relating to Islamic religious life, and limited to only a few locations, seems to support *Economic and Political Weekly*'s assessment. A look at the DDA's most recent Zonal Plan classifies "Hazrat Nizamuddin (East and West)" as areas where "no retail shops or household industry are to be allowed."[49] Note that here, as elsewhere, the DDA fails to differentiate between the *basti* and its wealthier neighbors. Without acknowledging the *basti* as a separate geographical or social unit, the DDA implicitly applies the same restrictions to all three neighborhoods. The only commercial areas in the *basti* can be found on the lane leading to the dargah, and the street directly in front of the center for the Tablighi Jama'at, a conservative religious organization that competes with the dargah for dominance in Nizamuddin's religious life. These shops deal almost exclusively in specifically religious goods—copies of the Quran, and recordings of *qawwali*—with some small eateries mixed in. The type of commerce that typically springs up in South Delhi's urban villages—"mechanical workshops, petty offices, Xerox shops"—is largely absent from Nizamuddin.[50] According to Mr. Shabi Ahmad, a consultant with the Indian Council of Historical Research and a forty-year *basti* resident, only the street near the Tablighi Jama'at is zoned for commercial use. Mr. Ahmad told me that, as far as he knows, the *basti* actually falls under the auspices of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi's Slums Division, despite the Aga Khan Foundation's researchers' finding that the majority of residents there actually live above the poverty line.[51] Mr. Ahmad explained that this apparent discrepancy has something to do with revenue reports appearing in the Gazetteer of Delhi produced by the English some 200 years ago.[52] Exactly how and why the neighborhood's current status is related to a centuries-old, colonial report was not entirely clear to me, nor did it seem particularly clear to Mr. Adhmad himself.

[48]     Pradip Datta, et. al., "Understanding Communal Violence: Nizamuddin Riots," *Economic and Political Weekly* 25:45 (Nov. 10, 1990), 2489.

[49]     Gusain, *Zonal Development Plan*, 25.

[50]     Datta, et. al., "Communal Violence," 2488.

[51]     Mathur, interview by author, 30 April 2009.

[52]     Shabi Ahmad, interview by author, 2 May 2009, Nizmauddin *basti*, New Delhi.

*The Modern Making of an Ancient Town*

Nizamuddin's strange absence from Delhi's urban plan notwithstanding, Mr. Ahmad, like many *basti* residents, insists on the presence of a settlement in the area since the time of the Saint's death. Sitting with me in his living room, hidden at the end of a lane in the heart of the *basti*, Mr. Ahmad pulled a tattered book from his shelf, an Urdu translation of the Persian *Seru Manazil*, penned by Sangin Baig in 1827 after a commission from Charles Metcalfe and William Fraser. Mr. Ahmad opened the book and translated for me from the Urdu into English: " 'There is a rainwater drain behind Ab-ki-Sarai and *kotla* Nizamuddin *abadi*.' *Kotla* means settlement, *abadi* means population. There must have been a settlement even in 1830."[53] Mr. Ahmad pointed also to the presence of ancient mosques and wells in the neighborhood, all of which date back at least 100 years, as clear indicators of permanent settlement. Such structures, he believes, would only have sprung up in an area with at least some settlement.[54] The *kotla* mentioned by Baig was probably the *pirzade* settlement, which, according to Mr. Ahmad, would have housed no more than a few hundred people—perhaps a small enough settlement not to show up in the photograph at Aga Khan's offices. If this is the case, then the idea of the Nizamuddin *basti* proposed to me by residents does not necessarily contradict that forwarded by Ms. Sharma and Ms. Mathur at the Agha Khan Foundation. So long as a handful of families can trace their roots back to the dargah, so long as ancient mosques, wells, and graveyards dot the landscape, the whole neighborhood will remain ancient in the historical imagination of its inhabitants.

Ms. Mathur, Ms. Sharma, and Mr. Ahmad agree that the current character of the *basti* is indeed a modern phenomenon. Starting in the Partition era, and continuing to this day, a steady flow of immigration has ensured Nizamuddin's regular growth. Walking with me down the narrow lanes leading to his house, Mr. Ahmad described the neighborhood as it was when his family first settled there in 1966: "All of this was open space or graveyard. There were two or three families on this lane. There has been a lot of vertical development in the last twenty years."[55] Though the area has certainly grown considerably since Mr. Ahmad first arrived in the mid-60s, by then the Muslim personality of the area, had been solidly forged—like so much of Delhi's character today—in the crucible of Partition. With the eruption of communal violence across Delhi, and

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[53] Sangin Baig, *Seru Manazil*, trans by Shabi Ahmed during interview by author, 2 May 2009, interviewee's home, Nizamuddin *basti*, New Delhi.
[54] Ahmad, interviews by author, 2 May 2009.
[55] Shabi Ahmad, interview by author, 1 May 2009, Nizamuddin *basti*, New Delhi.

the mass exodus of Muslims to Pakistan, many of the Muslim families that chose to remain in Delhi abandoned their homes and fled to refugee colonies. One of the most populous of these colonies was in the area that we now know as the Nizamuddin *basti*.[56] Though written first-hand accounts are largely unavailable, it is clear enough that Nizamuddin was chosen as a safe haven for Muslim families at the time due to the powerful presence of the dargah, and the perceived safety lent by an area with strong historic associations with Islam. Whether or not immigrants at the time chose Nizamuddin for explicitly religious reasons, to one extent or another the dargah exerted a kind of protective force for Delhi's suddenly endangered Muslim population. As these migrants settled precariously on the tiny patch of land around the dargah, the areas just to the east—the neighborhoods that are now Nizamuddin East and West—were acquired by the government for sale to incoming Hindu families fleeing from communal violence in the Punjab.[57] These neighborhoods have since become "the most upmarket of the erstwhile refugee colonies."[58]

According to Mr. Ahmad, the two major population booms of Nizamuddin occurred in the wake of Partition, and in the 1980s,[59] a time, as Patricia Jeffrey notes in the introduction to her book *Frogs in a Well*, "when 'communal' politics took centre stage to a degree that had not been seen since the troubled period leading up to the events of 1947."[60] These spikes in communal tension apparently coincide with major periods of growth in Nizamuddin's population. Without a full knowledge of the historical circumstances surrounding the growing population of the neighborhood, I cannot assert a definite causal relationship between increased communal tensions and migration of Muslim families to Nizamuddin, yet the correspondence between the two is striking. Though communal tension has only once led to violence in Nizamuddin (in a minor skirmish in 1990), it remains very much alive in the national psyche, a constant looming threat that seems to inform nearly every political, social, and religious reality, particularly for the marginalized Muslim community. No wonder, then, that the population boom, beginning in the 1980s with that second spike in communal tension, has still not abated.[61] As in the time of Partition, Muslim families threatened in their home communities by violence, or by social and economic systems that make upward mobility an impossibility, continue to seek out Nizamuddin when they arrive in Delhi, at least in part due to its

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[56]     Sengupta, *Delhi Metropolitan*, 74.
[57]     Jeffrey, *Frogs in a Well*, vii.
[58]     Sengupta 82.
[59]     Ahmad, interview by author, 1 May 2009.
[60]     Jeffrey, *Frogs in a Well*, viii
[61]     Ahmad, interview by author, 1 May 2009.

historically Muslim identity.[62]

While Muslim identity certainly played a large part in the development of Nizamuddin following Partition, Ms. Mathur emphasized repeatedly the importance of Nizamuddin's location in attracting large migrant communities.[63] As we have seen, location was hardly incidental to the Saint himself. As I have already discussed, settling in Ghiyaspur, with its close proximity to, and equally important independence from, the Sultanate city of Delhi placed the Saint and his often-controversial teachings[64] at an important political crossroads. Regardless of Delhi's status within the politics of the subcontinent, it has always held a central place in the political movement across North India. This high traffic level has long helped to keep the dargah alive; even when Delhi was abandoned under the reign of Muhammad-bin-Tughluq, the dargah at Nizamuddin attracted followers.[65] Today, the accessibility of Nizamuddin's dargah continues to distinguish it from others around North India, and even those elsewhere in Delhi. When I visited the dargah at Khaliyar in Uttarrakhand, its remoteness was sited as an important point of distinction between it and the better-known dargah of Nizamuddin. The hagiography of the Saint buried there actually explicates its remoteness by saying that the Saint's passionate and fiery power—his *jalal*—prevented even birds from flying over his burial place for more than three hundred years.[66] Conversely, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya's generosity and kindness made him the perpetual center of a social circle, amongst devotees at his *kanqah* in his lifetime, and amongst the visitors at his dargah in death. More recently, Delhi's rapid expansion to the South has found Nizamuddin directly in the city's center. Within walking distance of major train and bus stations, Nizamuddin *basti* is among the most easily accessible locations in Delhi. According to Ms. Mathur, many residents of the neighborhood have cited accessibility of transportation as an important reason for remaining in the Nizamuddin *basti* in spite of growing space and sanitation concerns.[67] From Nizamuddin, one can easily reach any part of Delhi, or North India. Interestingly, one of the custodians at the dargah cites this practical accessibility as one of the reasons for the dargah's popularity above those of the other major Chishti Saints in Delhi.[68] Connection, always important to the Saint, has now taken on a distinctly modern

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[62]     Datta, et. al., "Communal Violence," 2491.

[63]     Mathur, interview by author, 30 April 2009.

[64]     Dalrymple, *City of Djinns*, 276

[65]     Siddiqui, *Muslim Shrines in India*, 18-19.

[66]     Hassan, interview by author, 7 March 2009.

[67]     Mathur, interview by author, 30 April 2009.

[68]     Scott Kugle and Bruce Lawrence, "Delhi Dargahs: the Chishti Strategy for Survival in 21st Century India" (unpublished article, Henry Martyn Institute, 2009) 8.

vehicular valence.

Connection and community have been the primary productive forces in the Nizamuddin *basti* from the first. The authors of the article in *Economic and Political Weekly* observe: "the layout of the graveyards around the dargah […] suggests a sense of community among the dead, a community that is linked to the living through a shared desire for *barkat* (grace) from the saint."[69] Thus, 'community' of one kind or another—be it amongst the living or the dead—has existed at the dargah whether or not we can find historical agreement on when, or in what kind of settlement, that community developed there. The contingent factors that have shaped that community over the years resemble nothing more than the central institution of the Saint's lifetime: his *kanqah*. Though Nizamuddin always kept with him a close circle of preferred disciples—analogous to their supposed descendents who constituted the first small settlement around the tomb—descriptions of the perpetually crowded *kanqah* refer often to 'visitors' and 'guests.'[70] (In his account of the Saint, William Dalrymple says "he likened his own role among his disciples to that of a well-mannered host towards a group of simple guests."[71]) In its formative years, the Nizamuddin *basti* was formed by an influx of such 'guests,' refugees seeking shelter in the safety of a Muslim locale. Like Rajkumar Hardev before them, these numerous new residents began as guests but, in settling in Nizamuddin and committing themselves to the place by permanent construction, were not only accepted into a community, but were granted access to, and even possession of, its historic past. Today, the living and the dead, the Sufi and the orthodox, even the Hindu and Muslim share Nizamuddin together, but by one circumstance or another it seems that most of them have been drawn there by the dargah, which continues to occupy its central place in the life and imagination of the Nizamuddin *basti*.

### *Nizamuddin's Open Door*

On the larger scale of modern Delhi, the recreation of the *kanqah* requires more than evoking a spiritual 'home', as *kanqah* was translated for me several times.[72] In its newer form, the Nizamuddin '*kanqah*' has had to embrace many from outside, including those that have not come voluntarily to seek the Saint's grace—visitors as well as immigrants of all religions, origins, and socio-economic backgrounds turn up regularly at the Saint's door. Today, patterns of migration to Nizamuddin continue in much the same way that they

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[69]     Datta, et. al., "Communal Violence," 2488.
[70]     Sajun, *Diary of a Disciple*, 8.
[71]     Dalrymple, *City of Djinns*, 275.
[72]     Awan, interview by author, 15 April 2009.

have for decades, though now those seeking refuge in the neighborhood regularly come form Bihar and Bangladesh, seeking improved socio-economic opportunity rather than protection from violent communal frenzy. Generally, these new immigrants live on the periphery of the community, squatting on median strips, constructing *jhuggi* villages in parks, and, until a large-scale clearing project two years ago, making homes in the *nallah*, or drain, that runs along the western edge of the neighborhood.[73] One such area nearby has developed around the site of two possibly Mughal-era Sufi tombs, with the thirty or so families living there—mostly migrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh—employed in the construction of a new dargah. The draw of the Saint, which led these two Sufis to seek burial in the area, has now obliquely attracted thirty new families, though it is impossible to say how many will remain once construction is complete. It would be excessive to color acceptance of such settlements as hospitality on the part of *basti* residents. Still, in the past, the *pirzade* and other inhabitants of the *basti* have allowed poor immigrant communities to continue settling in their vicinity without charging rent, and without alerting the government to their highly illegal presence.[74]

More often the *basti*'s hospitality applies to visiting worshippers. In the tradition of the Saint, whose *kanqah*, according to Hardev's *Diary*, played constant host to those passing through on the way into or out of the capital,[75] Nizamuddin puts on its most vibrant face for those visitors drawn to the dargah from around the city, country, and world. Ms. Sharma suggested, based on her observations of practices at the dargah, that the majority of devotees there now are actually from outside the *basti* area,[76] a suggestion confirmed with assurance by Mr. Ahmad, who says that relatively few of the neighborhood's residents actually use the dargah as their primary religious center.[77] Though as of now there are no statistics tracking how many worshippers at the dargah come from within the community and how many from without, on a recent visit to the *basti* on a Thursday night—the most popular at the dargah—Ms. Sharma and Mr. Ahmad's assertion seemed particularly plausible based on the hugely increased number of cars parked around the neighborhood's periphery (easily double the usual number), and the crowds of people moving directly from the gates of the dargah toward the two or three primary points of exit from the *basti* back into greater Delhi. The significantly increased presence of merchants for those few hours on Thursday nights points also to the increased traffic of visitors come

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[73]     Mathur, interview by author, 30 April 2009.
[74]     Datta, et. al., "Communal Violence," 2491.
[75]     Sajun, *Diary of a Disciple*, 51, 74, 85, 90, 103, 107, 126, 144, 174.
[76]     Sharma, interview by author, 30 April 2009.
[77]     Ahmad, interview with author, 2 May 2009.

to worship at the dargah. In recent years, the popularity of worship on Thursday nights at the Tablighi Jama'at Masjid has also added to the increased congestion of the *basti* on those evenings.

Though the primary draw of Nizamuddin has always been its Muslim identity and the great institution of the dargah that helped to forge it, residents to whom I have spoken pride themselves on the near absence of communal violence from their neighborhood, and the approximately 10% of the population that is Hindu living amongst them.[78] Conversely, upon finding out that I was living near and doing my research on the Nizamuddin *basti*, one or two wealthier inhabitants of other parts of Delhi have ominously said 'there are a lot of Muslims there [in Nizamuddin],' with the implicit observation that there are *not* a lot of Muslims here (wherever that may be). The population of Nizamuddin West, largely comprised of Partition-era Punjabi migrant families who have accumulated considerable wealth,[79] has even attempted to keep the small number of wealthy Muslim families in the neighborhood from participating in residents' committees and other civic activities.[80] The difference in tone between residents of the typical (read: Hindu, affluent), South Delhi colony, and the dense, ramshackle *basti* is remarkable. More remarkable, perhaps, is the extent to which the Nizamuddin dargah actually lives up to its claims of universal appeal and openness. On any given day, Muslims pray alongside Hindus and Christians, while the inner courtyard teems with seemingly equal numbers of beggars, itinerants, and visitors from various social strata.

### A Different Communal Difference

If any kind of internal tension predominates in the Nizmauddin *basti*, it is that between competing Muslim groups. In the 1930s the Tabliqhi Jama'at established its center on the lane that connects what is now the major thoroughfare of Mathura Road directly to the dargah. With its conservative push for a return to traditional Islam—or 're-conversion' to Islam—the Tablighi requires a turn away from the syncretic traditions of Sufism,[81] and stands in direct opposition to the institution of the dargah. In an as yet-unpublished article, Drs. Scott Kugle and Bruce Lawrence suggest that "Tablighi popularity can be imagined as "parasitic" on the esteem Sufis enjoy," using the thoroughfares, commercial structures, and constant flow of visitors produced by the dargah as a means to

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[78]      Kamal Hassan, Syed Tahir Nizami, various conversations, Nizamuddin dargah, New Delhi; Datta, et. al., 2488; Mathur, interview by author, 30 April 2009.
[79]      Sengupta, *Delhi Metropolitan*, 82.
[80]      Datta, et. al., "Communal Violence," 2489.
[81]      Kugle et al., "Delhi Dargahs," 20.

spread a conservative message.[82] Despite an apparently adversarial relationship to the dargah, the Tablighi's choice to establish itself in Nizamuddin in the 1930s was motivated by proximity to the dargah and its magnetic draw on Muslim communities across India, as evidenced by the Tablighi's tactical use of rhetoric drawn from the Saint. Much scholarship has credited Sufism with the rapid spread of Islam in South Asia, with Nizamuddin Auliya as one of the most revered missionary forces of the medieval period.[83] The Tablighi Jama'at, for whom public preaching and the rhetoric of conversion play a central role, claim, according to Mr. Ahmad, " 'we preach Islam, so we are the true descendents of Nizamuddin Auliya.' "[84] Thus, even an organization positioning itself against the syncretic Sufi tradition of the dargah has attached itself to the historical figure buried there to legitimize its place in the community.

Despite any such in-fighting in Nizamuddin's Muslim community, the *basti* is ultimately just that: a community. Although *Economic and Political Weekly* states "the widely assumed concept of a coherent, unified, organised Muslim community remain[s] widely unrealised,"[85]Islam, in some form or another, has undoubtedly been the single greatest force in shaping the Nizamuddin *basti* as it exists today. It was because of the presence and draw of the dargah that, following Partition, the land now known as the *basti* superceded other historic settlements in the vicinity as a refuge for Muslim migrants.[86] As both the Aga Khan Foundation and Mr. Ahmad have confirmed, any habitation around the *basti* preceding Partition would have been reserved for those directly associated with the dargah, lending the area its reputation as historically Muslim. The original character of the area has survived primarily in the form of tombs and mosques, all of which were built there because of the dargah. It was this history, so deeply tied to Islam, that drew the first migrant communities to the neighborhood, transforming it into one of the most important centers of the Muslim community in modern Delhi. Today, Mr. Ahmad suspects, only about one third of the neighborhood's permanent residents depend on the dargah for their livelihood (the Agha Khan Foundation estimates even fewer), and probably fewer still pray there regularly.[87] More strikingly, the presence of the Tablighis—easily spotted by their particular mode of dress[88]— appears to overwhelm the neighborhood. In reality, the Tablighi population is largely a floating one, drawn to the center for short periods, with relatively few residents of the *basti* permanently

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[82]     Kugle et al., "Delhi Dargahs," 22.
[83]     Siddiqui, *Muslim Shrines of India*, 19.
[84]     Ahmad, interview by author, 2 May 2009.
[85]     Datta, et. al., "Communal Violence," 2491.
[86]     Ahmad, interview by author, 2 May 2009.
[87]     Ahmad, interview by author, 2 May 2009.
[88]     Kugle et al., "Delhi Dargahs," 22.

associated with the organization.[89] Yet even if we include this floating population in an analysis of the *basti*, I would argue that neither the growing power of the Tablighi Jama'at, nor the apparent indifference of many *basti* residents to the dargah, can ultimately detract from the its centrality to the neighborhood. Though at most a handful of families can claim ancestral antecedents in the *basti*, anyone that has settled there for its Muslim character has entered into a history generated by and around the dargah. Even those adversaries of Sufism contextualize themselves in the *basti* via the personality of the Saint.

*Sleeping in the Monuments, Living for the Land*

Still, the general population of the Nizamuddin *basti* is not preoccupied with the neighborhood's past. When I asked Mr. Ahmad if residents of the *basti* cared particularly about the history of their neighborhood, he shook his head no: "They have no sense of history. They sleep in the monuments."[90] While visitors from outside the *basti* flock there to connect to the Saint, the neighborhood itself is sustained more by a connection to place. Despite the neighborhood's problems with congestion, sanitation, access to health care, and education (all problems the Aga Khan Foundation hopes to tackle in coming years), most residents of the *basti* would not leave if given the option.[91] Many of the reasons for this are practical. As I discussed before, the neighborhood's location has played an important part in its development and sustenance over the years. Today, Nizamuddin offers unparalleled access to other parts of the city and the country, and despite the neighborhood's appearance of poverty, the majority of the *basti*'s permanent residents live above the poverty line.[92] In fact, due to its location, the *basti* actually has considerably better access to utilities than far more luxurious neighborhoods elsewhere in the city, with twenty-four-hour access to water nearly all year long, and a minimum of power cuts.[93] "In some ways," Shveta Mathur said to me, laughing, "the quality of life is far batter in the *basti* than in lots of East Delhi."

More importantly, a unifying sense of community engenders deep feelings of security for residents of the *basti* unique in notoriously dangerous Delhi. In the Nizamuddin *basti* people know one another. Walking with me through the congested alleys of the *basti*, Kamaal would stop constantly to speak with his friends and neighbors; I never saw this conviviality replicated in Nizamuddin's

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[89]     Ahmad, interview by author, 2 May 2009.
[90]     Ibid.
[91]     Mathur, interview by author, 30 April 2009
[92]     Ibid.
[93]     Ibid.

wealthier, more spacious neighbors. So far as I could tell, the only place in Nizamuddin West that appeared to draw any crowd of 'regulars' was the tea shop near the market where, perhaps not surprisingly, the clientele was comprised predominantly of Muslim residents of the crowded, social streets of the *basti*. In her chapter on urban villages, Sengupta records an interviewee from Chiragh Delhi saying "that the village [is] by and large safer than other parts of Delhi because it [is] smaller and because 'everyone knows your family.' "[94] According to Mathur, who has done extensive interviews in the neighborhood, even women say that they feel safe, an uncommon state of affairs in greater Delhi. Those outside often view the neighborhood suspiciously, some because of its publicly Muslim majority, others because of the impoverished populations living on its periphery, which give the area a reputation amongst some for illicit drug activity.[95] While traditionally the *basti* residents have allowed these communities to set up on the periphery of their neighborhood, there is always a clear distinction between those that live in the *basti* itself and those that subside on its fringes.[96]

Even these peripheral groups generally share in the unifying Muslim identity of the neighborhood. Though Muslim identity has caused the neighborhood's growth over the decades while helping to preserve its timeless quality, "Nizamuddin's stability is not simply self-generating; it is enforced by an implicit communal bias in urban planning."[97] Though I have focused thus far on the generative aspects of Muslim identity in Nizamuddin, negative communal realities have also informed the *basti*'s growth. Like so many of Delhi's predominantly Muslim neighborhoods, Nizamuddin remains considerably poorer than any of the surrounding, Hindu-majority neighborhoods. And communal injustice has not gone unnoticed. At a political rally for the BSP held near the Tablighi Jama'at Center in April of 2009, a series of speakers appealed to the collective sense of disenfranchisement amongst the neighborhood's Muslims in India's current political establishment. The people to whom I was able to speak at the rally, when asked why they were voting for the BSP, gave as their primary explanation the fact that the party had nominated a Muslim candidate.[98] One of the speakers at the rally— the favorite of the evening, based on the crowd's reception—built his speech around the repeated refrain "*Here*, we are a majority!" appealing to the solidarity of a community whose Muslim identity has

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[94]     Sengupta, *Delhi Metropolitan*, 150.

[95]     Mathur, interview by author, 30 April 2009; Tapan Chakravarty, interview by author, 30 April 2009, New Delhi.

[96]     Datta, et. al., "Communal Violence," 2491.

[97]     Ibid., 2488

[98]     Observers at BSP political rally, conversations with author, 27 April 2009, Nizamuddin, New Delhi.

long defined it.[99] This seems at odds initially with residents' pride in the communal harmony of their neighborhood. But more than an appeal to religious identity, the speech was an appeal to place, to people who feel their home has not been fairly represented in the political arena. When I spoke to Kamaal after the rally, he explained to me that the BSP (as he understood it) planned to appoint candidates that represented the communities from which they came—"a Muslim in a Muslim community, a Brahmin in a Brahmin community." Several days later, when Kamaal and I spoke again about the rally, he told me he planned on running for local office in the next election. Though he planned to vote this time for the Muslim candidate to represent Nizamuddin, he expressed disappointment at the lack of a representative from the neighborhood itself. He believes that, if he runs in the future, the community will eagerly band together to vote for one of their own.

Though the *basti* plays constant host to outsiders coming in to pray, there seems to be deep suspicion of those whose intentions are less clear. Often these suspicions and fears tend to be couched in terms of the land the *basti* occupies. In the small communal riots of March 1990, all of the instigators came from outside the community;[100] what was by all appearances an issue of religion was in fact an issue of invasion. Even in the legal disputes that preceded and followed the riots (a dispute over a piece of land between an ancient Muslim graveyard and a more recent Hindu cremation ground), "there is repeated citation of legal land rights,"[101] notably *not* citation of violated religious rights. For the residents of Nizamuddin, the community depends on the religious, cultural, and historical heritage of the land that it occupies, thus it is the fear of encroachment from outside that motivates it to action, and such encroachment need not be Hindu. After my conversation with the consultants at the Aga Khan Foundation, I was surprised to find that many residents of the neighborhood are suspicious of the foundation's plans for their land. Shamim Khan, the managing editor of a local Urdu newspaper, expressed the fears that he shares with his fellow *basti* residents that the Aga Khan Foundation, along with the Archeological Survey of India, would attempt to "capture" the historic landmarks of the neighborhood.[102] Similarly, many poorer members of the community fear that Aga Khan plans to demolish their houses and develop them commercially. A blog started by the Hazrat Nizamuddin Residents Association enumerates in detail the community's suspicions and

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[99]     BSP political rally speech, trans. Kamaal Hassan, Nizamuddin *basti*, April 2009.
[100]     Datta et. al., "Communal Violence," 2487.
[101]     Ibid. 2489.
[102]     Shamim A. Khan, Managing Director Parwaz Express Urdu Daily, conversation with author, 30 April 2009, Nizamuddin West, New Delhi.

concerns regarding the development project helmed by Aga Khan. Though the document is extensive and complicated, a theme that emerges time and again is the fear of losing the distinctive character of the neighborhood to an aggressive outside force.[103]   The Nizamuddin *basti* is on the defensive.   Though the rhetoric of politicized Islam can be heard with increasing frequency on its streets, violated *religious* territory is not the issue; as in the 1990 riots, the issue is the violation of the land from outside.  Whether they have lived on their plots for sixty or six hundred years, residents of the *basti* today know that they do not want to see their neighborhood changed or 'captured'.  Like the tomb of the Saint himself, the land seems also to act as a *qutb*, connecting the residents of the *basti* not to the divine, but to the traditions of unity, security, and community that so many lost in Partition.

*The Saint's Place*

Following the political rally, party organizers provided food for anyone who wanted to partake—I attended along with one or two other acquaintances whom I knew not to be BSP supporters. The event reminded me particularly of the several *kanqahs* that I had attended in the preceding months.  Whether or not the allusion was intended, the resonance with Sufi tradition could not have gone unnoticed in Nizamuddin where the Saint's spirit remains omnipresent. At the conclusion of her essay on Delhi's urban villages, Ranjana Sengupta says, "the inhabitants of urban villages […] have—some of them—lived in the same spot for 200 years.  Yet their loyalty is not to Delhi, for which many express contempt.  It is to their land and community."[104]  In the Nizamuddin *basti* this is not, strictly speaking, the case.  Most families living in Nizamuddin have been there no more than sixty years.  Whether or not they actively participate in the life of the dargah, these families participate in a community that has the dargah as its ever-present historical backdrop. Equally embedded in the community of the *basti* is the spirit of connection preached by, and embodied in Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya.  What had at first appeared a political rally appealing primarily to religious sentiment turned out to be just another *kanqah*, the manifestation of Nizamuddin's deeply felt sense of community expressed through the great traditions of the Saint whose tomb still sits at the neighborhood's center.

The above example of the dinner following the political rally, it seems to me, effectively expresses the nature of the relationship

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[103]     Hazrat Nizamuddin Residents Association, www.hnra.blogspot.com (accessed May 1, 2009).
[104]     Sengupta, *Delhi Metropolitan*, 154.

between the Saint's dargah, and the neighborhood that surrounds it. While Nizamuddin Auliya and his celebrated tomb may not form the center of religious life for the residents of the *basti*, his presence can still be felt everywhere. It was because of the Saint that the neighborhood came into existence, because of the Saint's presence that the neighborhood's particular historic character was established, and because of the dargah that most of the current inhabitants came to live there. Though I would not go so far as to suggest that the community's contemporary connection to its land *derives* from the Saint's own emphasis on connection and community, it seems clear that there is a continuity between the present shape of the Nizamuddin *basti* and the religious and ritual principals that are so important to the institution that defined it. The residents of the *basti* may no longer worship at the dargah; indeed, many of the people found in the *basti* on a given day would likely describe the rituals at the dargah as heterodox. Nevertheless, the Spirit of the Saint is immanent.

Just as the Saint's greatest adversary was the unjust encroachment of political power on the spirit of equality, humility, and love that characterized his *kanqah*, so today do the residents of the Nizamuddin *basti* perceive the intrusion of outside forces as the greatest threat to the continued survival of their neighborhood as they know it—ancient, harmonious, small, and safe. Whether by the productive internal force of the community, or by the negative exterior force of religious bias, Nizamuddin has remained its own, despite the vigor of Delhi's expansion. Today Nizamuddin faces many challenges, perhaps first among them maintaining its character and its community without losing hold of its cherished traditions of hospitality and syncretism. One need only set foot in the dargah to see these traditions alive and well, with 'outsiders' from nearly every one of Delhi's communities finding a place. Residents of the *basti* may not typically participate in the life of the dargah, but so long as they preserve their connection to their neighborhood and their community, they can look out to the colonies that surround them and heave a sigh of relief with a version of the Saint's famous words in their heads: despite everything, "Delhi is still quite far."[105]

## Conclusion

I have attempted here to understand the dynamic between a modern neighborhood and the historical monument at its heart. Through my research I have discovered just how complicated these

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[105]     Sajun, *Diary of a Disciple*, 170.

terms really are in a place as multilayered and historically complex as the Nizmauddin *basti*. The history of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, though easily accessible for anyone who cares to look, is not history in a conventional sense; it is a hagiography. This I expected. What had not occurred to me was the possibility that a *neighborhood* could have a hagiography, a history of mutually exclusive truths, contradictory evidence, and a 'reality' as evasive as that of any Saint. In both cases, I decided to accept hagiographical history as relevant—if not strictly accurate—to the thrust of my research. Thus my inquiry ceased to examine the historical birth of a neighborhood, focusing instead on the way a neighborhood lives in the minds of its residents. So two equally elusive and nebulous figures came to occupy my attention: Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, and the Nizamuddin *basti*. Much to my surprise, the latter, which I experienced first hand on a daily basis, was by far the more difficult to understand.

It is facile to say that the dargah and the *basti* are mutually sustaining, and neither does it capture the full complexity of their relationship. The dargah, I can say with certainty, was the generative force behind the Nizamuddin *basti*, whatever we may regard as the first form of that neighborhood. From that time, the man and the ideals enshrined there have persisted in the *basti*, in its continued Muslim character, in its pride in communal harmony, its openness to like-minded visitors, and its resistance to unwelcome external forces, be they political or otherwise. It is my contention that, even if residents of the *basti* no longer constitute the primary community of the Saint's devotees, it is through their deep sense of connection, to their land, to their history, and to their community, that the Saint's teachings continue to live.

## Appendix A

*Detail of Nizamuddin dargah and basti area.*



*Dome of Jama'at Khanna Masjid*

*Subz Burj*

# Appendix B

*Delhi Development Authority, Zonal Development Plan,*
*Zone-D Map*
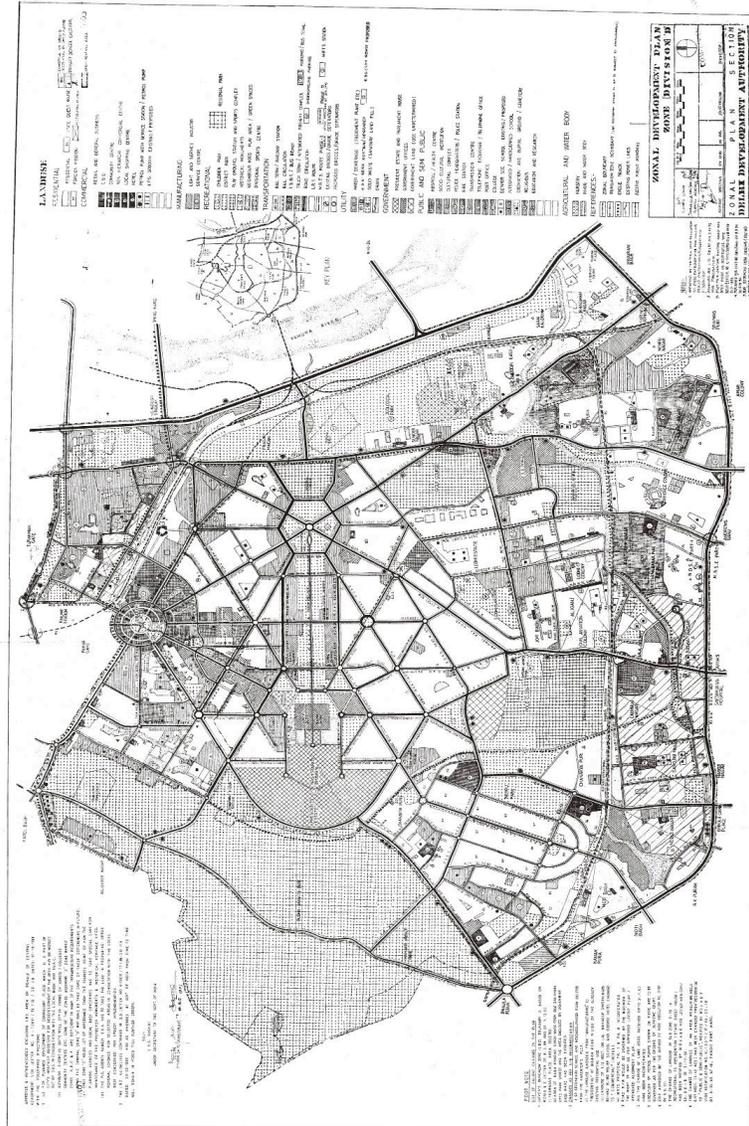
# THE INFLUENCE OF IDENTITY: AN EXAMINATION OF DIVERSITY IN INDIA'S SECURITY FORCES

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**ABSTRACT:**

A focused examination of the performances and practices of Indian domestic security forces during operations is warranted, given the rise in cross-border terrorism and emergence of internal security matters. These issues are further compounded by the conflicting demographics laden within the country. This analysis seeks to determine if differing caste, religion, or ethnicity in the composition of security forces affects adherence to duty in a multi-ethnic society. Comparing the demographics of the regular military to the paramilitary service members, I will seek to determine if differing caste, religion, or ethnicity in the composition of security forces affect adherence to duty in a multi-ethnic society. Using evidence based on eyewitness accounts and detailed post-operation reports, this study will argue that a caste-based reservation policy for the paramilitary forces does alter the behavior of service members. Compared to service members, who do not have a reservation system for recruitment purposes, conduct of paramilitary soldiers conduct during internal security matters is found to be biased. These findings will help shape how national governments will evaluate future domestic military actions.

The modern armed forces of India date their origin to the British Raj, when the first major reform of the military occurred during the 19th century after the Presidency Armies were abolished in 1857. Since then, based on number of troops, the Indian military has developed into the second largest military in the world. Organized under the Ministry of Defence, the armed forces of India are composed of the Indian Army, the Navy, and Air Force. However, defending a landmass of 1.2 million square miles with one of the most diverse populations requires special attention by the government. To govern the population, the Union Government has developed a significant auxiliary service of the military: agencies that make up the Indian Paramilitary Forces. The three largest organizations by number of personnel are the Border Security Force (BSF), the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), totaling about 450,000 service members. These forces are specialized for a variety of security details, ranging from border protection to riot control. Paramilitary forces provide a significant bridge between central and state policing powers for the Union Government.

Comparing the demographics of the regular military to the paramilitary service members, an essential question is raised: Do differences of caste, religion, or ethnicity in the composition of security forces affect adherence to duty in a multi-ethnic society? Examining the recruitment policies and the results of representation in both the Indian regular army and the paramilitary forces with the limited unclassified data available, this paper will demonstrate that caste-based reservation policies for the paramilitary forces does alter the behavior of service members, whose conduct during internal security matters is biased, contrasted to the conduct of soldiers in the regular military, which does not have a reservation system for recruitment purposes. There are several reasons why reservation policies lead to performance issues that are not apparent in the ethnic-based regiment system of the regular military: First, since reservations are caste-based and not determined by ethno-religious identity, there is an increase in soldiers from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, but not Muslim or Sikh soldiers. Since a great number of major communal violence in India involves conflicts between the ethno-religious majority and minority, the one-sided make-up of the paramilitary forces lends itself to partisan performance. Second, societal prejudices are sustained in the workplace, due to hierarchical organizational procedures based off of Hinduism and the absence of minority colleagues. Finally, the ruling political parties in both the Union and respective state governments are, at times, reluctant to deploy paramilitary forces to

deal with riots, despite being able to utilize specialized battalions such as the Rapid Action Force. If deployment of troops is delayed or otherwise impeded because of a political party's desire to see a certain outcome of a civil disturbance, then the soldier's role during these incidents is rendered nonexistent, regardless of the social composition. Use of paramilitary forces for internal security requires paying attention to the composition of the greater population: paramilitary forces constantly encounter and work with the citizenry as part of their duties, and in particular contentious circumstances, such as response to riots and pogroms.[1]

The adherence to duty by service members from paramilitary forces, who fulfill a similar mission to that of the Indian regular army, may be analyzed to determine the influence of these social structures on performance. Paramilitary organizations serve as a heavily armed police taskforce for the Union Government. Historically, the regular military has been used on the home-front for various tasks such as combating insurgency, controlling riots, and monitoring political demonstrations. However, maintaining regular army regiments to be wielded as instruments of coercion on domestic soil creates a set of legal and logistical issues in a democratic society. As an alternative response, at various times throughout India's post-independence history, when a need for internal security force manifests, new paramilitary organizations are created. Today, these paramilitary forces are the first responders to unique security issues, such as terrorism,[2] and are the primary security forces operating in Punjab and Kashmir, regions that border Pakistan.[3] These missions and assignments are heavily affected by cultural and ethnic biases. Paramilitary forces operate domestically; therefore the service members' understanding and tolerance of local culture, languages, and customs is much more important than for the soldiers of the regular military in such a diverse country, where religion is a significant staple of Indian society. During the Constitutional Emergency of 1975-1977, the political role of paramilitary forces increased, as did its manpower, reaching half a million members.[4] Today, the seven central police forces under the Ministry of Home Affairs have seen a 30% growth in personnel from 1997 to 2007,

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[1]    Throughout this paper, the terms military and army are used interchangeably, referring to the Indian Army. While the Indian Navy and Air Force do have a presence on the homefront, these branches have played a less significant role in internal conflicts.

[2]    Kirpal Dhillon, *Police and Politics in India: Colonial Concepts, Democratic Compulsions – Indian Police 1947 – 2002* (New Delhi, India: Manohar Publishers, 2005), 249.

[3]    Raju G. C. Thomas, *Democracy, Security, and Development in India* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 115.

[4]    Stephen Peter Rosen, *Societies and Military Power: Indian and its Armies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 207.

now totaling 746,878 service members.[5] The founding logics of the three organizations examined here (the Border Security Force, the Central Industrial Security Force, and the Central Reserve Police Force) differ, though the strategic outlook from each of these forces take into consideration the ethno-religious and socioeconomic backgrounds of its active duty soldiers.

Operating under the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Border Security Force (BSF) was established on December 1, 1965, as a direct response to Pakistan's invasion of the Rann of Kutch during the Second Indo-Pakistani War. The Government of India realized that the country's borders were not properly monitored after Pakistani troops easily infiltrated into India-controlled Kashmir. The BSF is presently assigned to police India's land border areas, a country with about 8,800 shared border miles, hosting Pakistan on the northwest, China, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal to the north, and Myanmar and Bangladesh to the east. However, because the existence of the Assam Rifles paramilitary force stationed in India's northeast has allowed the government to reallocate personnel, one-third of BSF battalions have been transferred to the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir. Largely in recent years, assignments in Jammu and Kashmir have led to additional duties, due to increased terrorist activities. Tasked with light combat missions, BSF service members are expected to engage insurgents that commit cross-border crimes. However, despite being organized into the same structure as an army infantry battalion,[6] the BSF is not detailed to fight skirmishes; that duty lies with other paramilitary border forces such as the Indo-Tibetan Border Police. As a result, the expansion of BSF duties requires specific patterns of personnel recruitment that reflect the demographics of J&K in order to adapt to rapid changes in insurgents' strategies.[7]

The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) also falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Its primary role is to protect key public industrial sectors such as nuclear power plants, space installations, and oil fields/refineries. While these facilities are still serviced by the CISF, after the 9/11 attacks in the United States the organization's role has expanded into other arenas, such as VIP protection and airport screening/security. Created by an act of Parliament in 1968, the impetus was provided by a disastrous fire on a public, industrial facility under the inattentive watch of the ward

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[5] "Annual Report 2007 – 2008." 11 April 2008, Government of India - Ministry of Home Affairs. http://mha.nic.in/pdfs/ar0708-Eng.pdf (accessed 27 April 2008), 151.

[6] S.V.M. Tripathi, *State of Armed Police Battalions in India* (New Delhi, India: Institute of Social Sciences, 2001), 26.

[7] H. Bhisham Pal, *Central Police Forces of India* (New Delhi, India: Bureau of Police Research and Development, 1997), 69.

staff. Rapidly expanding as the country's industrial sectors grow, the CISF is the most militant of the three paramilitary forces examined here, measured by the type of operations it performs.

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is another of the seven paramilitary forces operating under Ministry of Home Affairs, and is a descendant of the Crown Representative Police Force. Founded in 1936, the CRPF was created to provide a national police force that would have authority in both princely states and areas controlled by provincial governments.[8] After Independence, the Union Government maintained the agency to task it with defending the shared borders with Pakistan. After the creation of the BSF, the CRPF then took on traditional operations of investigation on behalf of the central government. The CRPF today focuses on cases related to wide-level disturbances, such as insurgency, food riots, and communal violence. The Rapid Action Force (RAF) is a specialized branch of the CRPF that is assigned to deal with riots. In 1992, ten battalions were created to serve as a strike force in situations of communal violence, and each RAF battalion is stationed at ten different communally sensitive areas across the country.[9] As of late, members of the CRPF have also undergone specialized training in counter-terrorism. Taking over some areas of jurisdiction from the BSF, personnel are now being placed on shared borders with Pakistan. The CRPF is the only central police organization that has capability as both an unarmed civil police service and an armed combat force.[10] CRPF soldiers have unique all-India police authoritative powers, such as the ability to arrest citizens and to search private property without a warrant.[11]

These new assignments developed for the BSF, CISF, and CRPF after the September 11th attacks and the 2002 Kargil conflict speak to the need for diversity in paramilitary forces. The paramilitary forces, unlike the Indian military, employ a reservation policy in their recruitment. Adoption of a reservation policy follows in line with other civil services, whereas Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes are granted quotas in these organizations. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are recognized by the Constitution of India as communities that have historically experienced prejudices, while Other Backward Classes are a group of communities also recognized under the Constitution as a categorization that is continuously and dynamically altered, depending on current social and economic factors. Scheduled Castes,

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[8]       Ibid., 117.
[9]       "Annual Report 2007 – 2008," Ministry of Home Affairs, 74.
[10]      Tripathi, *State of Armed Police Battalions,* 26.
[11]      Kuldeep Mathur, "The State and the Use of Coercive Power in India," *Asian Survey* Vol. 32, No. 4, (April 1992): 345.

Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes are not a homogenous group and is made up of many castes and sub-castes, but this categorization excludes non-Hindus such as Muslims and Christians. There is no overarching reservation policy as dictated by the Ministry of Home Affairs; rather, each agency is available to recruit for positions as needed, considering quotas to be fulfilled with regards to these three groups. Data is difficult to come by regarding these quotas, as defense officials are reluctant to provide information on the specifics of the recruiting process, citing the same reasons for refusing to record information on the status of Muslims in the military. Officials state that it "may convey the wrong message to the troops, adversely affecting the well-established cohesion, regimental spirit, and morale".[12] Closer examination of public recruitment advertisements calling for applications will show quotas for paramilitary positions, varying by each state.[13] Vacancies for these positions have numerous reservation-reserved spots available for interested applicants. Other notices for careers in the paramilitary forces do not list vacancies, but rather, request proof of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes membership.[14] Flyers for assistant commandant positions in the Central Police Forces (an umbrella term for the various paramilitary organizations) state that special consideration will be made for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes candidates, with respect to "vacancies as may be fixed by the Government".[15]

It is worth noting that Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes reservation policies do not include quotas for Muslims, in the paramilitary forces or in any other Union service that employ a reservation policy. Muslims have had a historically strong presence in the military before Independence, and currently have a relatively notable appearance among army soldiers due to the warrior, or martial, race theory. Stephen Cohen suggests that in forming the British Indian Army, the colonial power gave credence to the warrior, or martial, race theory: certain races are meant for fighting and soldiering, and they were to comprise the

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[12]         Sandeep Dikshit, "Muslims and the Indian Army," *The Hindu*, February 20, 2006. http://www.hinduonnet.com/2006/02/20/stories/ 2006022006591100.htm (accessed 11 April 2008).

[13]         "Directorate General - Central Industrial Security Force," date unknown, Government of India - Ministry of Home Affairs. http://cisf.nic.in/ RECRUITMENT_files/EnglishNotificationofConstable08.pdf (accessed 22 March 2008).

[14]         "Directorate General - Border Security Force," date unknown, Government of India - Ministry of Home Affairs. http://bsf.nic.in/recruitment/ r51.pdf (accessed 04 April 2008).

[15]         "Central Police Forces (Assistant Commandants) Examination," 23 June 2003, Government of India - Ministry of Home Affairs. http:// employment.tn.nic.in/pdf/crpf.pdf (accessed 23 February 2008).

infantry units.[16] These [ethno-religious] groups included Dogras, Gurkhas, Kumaonis, Pathans, and Rajputs, to name a few.[17] The warrior race theory did not apply for officer appointments in the military; consideration for these posts was based on social hierarchy and loyalty to the Crown. In contrast to infantry regiments, recruitment for combat support units (engineers, logistics, etc.) in the Indian Army during peaceful times drew from all ethno-religious groups, excluding Dalits [the Untouchables]. However, the warrior race theory took a backseat due to the need for manpower after the outbreak of the Second World War, and the British enlisted infantry soldiers from "non-martial races," employing a fair number of Dalits and those from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. [18] Shortly after the Pacific was secured, the policy of infantry recruitment reverted to the original scheme. Therefore, one would assume that Muslims would also have a relatively notable appearance in the paramilitary forces due to the similarities as security services.

However, minorities have a significantly lower presence within the paramilitary among the many different forces. In the BSF, CISF, and CRPF, the ethno-religious composition ranges from 3.8% for Muslims and 3.2% for Sikhs in the CISF to, at most, 5.5% for Muslims and 3.8% Sikhs in the CRPF.[19] Examining the other services, it will be found that promotions and prestigious assignments are reserved for only upper-caste Hindus. To illustrate, there are virtually no Muslims working at the Intelligence Bureau and the Research and Analysis Wing, two agencies within the Ministry of Defence, because Muslims are implicitly excluded from sensitive security services as a matter of practice.[20] Another example: in the state of Assam, 31% of the population is Muslim,[21] but the Assam Rifles organization consists of only 1,275 Muslims, or about 2.5% of the personnel.[22] It is bewildering that a paramilitary taskforce assigned to a region that has the second largest proportional Muslim population (after J&K) would have such few Muslim personnel in its ranks.

The reason for such low numbers of Muslims in these

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[16]      Stephen P. Cohen, "The Untouchable Soldier: Caste, Politics, and the Indian Army," *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 28, No. 3, (May 1969): 456.

[17]      Omar Khalidi, *Khaki and the Ethnic Violence in India: Army, Police and Paramilitary Forces During Communal Riots* (New Delhi, India: Three Essays, 2003), 5

[18]      Cohen, "The Untouchable Soldier," 458.

[19]      Khalidi, *Khaki and the Ethnic Violence in India,* 64.

[20]      Ibid., 64.

[21]      "Census of India - Religious compositions," date unknown, Government of India - Registrar General & Census Commissioner. http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/Census_Data_Online/Social_and_cultural/Religion.aspx (accessed 03 March 2008).

[22]      Khalidi, *Khaki and the Ethnic Violence in India,* 64.

security positions is the historical "Muslim loyalty" question, revived in recent years by Hindu nationalist political organizations. Parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Shiv Sena, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh are decidedly and similarly anti-Muslim in their ideologies. Prejudice against Muslims still thrives in India, where there is an atmosphere of deliberate misinformation and intolerance against the Islamic faith. Additionally, Muslims in India are claimed to be Muslims before they are Indians; that is, they are accused of supporting Muslim countries such as Pakistan over India. Reports indicate that Border Security Force units have used excessive force in dealing with Kashmiri Muslims, due to the belief that these people are loyal to Pakistan.[23] This societal norm translates into a low level of trust for Muslims, a reduction in assignments related to national or internal security, and determines how paramilitary troops behave during incidents of communal tension.

Communal violence is defined as violence against an ethno-religious community by another such community. In the Indian context, communal violence has generally come to be understood as violence against Muslims by the Hindu majority, although there have been significant civil disturbances among the many ethno-religious groups across the country. In 2009, India experienced 826 communal incidents that claimed 125 lives and caused injuries to 2,424 persons,[24] while during the preceding year, 943 communal incidents occurred where 167 persons were killed and 2,354 persons sustained injuries.[25] The country has witnessed an average of 40 major communal riots each year since 1990.[26] Hindu-Muslim violence has formed a large portion of these major incidents. The three disturbances that will be examined here for paramilitary partisanship are the 1987 Meerut riots, the 1992 Babri Mosque destruction and the subsequent riots in Bombay, and the 2002 Gujarat riots.

On May 20th, 1987, members of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), an armed reserve police force, were dispatched to city of Meerut to enforce a curfew that was imposed in response to preliminary rioting exasperated by religious militants that had

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[23]      Verghese Koithara, *Society, State & Security: The Indian Experience* (New Delhi, India: Sage Publications, 1999), 113.

[24]      "Annual Report 2009 – 2010." 18 March 2010, Government of India - Ministry of Home Affairs. http://www.mha.nic.in/pdfs/AR(E)0910.pdf (accessed 20 June 2010), 65.

[25]      "Annual Report 2008 – 2009." 09 July 2009, Government of India - Ministry of Home Affairs. http://www.mha.nic.in/pdfs/AR(E)0809.pdf (accessed 20 June 2010), 48.

[26]      K.S. Subramanian, "Police and the Minorities: A Study of the Role of the Police during Communal Violence in India," in *Minorities and Police in India*, ed. Asghar Ali Engineer and Amarjit S. Narang (New Delhi, India: Manohar Publishers, 2006), 123.

already killed 53 within a week.[27] 44 miles north of New Delhi in Uttar Pradesh, PAC officers were given authorization to shoot-on-sight any threats that arose during the riots. What transpired was discrimination that resulted in murders: Amnesty International reported that the PAC had accumulated 117 extra-judicial killings of young Muslim men during the Meerut riots.[28] The relatively high presence of Muslims in the reserve police force did nothing to resolve the mounting tensions in Meerut: Muslims composed about 6.7% of Uttar Pradesh's PAC during the 1987 riots.[29] Muslim paramilitary officers were ordered to surrender their weapons and take a leave of absence of duty. By demobilizing the Muslims members of the taskforce, the window for biases in paramilitary performance had been opened. By the fifth day, paramilitary troops totaled 6,400 and the police about 10,000 in Meerut as they began door-to-door searches to quell the sporadic rioting, looking for violence inciters and materials that had been used to create explosives. It is during this time that the majority of shootings by the PAC occurred,[30] and when both Hindu civilians and the troops deployed to the area to defend citizens committed the many atrocities against the Muslim minority.[31] The partisanship displayed by the PAC officers is possibly due to the lack of authoritative positions held by Muslims to ensure impartiality. As stated above, there are few Muslims in the paramilitary forces and those that have been inducted as soldiers lack equal opportunity for promotion or prestigious assignments. The balance of power is weighted against Muslims, where Muslims officers are often transferred to insignificant posts.

On December 6, 1992 in the city of Ayodhya, 150,000 militants were led by leaders from the Hindu nationalist parties Bharatiya Janata Party and Vishwa Hindu Parishad on an alleged organized plan[32] to tear down the Babri Mosque, which was

27      Michael Hamlyn, "Troops patrol Delhi as four are killed in Hindu-Muslim clashes." The Times (London), 23 May 1987 [newspaper online]; available from LexisNexis, http://www.lexisnexis.com:80/us/lnacademic/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T3764128498&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=126&resultsUrlKey=29_T3764125347&cisb=22_T3764136046&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=10939&docNo=128 (accessed 28 March 2008).

28      Khalidi, *Khaki and the Ethnic Violence in India,* 75.

29      Ibid., 76.

30      Richard M. Weintraub, "Death Toll Hits 93 as Hindu-Moslem Violence Continues in India." The Washington Post, 26 May 1987 [newspaper online]; available from LexisNexis, http://www.lexisnexis.com:80/ (accessed 28 March 2008).

31      Stanley J. Tambiah, "Presidential Address: Reflections on Communal Violence in South Asia," *Journal of Asian Survey* Vol. 49, No. 4, (November 1990): 743.

32      "Babri Masjid demolition was planned 10 months in advance." New India Press 31 January 2005. http://www.newindpress.com/NewsItems.asp?ID=IEH20050130092611&Page=H&Title=Top+Stories&Topic=

accomplished in less than five hours.[33] The existing controversy over the 464-year-old mosque stemmed from the belief that the first Mughal emperor of India, Babur, destroyed an existing temple dedicated to commemorate the birthplace of Rama in 1528 to build his own.[34] With the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in the mid-1980s, the issue became much more prevalent in the years following, with a previous attempt to destroy the mosque in October 1990,[35] until the issue came to a head two years later. Accepting the assurance by Kalyan Singh, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh (the state in which the ancient city of Ayodhya is located), that the Bharatiya Janata Party would not take any unauthorized action against the mosque, Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's administration had then relied on political and legal constraints to prevent harm to the mosque; however, these could not ease the tensions mounting on the ground.[36] As Hindu militants approached the mosque under the cover of a religious ceremony, New Delhi posted CRPF units in nearby Faizabad and deployed RAF regiments to the mosque. However, paramilitary units took 40 hours to even start a security parameter at the heart of the site, after the three domes of the mosque had already been taken down. This apathy shown on the part of the soldiers, who have sworn oaths to fulfill their duties of protecting the society, was not an isolated matter. However, it has been revealed in independent studies that the blame cannot be solely placed upon the paramilitary units: RAF soldiers were caught between upholding their role in protecting the mosque, and fulfilling contradictory orders from the Union government which sought to resolve the issue peacefully and the state government of Uttar Pradesh which was committed to aiding the Hindu militants.[37]

Shortly afterwards, the same paramilitary forces who were passive spectators in Ayodhya were reassigned to Mumbai and became agitators of violence, siding with Hindu rioters in what are commonly referred to as the Bombay Riots. Reports detailed that the casualty count ranged as high as 1,700 fatalities and 5,500 injuries.[38] In December of 1992, after stories spread regarding the destruction of the Babari Mosque, a Muslim backlash took place in the city of Mumbai. This was followed in January 1993 by a Hindu counter-

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0 (accessed 09 February 2008).

[33]    Mark Tully, "Tearing down the Babri Masjid." BBC News – South Asia, 05 December 2002. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/ 2528025.stm (accessed 09 February 2008).

[34]    Ramesh Thakur, "Ayodhya and the Politics of India's Secularism: A Double-Standards Discourse," *Asian Survey* Vol. 33, No. 7, (July 1993): 654.

[35]    Koithara, *Society, State & Security,* 116.

[36]    Manju Parikh, "The Debacle at Ayodhya: Why Militant Hinduism Met with a Weak Response," *Asian Survey* Vol. 33, No. 7, (July 1993): 673.

[37]    Thakur, "Ayodhya and the Politics of India's Secularism," 658.

[38]    Ibid., 645.

backlash against the Muslim community, sparked by a stabbing of two Hindu dockworkers[39] and resulted in attacks where Muslim casualties far outnumbered those of Hindus.[40] Reports indicate that paramilitary forces stationed in Mumbai abetted Hindu rioters during the Hindu-led phase of the civil disturbance. Extra-judicial killings by paramilitary forces increased to an unprecedented scale, where the majority of victims were Muslims.[41] Statements by witnesses in the area claim that troops were complicit in the attacks against the minorities; one merchant recalled that a sergeant helped break into a Muslim's shop and allowed angry militants to storm inside.[42] This active hostility is possibly due to a low Muslim presence in the paramilitary forces assigned to the Mumbai region.

The casual linkage between these two variables is the paramilitary policing and regulation policies that first, undermines principles of secularism and second, sustains prejudices. The low level of respect for Muslims among paramilitary members is reflected by the double standards in the workplace: Hindu idols of worship are evident at paramilitary stations and camps, but religious images of Islam are not allowed for Muslim colleagues.[43] Interviews with Hindu CRPF officers ask what comes to mind when the word "Muslim" is uttered. The answer: "criminals."[44] Muslim community localities are mapped as "criminal zones" by paramilitary regiments in their deployment stations.[45] A large majority of soldiers that are placed on fronts with high percentages of Muslims (Assam, J&K) are Hindus, who lack the ability to relate with the identities of the citizenry there. This intolerance for non-Hindu religions sustains sentiments among troops that Muslims are not citizens, but rather infiltrators from Pakistan.

The early 2002 riots in the western state of Gujarat take special notice, due to their unconventional nature and size: 151 cities and 993 villages in sixteen of Gujarat's twenty-five districts were occupied by well-armed, organized mobs for three days between

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[39]     Edward A. Gargan. "Police Complicity in Bombay Riots," in *Communal Riots: The State and Law in India*, ed. Iqbal A. Ansari (New Delhi, India: Institute of Objective Studies, 1997), 196.
[40]     Dhillon, *Police and Politics in India,* 405.
[41]     M.B. Chande, *The Police in India* (New Delhi, India: Atlantic Publishers, 1997), 262.
[42]     Gargan, "Police Complicity," 197.
[43]     Khalidi, *Khaki and the Ethnic Violence in India,* 103.
[44]     Asghar Ali Engineer. "Making and Unmaking of Muslim Stereotypes," in *Minorities and Police in India*, ed. Asghar Ali Engineer and Amarjit S. Narang (New Delhi, India: Manohar Publishers, 2006), 22.
[45]     Arshi Khan. "Police Prejudice Against the Muslims," in *Minorities and Police in India*, ed. Asghar Ali Engineer and Amarjit S. Narang (New Delhi, India: Manohar Publishers, 2006), 143.

February 28th and March 2nd.[46] The riots continued until May, with the period of the most concentrated violence occurring in mid-March. The riots commenced on February 27th, 2002 when a coach train occupied by 58 Hindu pilgrims (or Hindu fundamentalists, by other accounts) was engulfed in flames near the Godhra Railway Station in the Panchmaghal District. All the passengers (23 men, 15 women, and 20 children) were killed in the train burning, where an investigation into the origin of the fire has been attributed to a cooking accident.[47] An altercation between a Muslim mob and local Hindus present at the scene generated stories that the Muslims had deliberately set the coach train on fire during the dispute. News of this version of the incident quickly spread throughout Gujarat, and fundamentalists organized mobs of angry Hindus to assault the Muslim community. Among the violent acts that occurred were the selective targeting of Muslims for brutality, destruction of property owned by Muslims, and widespread sexual violence against both Muslims and non-Muslims women and female children.[48][49] Reports indicate that the Union and State Government of Gujarat failed to deploy paramilitary forces in a timely manner to deal with the crisis, and that members of the police and paramilitary forces that were on active duty during this incident were either held back or apathetic once on the ground during these attacks, if not complicit in some.[50] On night of February 27th, immediately after the Godhra train incident, curfew was imposed on twenty-seven cities across the state. In neighboring Rajasthan, several thousand troops were ready to be ferried to Ahmedabad, the state capital city, by the evening of the next night. However, only 1,000 paramilitary troops were deployed and once they were on the ground, soldiers were not provided with transport or information on communally sensitive areas, evoking memories of the same issues during the 1984 anti-Sikh pogroms.[51] In addition, two battalions of CRPF's Rapid Action Force (RAF) were deployed the nearby city of Godhra, but these soldiers were ordered to stay in police headquarters, rendering them useless.[52] The total number of armed forces (including regular army, paramilitary forces, and specialized police regiments) in Gujarat during these riots totaled

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[46]     Subramanian, "Police and the Minorities," 126.

[47]     "India train fire 'not mob attack'." BBC News – South Asia, 17 January 2005. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4180885.stm (accessed 26 March 2008).

[48]     Subramanian, "Police and the Minorities," 127.

[49]     "Genocide: Gujarat 2002," 22 April 2002, Communalism Combat. http://www.sabrang.com/cc/archive/comapril2002.pdf (accessed 24 March 2008).

[50]     "Genocide: Gujarat 2002."

[51]     Rahul Bedi, "Soldiers 'held back to allow Hindus revenge'." The Telegraph, 03 April 2002. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/ asia/india/1386725/Soldiers-%27held-back-to-allow-Hindus-revenge%27.html (accessed 19 February 2008).

[52]     Subramanian, "Police and the Minorities," 131.

about 11,000.[53] Many reports indicate that security forces stood by and watched as Hindu mobs tore through Muslim areas, or even encouraged rioters to continue.[545556]

Political interference has played a role in the effectiveness of the assigned duties of paramilitary forces. Anticipating this, Prime Minister Rao dismissed the Bharatiya Janata Party from all its leadership positions in state governments (Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh) shortly after the party's collaboration with militants in the destruction of the Babari Mosque.[57] The Union Government has not acted in the same manner in all cases, though: during the Gujarat riots, the state police headquarters in Ahmedabad were occupied by Bharatiya Janata Party political leaders, ministers, and party officials who issued orders to paramilitary forces, telling soldiers to ignore the attacks against Muslim citizens. The discrimination by paramilitary forces in these cases, therefore, was influenced by two elements: soldiers' loyalty to partisan government leaders during times of crisis and the negative dynamics of ethno-religious identities. In 2000, Justice G.T. Nanavati was commissioned to investigate the 1984 Anti-Sikh pogroms. Although it has not yet been made public, newspapers have reported that in his 185-page record, the ruling members of the Congress Party, H.K.L. Bhagat, Sajjan Kumar, and Jagdish Tytler, played key roles in inciting the attacks, making the notable charge that Hindu nationalist parties are not the only political organizations that harbor intolerances for the Muslim community.[58] Sikh members of the RAF faced the same fate as Muslim officers in the PAC did during the Meerut riots: they were ordered by party leaders to turn in their weapons and were dismissed during the duration of the riots.[59]

In contrast to Indian Paramilitary Forces, the Indian Army is often portrayed as a secular, non-discriminatory organization by its military officers and civil service leaders. As a national service, the military organization is intended to mirror the demographics of the citizenry. The Indian military as it stands today, however, is not representative of the population by any sort of metric: ethno-

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[53]     Celia W. Dugger, "Hindu Rioters Kill 60 Muslims in India." The New York Times, 01 March 2002. http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B03EEDD1031F932A35750C0A9649C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=all (accessed 19 February 2008).

[54]     "Genocide: Gujarat 2002."

[55]     Dugger, "Hindu Rioters."

[56]     Subramanian, "Police and the Minorities," 127.

[57]     Thakur, "Ayodhya and the Politics of India's Secularism," 658.

[58]     Vinay Kumar, "Credible evidence against Tytler: Nanavati." The Hindu, 09 August 2005. http://www.hinduonnet.com/2005/08/09/stories/2005080911440100.htm (accessed 25 April 2008).

[59]     Khalidi, *Khaki and the Ethnic Violence in India,* 97.

religious, socioeconomic, or even geographical. During the British expansion of the military during the 19th century, the Indian army recruited from all major ethnic and religious groups, including Christians and Muslims. Nevertheless, the ethnic and socioeconomic make-up of the Indian Army was deliberately constructed, establishing three legacies that influence the structure of the army today.

While today there are no reservations based on religion or socioeconomic identity, there are specific regiments comprised of a single ethno-religious group, discussed in detail below. The British employed preferential recruitment policies for elite and upper-caste Hindus because they believed these were the most educated and economically stable areas of the population.[60] The reasoning was twofold: those at the top of the social hierarchy were generally considered loyal to the crown and less likely to challenge their British superiors, and the military would have to spend less time to educate recruits if they had already came from a highly-educated background. Today, after the economic liberalization of the late 20th century, the military has been hard pressed to recruit upper-caste men, who now seek positions in the growing central bureaucracy or within the rapidly growing private sector. The second reason was that the British heavily recruited from certain regions of India, believing that even within groups, the soldiers that hail from particular areas, such as the Northwest, would be better soldiers. From 1862 to 1914, soldiers from Punjab constituted almost half of army personnel,[61] being favored over those that came from the south, and officers commissioned in the military mainly hailed from the northwest.[62] Continuing the legacy of the British to embrace certain sectors of society, the Union government has divided India into six recruiting zones (Western Himalayan, Eastern Himalayan, Western Plains, Eastern Plains, Central, and Southern).[63] In 1984, the military reformed its regional recruiting policies, stating that it would then base its personnel recruitment priorities upon the proportion of males within a given state that are fit for service (ages 17 – 25). States such as Punjab recorded a significant decrease of its hometown soldiers as a result.[64]

Implementers of recruitment policies for the Indian military

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[60]     Veena Kukreja, *Civil-Military Relations in South Asia: Pakistan, Bangladesh and India* (New Delhi, India: Sage Productions, 1991), 195.

[61]     Apurba Kundu, "The Indian Armed Forces' Sikh and Non-Sikh Officers' Opinions of Operation Blue Star," *Pacific Affairs* Vol. 67, No. 1, (Spring 1994): 48.

[62]     Rosen, *Societies and Military Power,* 243.

[63]     Indian Army, "Official Website of the Indian Army," Government of India - Ministry of Defence, http://indianarmy.nic.in/rtg/ rtg_other_ranks.htm (accessed 21 April 2008).

[64]     Khalidi, *Khaki and the Ethnic Violence in India,* 19.

recognize that the force is an all-volunteer service; there has never been conscription, even during the Indo-Pakistani conflicts or the Sino-Indian War. Despite retaining, to some degree, these legacies from the British regarding the structure of the military personnel organization, the army does not endorse or enforce a reservation policy, unlike in the paramilitary forces or virtually every other public sector and the Union civil service. The Indian military does have a quota system for a few of its seats in officer academies, [65] an important route to receive a commission as an officer. Military leaders have been vocal critics of applying reservations, stating that the performance of the military has been exemplary thus far, and that applying a reservation policy is no longer necessary after the 1984 changes in the recruiting approaches. Calls in the Parliament for the military to implement a reservation policy have all been unsuccessful. Again, data regarding the ethnic or religious composition of the military is difficult to come by because defense officials refuse to record such data, similar to approaches by the paramilitary officials. Political parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party argue that seeking data on the status of certain groups in the military, such as Muslims, would serve to "weaken" and "communalise"[*sic*] the armed forces.[66] The opposition fails to realize that this data is valuable, as it may be employed to analyze the behavior of personnel; in particular, the conduct among the officer corps. It also would provide a level amount of information on the social, economic and education status of the Muslim community overall in India. In 2005, the closest the civilian government has ever gotten to force military leaders to record data on Muslims was when the Sachar Committee mandated it. The military was asked to provide information on how many Muslims are enlisted and commissioned, their ranks, and the role played by some Muslims in key operations such as in the Kargil War. The army complied with only one request, releasing data on January 9th, 2006 that 29,093 Muslims (under 3% of the entire Army personnel) were in the Army in 2004.[67] No repercussions were inflicted on the army's top-ranking officers for ignoring the remainder of the request.

The "maintaining the regimental spirit" reasoning, as a counter to providing minority data in the armed forces, comes from how the military has historically been constructed. Both the police and military have retained similar selective recruitment and deployment practices that were inherited from the British. Following

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[65]     Ibid., 18.

[66]     Praful Bidwai, "Uproar over Muslims in Indian Army," *The News International*, February 25, 2006. http://www.tni.org/detail_page.phtml?page=archives_bidwai_uproar (accessed 14 April 2008).

[67]     Shishir Gupta, "How many Muslims do you have, Govt asks armed forces," *The Indian Express*, February 12, 2006. http://www.indianexpress.com/india-news/full_story.php?content_id=87764 (accessed 05 April 2008).

a linear arrangement from a sub-unit up to a larger unit, the Indian Army is organized into regiments of single- (or pure-), mixed-class units of soldiers, where 'class' refers to ethno-religious group. These regiments are then categorized into battalions consisting of fixed-class, where there are two or more single-class regiments, or all-class, constructed from mixed-class regiments. Thus, while a fixed-class battalion may include soldiers from different ethno-religious groups, they remain segregated at the regiment level.[68] There are many single-class units such as the Kumaon Regiment or the Dogra Regiment, but the most prominent is the Sikh Regiment. The Sikh Regiment of the Indian Army is the most combat-successful regiment, and is the most highly decorated. As stated before, unlike the Union Government's approach to recruiting Muslims, Sikhs are not only encouraged to join the military; government officials actively recruit them.[69] Making up only 2% of the Indian population, Sikhs comprise of about 20% of the Army Officer Corps and 11% of the entire regular army.[70] The Sikh Regiment illustrates a case where a particular ethno-religious group is overrepresented in the military, when many others are underrepresented. However, even Sikhs are discriminated among themselves as they are further divided into two regiments based on socioeconomic standing: the Sikh Regiment for elite Sikhs, and the Sikh Light Infantry, consisting of members of the community occupying a lower position within the social and economic hierarchy.

Diversity in military service is not only a concern for examining differing behavior, but in India the demographic of the army is undoubtedly linked to the organization's ability to provide social mobility for its personnel. Military service fills an occupation void in a country where the unemployment rate stands at 7.2% and a quarter of the population lives below the poverty line.[71] For Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, comprising about a quarter of India's population, the lack of a reservation policy for army recruitment does not appear to impede the social advancement for the soldiers from this lower socioeconomic group. Members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes community do not generally have access to the private sector, so military service provides clear benefits: leadership experience, educational opportunities, and skill training, to name a few. This phenomenon not unique to India: in the United States, African-Americans, a historically discriminated ethnic group that has not possessed the same economic access, are represented in the military at a proportionally higher rate than

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[68]    Rosen, *Societies and Military Power,* 206.
[69]    Khalidi, *Khaki and the Ethnic Violence in India,* 13.
[70]    Ibid., 14.
[71]    Central Intelligence Agency, "CIA - The World Factbook – India," Central Intelligence Agency. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/ geos/in.html (accessed 16 March 2008).

Caucasian Americans.[72] Certain regiments are comprised of a large number of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes members, such as the Bihar Regiment where almost half of the personnel are members of Scheduled Tribes.[73] In addition to the rank-and-file soldiers, there remains discrimination in the recruitment of army officers. After independence, Indians from differing socioeconomic backgrounds – including members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes – were recruited as officers. However, the corps did not become ethno-religiously or geographically diverse; officers still came from privileged military families of the categorized "warrior races" that hailed from the northwest.[74]

In dealing with an army that stretched across many ethno-religious, socioeconomic, and geographical cleavages, the Union Government developed particular policies to physically and psychologically isolate soldiers from society to enforce the loyalty of soldiers to their regimental units.[75] Isolation from society was an integral part of the British's strategy to fragment the military and discourage unity between soldiers and citizens [subjects]. During the British Raj, the Indian military was used in operations to protect the Crown, even if missions required using army troops against Indian nationalists. This was only possible due a policy to effect a prolonged separation of soldiers from the rest of society. The British strategy to quell violence was to send in "alien" regiments to deal with internal conflicts – these regiments would be either geographically or ethnically separate from the people they would be deployed against. This would condition the Indians into believing that they could not even trust their fellow citizens. Suppressing demonstrations through this method would cause tension between ethnic groups and limit the ability of pro-independence groups from different backgrounds to unify. For example, at the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in April 1919, the British ordered Gurkha regiments to fire upon unarmed Punjabi demonstrators.[76] Despite this incident and others, current government approaches to anticipate tensions between the ethno-religious groups remains the same: soldiers are isolated from Indian society for an extensive time during their active service. This policy has been preserved in order to reduce the discrimination among soldiers that is created by the recruitment and structure of the army, and to foster relationships among peers that traverse socioeconomic and ethnic boundaries.

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[72]   U.S. Department of Defense, "Population Represenation 2005," U.S. Department of Defense. http://www.defenselink.mil/prhome/ poprep2005/appendixb/b_03.html (accessed 02 April 2008).

[73]   Khalidi, *Khaki and the Ethnic Violence in India,* 19.

[74]   Rosen, *Societies and Military Power,* 239.

[75]   Ibid., 216.

[76]   Thomas, *Democracy,* 110.

One modern adaptation of the policy is the extension of boot camp: recruit training now lasts fifty-two weeks, up from thirty-six, to include a sixteen-week basic education program that brings recruits up to a "third class certificate of education and map reading".[77] This policy was enacted to combat discrimination against the underrepresented members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; these communities historically have had relatively lower literacy levels. Remedial training for all soldiers in basic training aims to reduce minority soldiers from being singled out and discriminated against. In addition, this yearlong boot camp is also conducted in isolation, with camps in distant, mountainous regions of the county to separate the soldiers from typical Indian society and place them in situations where they have to depend on contemporaries from all ethnic-religious and socioeconomic groups. Additionally, habitual trainings after the completion of boot camp consist of postings in the same mold, being at bases distant from the portions of the country from which the soldiers hail. Officers assigned to military units are often available to stay for up to 20-year assignments to a regiment or battalion, reinforcing the notion of cohesion regardless of background. The argument for all these policies is that soldiers who live in an environment where it is more appropriate to empathize with members of their army unit would be better prepared to serve the diverse society of India.[78]

To assess the usefulness of the current military polices regarding their approach to diversity, we may examine Operation Blue Star. In early June of 1984, Operation Blue Star was executed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi as a response to the occupation of the Golden Temple and other nearby facilities in Amritsar by Sikh militants. On June 2, the Indian Army entered the religious center of Sikhism and after securing control of the city and creating a perimeter, an assault on the temple commenced three days later. Led by then-Lt. Gen. K. Sunderji, the army deployed elements of the Sikh Regiment (within a larger battalion) to storm the entrance to the Golden Temple.[79] Subsequent political ramifications notwithstanding, the mission was an operational success and the temple was largely undamaged, though reports emerged stating that atrocities were committed by both the army units and militants, among them the destruction of the temple's sacred library.[80] The army leadership did not use alien regiments in this situation, as the British would have, instead choosing to send Sikh military units that represented the same demographic as the militants to control the situation. Post-

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[77]     Rosen, *Societies and Military Power,* 210.
[78]     Ibid., 211.
[79]     Kundu, "The Indian Armed Forces' Sikh and Non-Sikh Officers' Opinions of Operation Blue Star," 52.
[80]     Ibid., 53.

operational reports detail that the behavior of the soldiers in Sikh regiments did not differ from those in other non-Sikh units. While this is not to claim that the sole reason for success was the diversity among the regiments, clearly the factor of varied ethno-religious, socioeconomic, and geographical backgrounds was present, and served as a significant element in determining the favorable completion of the operation. If anything, diversity has not been a negative factor: poor performance by the Indian army in the Sino-Indian War of 1962 has been attributed to inconsistent intelligence and weak planning, and not to the different ethno-religious identities.[81]

The social construction of the Indian military remains unique, in that segregation is not only still occurring, but also that it has been accepted as beneficial for dealing with security matters in a country that is undoubtedly diverse. The success of Operation Blue Star and favorable reports of other regular army operations speak to the need for specific ethno-religious regiments, rather than a caste-based reservation system. The lack of paramilitary recruitment reservation policies for groups other than Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes does little to help reduce bias against minority ethno-religious communities, in particular Muslims. Without the opportunity to overcome language barriers and the widening education gap, the influence of Muslims in internal security forces is minimized, developing paramilitary soldiers that are more comfortable to remain the protectors of the interests within his/her community only.[82] Ethno-religious imbalances in security forces threaten the ability for fair and just performance when responding to riots and pogroms. Intolerance for different cultures translate to prejudices and misunderstandings held by soldiers, affecting their adherence to duty to protect all citizens, including minorities. Finally, with the civilian-military relationship in India, by allowing political parties in both the Union and the state governments to play a role in deploying paramilitary forces, the ability for soldiers to receive and carry out non-biased orders is compromised. The internal security incidents examined here demonstrated that partisan performance by soldiers against members of a minority community is prevalent in the paramilitary forces, and that caste-based reservation policies have not done anything to overcome the problems and tensions imported from Indian society.

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[81]     Rosen, *Societies and Military Power,* 240.
[82]     Vibhuti Narain Rai, *Combatting Communal Conflicts: Perception of Police Neutrality during Hindu-Muslim Riots in India* (Allahabad, India: Anamika Prakasha, 1999).

# SAFFRON WOMEN:
# A STUDY OF THE NARRATIVES AND SUBJECTIVITIES OF WOMEN IN THE HINDUTVA BRIGADE

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**ABSTRACT:**

The following paper examines the modes by which Indian women are both inserted, and insert themselves into the Hindutva campaign, or Hindu nationalist movement via organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. By tracing the narratives of two women dedicated to the Hindutva campaign, Sadhvi Rithambara and Kamlabehn, my study foregrounds the multiform and varied subjectivities open to the female constituency of such campaigns. Whether as the significators of an authentic "cultural essence," objects of its varied political platforms, or agents of the organization's ideological reproduction and distribution, the magnitude and impression of these female constituents is crucial. While the narratives that these women offer do reflect the cultural and historical precepts of the RSS, their varied subjectivities cannot be reduced to the organization's boundaries. The stories they offer and the relationships they forge with the RSS and the Hindu nation are all their own. Through tracing these female subjects' diverse narratives, the following paper suggest an encompassing study of the process by which Hindu women continually and actively construct their surrounding nation as well as the space they practice within.

## Introduction

On September 25, 1990, the first religious pilgrimage organized by the BJP, the political affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, commenced in the western coastal city of Somnath. Branded the Rath Ram Yatra, the procession was supposed to span 10,000 kilometers before culminating in Ayodhya on October 30, 1990. The map that the yatra (pilgrimage) traced was designed to construct the mythical motherland promulgated through Hindutva ideology. The Somnath temple, the starting point of the pilgrimage, is identified as one of the twelve lights of Shiva and commonly referred to as the "shrine eternal." The shrine, having been destroyed six times under Muslim invasion, was restored in 1950 under the initiative of Sardar Patel. According to the official BJP website, Shri Advani, a politician of the BJP and the chief organizer of the *yatra*, chose the reconstructed shrine as the first chapter in a month-long journey to "preserve the old symbols of unity, communal amity and cultural oneness."[1] Ayodhaya accordingly marked its concluding chapter as it boasted a site not yet reconstructed: the Babri Masjid. This mosque, built in the 16th century under Babar, the first Mughal emperor, is allegedly plotted on the site of an older Hindu temple that commemorated Ram's birthplace, the historical king of Ayodhya and Lord Vishnu's incarnation.

The pilgrimage effectively reflected the political platform of its organizers, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Formed by Dr. Hedgewar in the midst of the 1925 Muslim- Hindu riots in Northern India, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh emerged as a cultural organization dedicated to unifying a diverse and stratified Hindu public through the continual projection of the other (ed) Muslim community. From its inception, the RSS's consolidating platform relied on a recognition of Hindu culture, which encompassed everything from language to religious statutes, as a "corporate whole held together by shared blood and race."[2]

Partha Chatterjee situates the project of organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh within the overarching dichotomy of the spiritual (inner) versus the material (outer) sphere. While the "material" domain denotes those fields of Western expertise such as economy, science and technology, the spiritual domain bears the "essential marks of cultural identity."[3] Hedgewar's project of cultural

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[1]    Bharatriya Janata Party. "Ram Rath Yatra, September- October 1990," http:///www.bjp.org/content/view/449/225/, (accessed November 14, 2009).

[2]    Thomas Hansen Bloom, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*  (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1999), 78.

[3]    Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial*

nationalism, or the uniting of a constituency through common religious statutes and language, is best understood as a project of the spiritual sphere. Early Indian national projects, as Chatterjee affirms, "declare the domain of the spiritual its sovereign territory and refuse to allow the colonial power to intervene in that domain."[4] The inner sphere of national culture, to which the colonial state is denied access, then becomes the platform for the "most powerful creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a modern, national culture that is nevertheless not Western."[5] The inner sphere, rather than remain an unchanged relic of tradition, becomes the platform on which the "cultural whole" of Hedgewar and RSS discourse is brought into being.

The organizational mission of the Sangh, thus rests on its ability to actively define and defend this "corporate whole" against any extra territorial political and cultural threats, namely Muslim infringement[6]. M.S. Golwalker, Hedgewar's successor and the second president of the Sangh, was responsible for the organization's more aggressive and militaristic strains. Under his leadership, the institution focused on the cultivation of its' constituents physical and spiritual prowess. Golwalker, in a stringent effort to cultivate such citizens, established the shakha (branch) as the basic organizational unit of the institution. Based loosely on the popular tradition of akhara, in which men met at wrestling pits for daily exercise, the shakha added a strict ideological lens to these gatherings. Every day RSS members meet in an open public space, usually a park, for an hour of physical and ideological training. Constituents learned the basic precepts of the movement, which included political doctrines and Hindu cultural histories, an amalgamation of religious and historical texts, alongside traditional Hindi military skills such as lathi wielding, or sword fighting. For, as Golwalker asserted, the Hindu state could only be regained through "men with a capital M," that is, men who had strapping and able bodies as well as a specifically Hindu "spiritual essence" that set them apart and above their Muslim neighbors[7].

In the fashion of Hedgewar and Golwalker, the *Ram Rath Yatra* marked a mythical and historical India that unfolds unfinished into the present. It began at the site of an already reconstructed shrine and ended within the incomplete restoration of another. To effectively assemble the spatial imaginings of Bharatmata within a tangible reality, the BJP brought several hundred thousand bricks to villages and towns that lined the procession's route. Local Brahmins

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*Histories* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton UP, 1993), 6.
[4]      Ibid, 6.
[5]      Ibid, 6.
[6]      Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 78.
[7]      Ibid, 82.

and town elders consecrated the bricks, wrapped them in saffron cloth and sold them to pilgrims, who then carried them to the next locality or town on the mythic-historic route. These bricks, according to the Sangh's design, would ultimately surface in Ayodhya for the reconstruction of Ram's temple. The procession was intended to bring together a community segregated along caste, class, and gendered lines, all within the unified span of the literal land beneath their feet and accompanied by a communal mission of restoration. According to the BJP's own estimates, more than 100 million people attended the processions.[8] The pilgrimage, having failed to restore Ram's birthplace at the end of its month course, witnessed the resurgence of its adherents' passions on December 6, 1992. Nearly two years after the initial campaign, in the early afternoon, a vanguard of disgruntled Hindu nationalists broke down the police barricades surrounding the mosque and within five hours hammered and axed the religious shrine to the ground.

Figure I: Hindu Nationalists Siege the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya.

The *yatra* left, both alongside and beyond its path, a trail of riots, communal tension, and casualties. Woman surfaced in unprecedented spaces. Emerging as both the architects and executors of the movement, their voices emanated both above and within the public arena. Audiocassette tapes recorded and distributed by the BJP trace the speeches of two seminal women, Sadhvi Rithambara and Uma Bharati, as they call both Hindu men and women to the

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8       Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 161.

restorative mission. The voices of these two women were so violent and persuasive that the Imam of the Babri Masjid entreated authorities to destroy the tapes: "It has built a wall of hatred," he implored[9]. Rithambara and Bharati, it seems, had effectively reversed traditional Hindu gender constructions: asserting violence through feminine channels, which had historically been bounded to images of compliance and tranquility. The spaces afforded to women within the pilgrimage and the subject-positions that they constructed within its borders compel us to ask and explore a variety of questions: How and by what means are women, particularly Bharati and Rithambara, called into the communal conflict and how do they insert the female figure, both figuratively and tangibly, into the ensuing event? How do they construct their surrounding space, Bharatmata, and how do they envision themselves residing within it? What positions for female activism do they propagate? And finally, how do they challenge and/or reinforce traditional gender identities?

The female figure has, from the colonial period forward, emerged as the central and principal signifier of Hindutva or Hinduness[10].In recalling the domestic sphere, she surfaced as the chief representation of a bounded and authentic culture and hence, a viable and projected other to the western, politicized colonial administration. In the following article, however, I posit an examination and analysis of women as neither the platform by which Hindutva's ideology was structured, nor the object of its concern, but as agents involved in its' continual reproduction. To effectively account for such agency, I remain dedicated to presenting a rendition of Hindutva as espoused by two of its female subjects, Sadhvi Rithambara and Kamlabehn, in their own words and via their own actions. Accordingly, I provide a cohesive analysis of a speech recorded by Rithambara, one of the chief cultural activists of the RSS, alongside an ethnographic portrait of one of the Samiti's many dedicated female volunteers, Kamlabehn. In this way, I effectively investigate how these women *practice* the spaces that they construct via Samiti discourse.

The body of my paper thus revolves around stories and the subjects that tell them. It spans the narratives imparted during the shakha ideological training sessions and the religious tales propagated between a mother and her children in the privacy of their home. It is within and via these narrative structures that identities, both communal and collective, emerge, and myths of common origin and destiny become a real, potent and lived form. Narrative, as I posit throughout the paper, is an active practice by which relationships

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[9]       Tapan Basu. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993), 100.

[10]       Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 93.

between self and nation as well as gender and ethnicity are continually forged. The subjects I engage with each construct their relationship to, as well as their place within the Hindu nation differently. It is through their personal and varied narratives that we, as outsiders, can effectively understand the means by which they align and insert their varied gendered and ethnic selves within the unitary and bounded Hindu nation.

However, these words, or narrative structures, and the identities they foster must be measured against the setting and background that birthed them. As Nita Kumar states in her introduction to *Women-as-Subject: South Asian Histories*: " …there is no South Asian outside history"[11] (Kumar 1994:17). In this way, she implored me to consider the subjects' narratives, or the words of women Hindu nationalists, alongside the dominant discourse of the RSS. For as Kumar maintains: "Only when set against the normative voice is there any meaning to the reversals embodied in the subjects narrative."[12]   Drawing on Kumar's theoretical approach, my discussion and analysis of the forms and distributions of women's agency are continually integrated as part of a larger and relentlessly shifting set of historical and cultural relationships.

Through identifying the practices, or the modes by which Rithambara and Kamlabehn (re) pell, (re) appropriate and (re) assemble  the dominant discourse, I hope to both question and critique the subject positions and spaces that present anthropological and theoretical literature provide for their conceptions of self. While these two women do actively construct their identity in both their modes of speech and agency from within the dominant discourse, their actions cannot be reduced to it. Yet, the intricacies of their subject positions cannot be understood outside of the discourse itself. They seem to straddle between free will and no will at all in the realm of opportunism, conviction, and active choice. Rather than produced by the RSS, they have been fashioned by it. They provide via their narratives, a plethora of new modes and manners of understanding the subject and resistance both within and alongside the dominant discourse.

### Sadhvi Rithambara: "We Shall Build This Temple!"

*Introduction: The Form, History and Medium of the Sadhvi's Speech*

In a speech given in Hyberbad in 1991, only two weeks after the national parliament and state assemblies general election,

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[11]     Nita Kumar, *Women as Subjects: South Asian histories* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 17.
[12]     Ibid, 17.

Rithambara exclaims:

> "Ram's birthplace is not a quarrel about a small piece of land. It is a question of national integrity. The Hindu is not fighting for a temple of brick and stone. He is fighting for the preservation of a civilization, for his Indianess, for national consciousness, for the recognition of his true nature. We shall build this temple!"[13]

Here she evokes a visceral reaction from her audience that sustains a shared communal loss. In building Ram's temple within her speech, Rithambara constructs and consolidates a single, powerful consciousness: "We shall build this temple." It is a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, which through appealing to a group identity simultaneously constructs it. The proliferation and strength of Rithambara's words within the context of the Ram Jamanbhoomi movement, or the restoration of Ram's temple (of which the *rath yatra* discussed in the introduction is part) cannot be underestimated. Her speeches were repeatedly broadcast at temples across the country, recited at BJP assemblies, and dispersed within the homes of RSS affiliates. Her voice and its' message sold on street corners for one rupee. Priests throughout the state of Uttar Pradesh, in which Ayodhya is located, had even "suspended their normal programs of recitation from sacred texts at temples to continuously play the cassette"[14]. Both rural towns and bustling cities, which had no prior history of communal tension, were thrown into a bout of conflict rearing the slogans of Rithambara. What then lies behind the shrill voice of these recordings? What sort of personal and political agendas is Rithambara advancing? Do they conflate or conflict with the larger subjectivities and forms of Hindu nationalism?

While little is known of Sadhvi Rithambara's life prior to her work with the VHP, the RSS religious subsidiary, it is reported that at the age of sixteen she had a "strong spiritual experience while listening to a discourse by Swami Parmananda, one of the many 'saints' in the forefront of Hindu revivalism.[15] Following this transcendental occurrence, Rithambara left her family home in Khana, a poor rural village in Punjab, to join Parmananda's ashram in Haridwar. As his disciple, she traveled throughout northern India to attend various religious meetings, taking daily oratory lessons from her guru. Samiti officials, impressed by her oratorical talent, invited her into the echelons of the organization. Ultimately, however,

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[13]    Sadhvi Rithambara cited in Sudhir Kakar. *The Colors of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion, and Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 157.
[14]    Tanika Sarkar. *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Re.ligion, and Cultural Nationalism.* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001), 269
[15]    Kakar, *The Colors of Violence*, 153.

Rithambara gained prominence within the VHP and became their chief spokesperson during the Ram campaign.



Figure II: Sadhvi Rithambara Partakes in the *Ram Rath Yatra*
(The Pilgrimage to Ayodhya)

As the movement's principal voice, Rithambara always remained outwardly concerned with identifying along religious, rather the political lines. While accompanying her guru on religious pilgrimages in the north, she adopted the title *sadhvi,* the female counterpart of *saddhu*, or ascetic. By renouncing worldly life, Rithambara projected a certain selflessness and "power which is of another, 'purer' world."[16] She effectively removed herself from the political arena of selfishness, deceit, and falseness and constructed her identity along religious lines of truth and devotion. Rather than emerging as an advocate of specific partisan interests, Rithambara established herself as a pseudo-goddess concerned and saddened by the plight of the entirety of the Hindu nation.  Her gender magnified this image. While she may not embody the traditional Hindu woman, identifying neither as mother nor wife, she employs the significations of such to her advantage, locating her being and motives within the "inner sanctum" of the home and traditional Hindu existence. As Amrita Basu asserts in "Feminism Inverted:"

> "Female ascetics can claim to recognize greed and corruption from their position of selflessness, suffering and martyrdom. But given their vulnerability to sexual exploitation, they also

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[16]     Ibid, 155.

recognize the need for law, order, and morality to reinvigorate political life"[17].

By conflating her identity as ascetic and woman, Rithambara offers a scathing critique of present tainted politics, while simultaneously advocating for a more paternalistic state.

Her words are, as Tanika Sarkar affirms, "bare," and her voice "pure," evoking a message which is both natural and spontaneous[18]. The sincerity and devotion evoked through her speech can be attributed to the medium of her oratory style, the katha form. This traditional technique, present in the rhyming verses of Hindu epics and sacred texts, is marked or identified by its continual return to an identical point of reference via various discursive paths: "In Rithambara's case these discursive routes take the form of exhortations, homilies, anecdotes, and stories and couplets that embed the moral ineffably in the memory."[19] In evoking this traditional narration form, Rithambara constructs her subjecthood within the spatial landscape of the "spiritual sphere." Like the sacred texts she emanates, her words denote a bare truth and eternal wisdom. Rithambara is thereby able to situate her message against the temporary narrow-minded deceits of her political adversaries.

The medium of Rithamabara's speeches dispersal, the audiocassette, only magnifies the eternal nature of her voice. The VHP, through employing such technology, enabled the constant and recurrent exchange between speaker and listener or congregation. In this way, it facilitated an ever-expanding development and extension of the speeches original significations and connotations. As Basu, a scholar of the RSS, argues in *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags:*

> "By preserving and replaying the human voice and spoken word, the audio cassette achieves an impact qualitatively distinct from the one resulting from re-reading a text, The latter also can grow and attain new meanings in overtone, but it remains an individual exercise, a private act. The spoken word is addressed to a whole congregation and proceeds through a continual interchange of passion between the speaker and listener. New technology is able to recapture that exchange ad infinitum for freshly or differently constituted congregations, and, at the same time, allow the first message to fatten on new meanings and associations gathered from

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[17]     Amrita Basu, "Hindu Women's Activism in India and the Questions it Raises," in *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*, ed. Patricia Jeffery and Amrita Basu (New York: Routledge. 1998), 105.
[18]     Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 269.
[19]     Ibid, 286.

the movement, unleashed by itself, grown from its own self-fulfilling prophecies." [20]

The replaying spoken word sustains the communal conscience of her adherents. The singularity and unity of their identification and loyalties is a direct result of Rithambara's invocation of a communal passion. Thus, when a woman sits in her courtyard playing Rithambara's speech on cassette, she does not envision a private discussion between herself and the Sadhvi, but imagines her subject as part of a larger congregation, all wound up together in a "continual interchange of passion." [21] An "interchange" assumes that the said woman is, rather than understanding Rithambara's words within the context of the political, social and religious environment surrounding its recording, appropriating the message within present circumstances. Thus, we can imagine that those speeches Rithambara recorded before October 30, 1990, had considerably altered significations when played past the date of failed (re) construction.

Through its ability to read the communal future ("we will build this temple"), Rithambara's cassette confirms the mythical interpretations of the "unified" and bounded past which it simultaneously constructs. Her politics becomes a "politics of magic," which summons a collective subjectivity through arousing the deep-seated fear of the Hindu body politics present vulnerability. This vulnerability is defined, further, as the threatened state of their "true" Hindu selves in the face of the Muslim enemy. Keeping both the style of her speech as well as the medium through which they were projected at hand, I will analyze the recording of a 1991 Hyberbad speech, as translated by Sudhir Kakar in the *Colors of Violence (1996)*. Rather than divide her speech according to issue, or within a frame of comparative analysis, I will investigate it within its original form and structure. The coherence, authority and strength of her words can only be recognized and appreciated when presented in their original fashion.

**The Invocation: Bounding the Hindu Nation**

Rithambara begins her speech through invoking a collection of Hindu gods, goddesses, and figures drawn from both modern and ancient Indian history:

"Hail Mother Sita! Hail Brave Hanuman! Hail Mother India! Hail Lord Krishna! Hail the eternal religion! Hails the religion of the Vedas! Hail lord Mahavira! Hail Lord Buddha! Hail Banda Bairagi! Hail Guru Gobind Singh! Hail the great sage

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[20]     Basu, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 100.
[21]     Ibid, 100.

Dayananda! Hail the great sage Valmiki! Hail the martyred kar-sevaks! Hail Mother India!" [22]

What struck me first was that the invocation for the restoration of Ram begins not with the epic figure himself, but with his wife Sita. According to the Ramayana epic, Ram was forced to exile his wife, albeit unwillingly, after she had been taken and captured by Ravana. No longer embodying the form of a chaste and pure female, Ram removed Sita from his household to maintain the virtue of his reign and dynasty. Deserted and pregnant, she was taken in by the sage Valmiki, and delivered twins in his hermitage. Her sons, Kusha and Lama, grew to be intelligent, virile characters. Upon the children's return to their father, Sita, in a revered speech begged Bharat, Mother Earth, to swallow her:

> "If unstained in thought and action I have lived from day of birth,
> Spare a daughter's shame and anguish and receive her, Mother Earth!
>
> If in duty and devotion I have labored undefiled, Mother Earth! who bore this woman, once again receive thy child!
>
> If in truth unto my husband I have proved a faithful wife, Mother Earth! relieve thy Sita from the burden of this life!"[23]

Sita thus defies both Valmiki and Ram's pleas for her return to Ayodhya. Evoking Sita within this epic constructs a woman, who as Bharati affirms "did not always obey," but instead "went her own way and committed suicide in the end rather than following her husband's orders."[24] Rithambara assembles a mythic Hinduism that tolerates her personal convictions and gendered transgressions. In doing so, she constructs a space for her woman compatriots, at home and in courtyards listening to her shrill voice via cassette, to do the same. She calls them into a present that demands they not obey. For only through such active transgressions, Rithambara maintains, can the motherland encapsulated in its new capital, Ayodhya, be reconstructed in its' former glory. Like Sita, they must implore the land, Bharat, over and before their husband, the epic figure of Ram. The mythic "duty" and "devotion" of Sita, is transfigured into a historical and present will.

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22      Kakar, *The Colors of Violence*, 156.

23      Romesh C Dutt, trans. *Ramayana* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 208

24      Uma Bharati cited in Basu, "Hindu Women's Activism and the Questions it Raises", 167.

The entire epic denotes an even larger transformation. Until now, all the objects of fetishized love to be reclaimed have been embodied in the feminine figure, whether Bharatmata or the abducted Hindu woman. Here, however, such logic is reversed. The object of "sacred" love is Ram, a male deity, and Sita is called upon to rescue him. The present reappropriation transposes the mythic epic, which records the struggles of Ram and his army in recovering Sita from the depth of her hermitry. As Basu maintains: "The reversals of roles equips the communal woman with a new and empowering self image. She has stepped out of a purely iconic status to take up an active position as a militant."[25] Women, led by the iconic image of Sita, are not only conceived as an integral part of the body politic, but implored to build and uphold its boundaries. Through the Sadhvi's calling, the mythic female becomes the present historic savior, summoned to the front lines of Aydohya's restoration.

After invoking both Sita and Hanuman, two characters linked to Ram's epic, and reflecting the contemporary concerns of the restoration at Ayodhya, Rithambara continues to construct the boundaries of the Hindu community as espoused by the Sangh. She calls upon a Jain sage, Mahavira, a Seikh guru, Gobind, and the Buddha; denoting that these three religions, like Hinduism, are "birthed" of Bharat and its' constituencies, thereby, enmeshed in a similar fate. This is epitomized more directly through her summoning of Banda Bairagi, a Seikh whose story circulates around his lifelong struggle against Mughal (Muslim) forces[26]. Alongside these religious characters, Rithambara invokes the nineteenth century reformer Dayananda, who founded the first Hindu nationalist society, the Arya Samaj. Rithambara thereby extends the subjects of her introductory chant from religious deity to historical figure. She concludes, finally, by invoking the "martyred *kar-sevaks*," or the RSS members who died at the hands of police fire in a bid for the reconstruction of Ram's temple. In her invocation, Rithambara links the gods of a mythic past to the heroes of a historical present. Both the mortal and immortal, gods and citizens, become the subjects and children of Bharatmata, or mother India. However, her placement of these figures alongside one another blurs the boundaries between the sacred and profane:

> "The logic of the placement of these names in relation to each other ostentatiously confuses the mythic and the historical, imparting mythic status to human figures and historical truth to myths." [27]

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[25]     Basu*, Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 82.

[26]     Kakar, *The Colors of Violence*, 156.

[27]     Bishnupriya Ghosh "Queering Hindutva" in *Right Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists Around the World* ed. Paolo Bachetta and Margaret Power

By blurring these boundaries, Rithambara constructs the historical female in light of the goddess Sita. Women, through the initial summoning, remain both indispensable "mythic" subjects within the body politic as well as its' most potent and literal restorative force. The mythic India of Ram's epic becomes a historical reality which they, as women, have the potential to reclaim.

### Ram's Devotees: Naturalizing the Boundaries of Nationhood

Having established, in her introductory remarks, the boundaries of the body politic, Rithambara proceeds to both essentialize and naturalize the community of this spatial landscape:

> "Some people became afraid of Ram's devotees. They brought up Mandal. They thought the Hindu will be divided. He will be fragmented by the reservation issue. His attention will be diverted from the temple. But your thought was wrong. Your thought was despicable. We shall build this temple! I have come to tell our Hindu youth, do not take the candy of reservations and divide yourself into castes. If Hindus get divided, the sun of Hindu unity will set. How will the sage Valmiki look after Sita? Those who thought that our bonds with the backward caste with the Harijans are cut will be dust. We shall build this temple! Listen Ram is the representation of mass consciousness. He is the god of the poor and the oppressed. He is the life of the fisherman, cobblers, and washerman. If anyone is not a devotee of such a god, he does not have Hindu blood in his veins. We shall build this temple!"[28]

When placing this text alongside the invocation and approaching it as an extension of the former, it becomes clear that the Hindu community is not a bounded cultural entity whose borders can be effectively guarded and maintained, but a process constantly in flux, continuously assaulted by forces from both within and without. Forces like the Indian National Congress continually endeavor to divide, disorder, and shatter the fragile and recuperating unity. The mytho-historical Hindu subject, so clearly demarcated in the invocation, becomes a blurred victim of looming political threats. To effectively illustrate such vulnerability, Rithambara structures her concerns around the Mandal Commission. Implemented in 1979 by the Janta Dal government, the commission provided quotas for OBC's, or "Other Backward Classes[29]," in both public education and

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(New York: Routledge, 2002), 266.

[28]  Rithambara cited in Kakar, *Colors of Violence*, 158.

[29]  The criteria for Backward Classes, according to the commission, had more to do with status rather than economic parameters: "In keeping with the

employment. Afraid that the commission would effectively raise caste-consciousness and destroy Hindu solidarity, she implores the youth not to "take the candy of reservations." Through aligning and exemplifying the commission's motives within the image of "candy," Rithambara effectively constructs their political endeavor as one of deceit and lure. The government, through the raw and bare constructions of the Sadhvi's illustration, becomes an institution engaged in childish games of trickery; an institution that envisions it's populous as inherently naïve and susceptible.

In a state of overwhelming agitation Rithambara passionately retorts: "But your thought was wrong!" Her plea at once strikes at her adversaries and attempts to awaken the Hindu mass consciousness. In an effort to regain their crippled and vulnerable unity, Rithambara reminds her audience of the mutually dependent and faithful relationship of Valmiki, a hunter of low caste, and Sita, the wife of a king and deity. "How will the Valmiki look after Sita?" she asks. Rithambara thus envisions caste within unitary rather than fragmentary terms. A unity, which ultimately falls beneath the overwhelming figure of Ram, "the god of the poor and the oppressed." A God, which anyone born with "Hindu blood in his veins," would naturally devote himself. In her concluding plea, Rithambara asserts a sort of naturalized and essentialized communal consciousness. By being born of Bharatmata, she maintains, one has inherent sentiments and loyalties. Rithambara thereby effectively constructs the "eternal" Hindu subject through appealing to him. She leaves the listener engaged; convinced that in being born of the land, he is called upon and required by Ram to rebuild it.

The subject imagined within this segment is undeniably male: "he will be fragmented," "his attention will be diverted." However, Rithambara's concluding retorts are always framed within the unitary "we." She thus infers that while the current state only recognizes the male subject, in an effort to "fragment" and "divert" *his* communal consciousness, Hindutva's platform and struggle reincorporates "her" lost voice in a valiant effort to reassemble the shattered unity. Rithambara's "her" signifies all those at the margins of Indian society. Women, in occupying a liminal position, provide a most convincing consolidating platform: "First of all, women are depicted as the homogenous mass and are identified with the common folk or the whole people. Women's presence in the movement is then used as a sign of the movements ubiquity, its universality."[30] Ram, in being the

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prevalent ranking of status, the most important criterion was whether a community was 'considered backwards by others.' Other decisive criteria were high frequency of manual labor, low age of marriage, and above-average percentage of working women." Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 98.

[30]     Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 209.

God of "the poor and oppressed," becomes the seminal figure of their calling. The Sangh thereby emerges as the sole organization which recognizes those on the margins, women and "backwards classes," as both mythic components of a Hindu body politic and integral historical participants in the present unfolding drama. Through this consolidating platform, the RSS disentangles itself from its primary associations with upper-middle class politically aware elite and emerges as the only movement that embodies the pluralistic and varied Hindu society as it now stands.  The will espoused by the RSS, through such invocations, becomes the communal will as embodied by Ram. Rithambara accordingly emerges as the historical-mythic persona who implores women out of the inner sanctum on a mission to restore the sphere to its former glory. As Basu maintains, the platform of Hindutva "encourages women's espousal of violence to rectify the unethical nature of the social order.[31] The restorative becomes the position of Hindutva's female activists and the Sangh, the preeminent institution that provides for these women's mobilization.

### The "Denial of Reality:" Constructing Hindu Victimhood

Having bounded both the mytho-hisorical landscape and constructed the "essential" nature of its inhabitants, Rithambara then continues to build her subjects' cohesion by illustrating the idealized virtues inherent in their character. This romanticizing project remains dependant on the simultaneous construction of an other to which the idealized group can be contrasted. Thus the Hindutva charachterization of the male Muslim emerges:

> "Our civilization has never been one of destruction. Intellectuals and scholars of the world, wherever you may find ruins, wherever you come upon broken monuments, you will find the signature of Islam. Wherever you find creation, you discover the signature of Hindu. We have never believed in breaking but in constructing." [32]

The Muslim, within Rithambara's speech, is constructed as a destructive force that has "trod upon humanity." His violence is positioned against the Hindu subjects selfless acts of "creation." In summoning "scholars of the world," Rithambara is suggesting that such divisions are both inherent and universal.  The language employed, that of "ruins," "monuments" and "discovery," constructs the Ram janmabhoomi movement as a sort of historical excavation; An act of creation in which the past, rather than destructed, is restored.

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[31]    Basu, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, 178.
[32]    Rithambara cited in Kakar, *Colors of Violence*, 159.

The violent character of the Muslim, rather than just acting as a base of comparison, is portrayed by Rithambara as a real and viable threat:

> "Even in a mutilated India they [Muslims] have special rights. They have no use for family planning. They have their own religious schools. What do we have? An India with its arms cut off. An India where restrictions are placed on our festivals, where our processions are always in danger of attack, where the expression of our opinion is prohibited, where our religious beliefs are cruelly derided […] In Kashmir, the Hindu was a minority and was hounded out of the valley. Slogans of 'Long Live Pakistan' were carved with red-hot iron rods on the thighs of our Hindu daughters. The Hindu was dishonored in Kashmir because he was in a minority. But there is a conspiracy to make him a minority in the whole country. The state tells us Hindus to have only two or three children. After a while, they will say do not have even one. But what about those who have six wives, have thirty-five children and breed like mosquitoes and flies? Why should there be two sets of laws in this country? Why should we be treated like stepchildren? […] You know the doctors who carry out their medical experiments by cutting open frogs , rabbits, cats? All these experiments in Hindu-Muslim unity are being carried out on the Hindu chest as if he is a frog, rabbit or cat." [33]

The grotesque, sexual, and invasive imagery painted through Rithambara's speech commands an almost visceral and intuitive response from her audience. A reaction so instinctive that it demonstrates what Kakar terms, a staunch "denial of reality." Namely, an effective neglect of the present socio- economic conditions: first, that the Muslim community is an eighth of the size of the Hindu population, and second, that they live in far worse circumstances.

This denial of reality, and the images of Hindu victimhood and Muslim tyranny that emerge, derive their potency from Rithambara's employment of the mutilated and fragmented female body. "What do we have?" Rithambara asks, "An India with its arms cut off." Here, the Sadhvi recalls the Samiti goddess constructed by Lakshmibi Kelkar[34], Ashtabuja, whose eight arms wield her power.

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[33]     Ibid, 162.
[34]     Lakshmibai Kelkar formed the Samiti, the women's wing and first subsidiary of the RSS in 1936. The Samiti partakes in all the avenues and arenas afforded to their male counterpart. They too partake in daily shakha sessions and are trained along the Sangh's physical and ideological lines.

The mutilated female image propagated within this metaphor assembles modern Indian history as a series of defeats and fragmentations; a narrative of the unfair distribution of state resources. Through calling on her congregation to reclaim the state, Rithambara effectively re-members her mother's lost limbs. She thus recovers the Hindu daughters, whose thighs were burnt with "red hot irons." Such images resurge in her discussion of dissection, during which she frames the Hindu nation within the vulnerable form of frogs, rabbits, and cats at the mercy of doctors, or more directly the governmental apparatus. In opposition to the dissected frog, who can produce no more offspring, the Muslim emerges as a mosquito spinning and buzzing the eugenic tales of incessant breeding. Rithambara effectively spatializes the threats of the organic metaphors: The Muslims, like mosquitoes, are soon going to envelop and overwhelm the frog's quaint pond. The frog at the mercy of the doctor, or state apparatus, remains completely incapable of initiating any means for self-defense. Images of diseased breeding and contamination abound.

Ultimately this brings Rithambara to ask: "Why should there be two sets of laws in this country? Why should we be treated like stepchildren? […] What is this impartiality toward all religions where the mullah gets the moneybags and the Hindu the bullets? We also want religious partiality but not of the kind where only Hindus are oppressed."[35]  In identifying the Hindu community as "stepchildren," Rithambara is actively constructing a second mode of identifying and comprehending the fragmented Bharatmata. While the organic metaphors of dismemberment evoke modern Indian history as a series of "loss and division," the summoning of a stepchild reminds the listener or congregation "of the libidinal figure of the son divided from a harmonious dyad with the maternal body and striving to reclaim her in a fallen world."[36] She thus recognizes a body politic, which although wounded and fragmented, is inherently capable of (re) claiming the lost limbs of modern Indian history.

### *"Hail Mother Tulsi!":* Envisioning a Female Body Politic

While in both forms of fragmentation thus far visited, the imagined body politic capable of restoration is masculine, Rithambara's (re) narration of a children's folk tale unfolds something strikingly different. The tale invoked is that of Birbal, a Hindu minister, and Akbar, a Mughal emperor.

"Once Akbar and Birbal were going somewhere. On the way they saw a plant. Birbal dismounted and prostrated himself

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35      Ibid, 162.
36      Ghosh, "Queering Hindutva," 269.

before the plant saying, 'Hail mother Tulsi!' Akbar said, Birbal you Hindus are out of our minds, making parents out of trees and plants. Lets see how strong is your mother!' He got off his horse, pulled the Tulsi plant out by its roots and threw it on the road. Birbal swallowed his humiliation and kept quiet. What could he do? It was the reign of the Mughals. They rode farther and saw another plant. Birbal again prostrated himself saying, 'Hail, father! Hail, honored father!' Akbar said, ' Birbal I have dealt with your mother. Now let me deal with your father too..' He again pulled out the plant and threw it away. The plant was a nettle. Akbar's hand started itching and soon the painful itch spread all over his body. He began rolling on the ground like a donkey, with tears in his eyes and his nose watering. All that while he was scratching himself like a dog. When Birbal saw this condition of his king, he said, ' Oh, protector of the world, pardon my saying that our Hindu mothers may be innocent but our fathers are hard bitten.' Akbar asked, 'Birbal, how do I get rid of your father?' Birbal said, 'Go and ask forgiveness of my mother tulsi. Then rub the paste made out of her leaves on your body and my father will pardon you." [37]

In Rithambara's retelling of this folk tale, she demonstrates not only Birbal's wit and intellectual superiority, but also Akbar's innate stupidity and animal-like vulnerability, as he "scratch [es] himself like a dog." She thereby evokes the bounded communities of the Muslim and Hindu alongside their inherent characteristics. However, above this resurgent communal platform is the claim that the sacral and naturalized Hindu citizen is feminine, epitomized in the *tulsi* plant, renowned for its "spiritual and medicinal" properties.[38] In opposition to the healing feminine flora, the masculine emerges in the form of a stinging nettle who relies on the former for alleviation. The male thus surfaces alongside modern history, a victim of both fragmentation and destruction. This claim is most apparent when Rithambara maintains "What could he [Birbal] do? It was the reign of the Mughals." While the masculine remains a figure both influenced and swayed by the material world of politics, women's essence lingers unchanged. The eternal personification of the feminine provides for her restorative agency. The tulsi plant is thus able to "cure" the ailing wounds of a destructive masculine world as embodied in the form of the nettle. The woman, residing outside of the fallen world of politics, remains its most formidable cure and agent of renewal. As Ghosh insists: "Women personify lost unity and as restorative agents have the ability to transmute this fallen time and place to a

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[37]     Rithambara cited in Kakar, *The Colors of Violence*, 161.
[38]     Ghosh, "Queering Hindutva," 269.

remembered myth."[39] Through evoking this folktale, Rithambara advances a feminine political agenda, which implores its members to "sustain, nurture, and make possible a politically instrumental national ethos." [40]

## Subjecting the Dis-Membered Feminine: Victim of Virile Agent?

On the one hand, Bharatmata (the feminine) must be rescued from the material and modern forces of evil. On the other, she is ascribed a self-regenerative nature and restorative capabilities. It is among and between these two divergent conceptions of the dismembered feminine that I would like to situate both Rithambara's self as well as the female subject she envisions. For it is between these two poles of femininity that I believe we can locate and attribute the often-transgressive appropriations of the Hindu nationalist woman. To conceive of this space, we must first discern that of its counter, the Hindu male. While the masculine subject remains the focal subject of her political pleas, he also remains the prime target of her critique. It is "he" who through his cowardly and fearful disposition sanctioned the fragmented present. His helplessness, both physical and ideological, is solely responsible for the branded thighs of Hindu girls and the partition of the nation. The inadequacy of male protection both provides for and commands women's entrance into the public sphere of destruction and deprivation. As Ghosh so articulately maintains: "They are warriors by default."[41]

This default, however, has striking consequences. Amrita Basu's accounts of women in Bijnor during the Ram pilgrimage, or *yatra* provides a salient example:

> "In October 1990 in the town of Bijnor in western Uttar Pradesh, Hindu women led a procession through a Muslim neighborhood with trishuls (tridents) in hand, shouting bigoted, inflammatory slogans. In the aftermath of the violence in which several hundred people were killed, these women radiated pride at their actions." [42]

For women of the right, the Sangh's tales of Muslim rape and eugenics provided a supple opportunity for the transposition of their private selves into the public world of political upheaval. These

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[39]     Ibid, 269.
[40]     Ibid, 269.
[41]     Ibid, 271.
[42]     Basu," Hindu Women's Activism in India and the Questions it Raises," 167.

women found themselves at the front of the *yatra* battles, their saris pressed against police barricades, their domestic voices screaming "inflammatory slogans." For Rithambara particularly this transition enabled and bestowed her self with male speech patterns and familiarities. The potency of these reappropriated masculine traits overwhelm her concluding statement, in which she asserts: "Whatever the Hindu does, it is the Muslim's religion to do the opposite, I said, 'If you want to do everything contrary to Hindu, then the Hindu eats with his mouth; you should do the opposite in this matter too." [43] The crude and aggressive insinuations of this passage, namely her suggestion that Muslim male eat with "the opposite" of his mouth, reflects a distinctly male voice. Rithambara assumes a sort of fluency in such vulgar gestures and a familiarity with the male audience at which they are aimed. Through a skillful manipulation of language, Rithambara effectively resists those categories of normative femininity. She emerges as a self-designated virile male obsessed with re-membering the female body of Bharat, a crude compatriot versed in sexual innuendos and a nationalist who bluntly derides his Muslim neighbor. In her concluding statement, Rithambara effectively trans-genders her speech pattern and her sense of self. What remain questions of concern, however, are whether Rithambara consciously and actively propagates her subject-position to her woman adherents, And if so, whether this undermines or threatens the framework which she so passionately advocates.

## Marking Off Kamlabehn's Territory: The Self and Spatial Imaginings of a Pracharika

In an attempt to illustrate the female subject of Rithambara's agenda, I will shift my attention to Kamlabehn, a dedicated pracharika, or full-time ascetic leader of the Samiti. Within my analysis I will remain attentive to her conception of the feminine self and the space that it affords within the present conflict. This project requires that I trace the pracharika against her propagator, Rithambara. In doing so I ask: Does Kamlabehn's subject position align or depart with that of the Sadhvi? What about her conception of nation and citizenship?

Kamlabehn is noted by Bacchetta, in the introduction to her ethnographic portrait, as "a sevika before birth."[44] While both her parents and siblings are active members of the RSS, Kamlabehn remains the most committed to the organization. Though she claims to admire both her parents dedication to the national call, she specifically sites admiration for her mother: "Kamlabehn admires

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43      Rithambara cited in Kakar, *Colors of Violence*, 165.
44      Paolo Bacchettta, Gender in the Hindu Nations: RSS Women as Ideologues (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004), 66.

both her parents for their active commitment to Hindu nationalism, but emphasizes her mothers merits and the strength required to break with her 'traditional upbringing.'"[45] She thus attributes her mother's position as housewife not to the bounds of gender, but to her family's lack of familiarity or association with the Sangh. For Kamlabhen, like Rithambara, the RSS is constructed as the primary route to female empowerment. It is among the ideological precepts of its leadership, that her father found the conviction to send her to English speaking schools and support her entry into traditionally male domains. Encouraging Kamlabehn, after graduating from secondary school, to continue her education at a local engineering college.

Perhaps the most incessant critique of the Samiti daughter during her schooling years was her manner of dress; Kamlabehn's daily uniform consisted of an oversized men's shirt, trousers and tennis sneakers. While men, particularly her father, remained mostly indifferent to her dress, female family members', most notably her mother and aunts, were continually apprehensive. As Bacchetta notes:

> "They were 'bothered' by her dress not so much because of its origin in extra-representational Hindu systems, but primarily because they presumed she was violating what they had constructed as the naturalness of the sari for Hindu women."[46]

These concerns, it seems, were strikingly relevant and truthful. Kamlabehn was, through her dress, attempting to occupy a new structural position: that of a resilient, yet valued single woman who could penetrate public space (namely college) without any prescribed gendered or sexual significations. The transgressive nature of her new form becomes overwhelmingly apparent when Kamlabehn refuses a marriage proposal from a *sevak* (male RSS volunteer) with whom she became familiar with in engineering school. Accordingly, she affirms: "I told him, I am already married to the Samiti, I am married to the Nation, not to any man."[47] After providing such explanation, Kamlabehn maintains, the *sevak* approached and respected her as a sister and held her in an even higher regard.

Following her rejection of marriage, Kamlabehn resolved to commit her entire being to the RSS, becoming a *pracharika*, or full time, single, and celibate volunteer and leader of the Samiti.

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[45]     Ibid, 67.
[46]     Ibid, 69.
[47]     Ibid, 70.

*Pracharikas* are responsible for organizing shakhas, daily physical and ideological training sessons,, as well as coordinating various campaigns. Such programming necessitates that they travel, very often alone, on public transport. The ability to physically defend oneself here turns from novelty to necessity.  The spatial mobility inherent in the *pracharikas*, and notably, Kamlabehn's existence challenges "the de facto rule that traditional upper caste, middle class women should be confined to the domestic space or protected by male family members in the public space.[48] She invokes a space and self that, rather than restricted to the boundaries of a single male, becomes a space-unto-itself. Kamlabehn emerges as a subject who can, by her own devices, span the physical boundaries of the public sphere, *her* nation.

What lingers of Kamlabehn's self-image is her adamant atheism. Unlike Rithambara, whose speech, both in its form and message, aligns with religious convictions, the *pracharika*'s travels throughout the mythic nation are invested with "non spiritual political meaning."[49] For Kamlabehn, Hindu religion and Hindu culture are synonymous. The former merely denoting the explicit significations and rituals of the latter, which is identified as an "overall way of life." [50] In divorcing Hindutva ideology from religious doctrine, Kamlabehn propagates its philosophy to individuals who may not have any spiritual convictions.  She thereby expands the Sangh's constituency to a secular public. Without any religious sanctions, the space inhabited by the female subject is far more easily subject to change within and along historical circumstance.

Kamlabehn's unusual marriage proposition reflects such malleability: "Then, in a skillful reversal of the norms in her context (where males dominate and arranged marriage is the rule), 'she decided to propose to him, and he accepted.' She told her parents only later."[51] Kamlabehn becomes the decisive agent: she asks for the *sevak's* hand in marriage, thereby dictating and asserting the route her life will take. Their marriage follows the unusual course of its proposition. After marriage the couple never officially claimed residence together. While Kamlabehn resides in an apartment in Allahabad, her husband Nilabehn remains in Mumbai. Although no longer a *pracharika* (since marriage), Kamlabehn continues to teach para-military skills at her local shakha. As Bacchetta maintains:

> "Thus paradoxically, marriage had been a factor in the expansion of her space of relative freedom. Her family

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48      Ibid, 71-72.
49      Ibid, 72.
50      Ibid, 73.
51      Ibid, 78.

presumes that she no longer needs their collective protection or surveillance, for they expect her to some under the individual surveillance of her husband. In reality, her husband is rarely there and not answerable to him. Thus, she is even less directly accountable to others now than earlier." [52]

Kamlabehn, like Rithambara, effectively manipulates traditional gender significations to her advantage, expanding her space of autonomy. "Less directly accountable" than ever before, the *sevika* can dictate the minute details of her daily life without having to tend or respond to any imposing male figures.

The sevika's gendered transgressions, namely Kamlabehn's self-appropriation of space/time, remain exclusively dependent on her relation to the "othered" Muslim. Her acquisition of traditional male skills, including her familiarity and ability with weaponry, are "only justifiable in the name of self defense (of her own chaste Hindu femininity) and self-sacrifice (for the Hindu Nation where ultimately men rule) against the projected threat constituted by the Muslims."[53] In a manner similar to Rithambara, Kamlabehn employs the duality of her nationalist subjectivity, that of victim and regenerative actor, to cleverly transgress her normative gendered roles. For a more comprehensive analysis of Kamlabehn's subjecthood via projection of the other, I will turn to her accounts of two riots that transpired in Allahabad.

The first riot, referred to as the "1969 Muslim riot," took place while Kamlabehn was still a child. The riots claimed around 1,500 lives and left over 30,000 residents homeless. Most of the victims were Muslim. Both the Muslims and Hindus involved came from the city's slums, far from the middle class enclave of the *sevika's* childhood. The second set of riots, from 1985-86, were concentrated in the same neighborhood and claimed a similar segment of the population as victims. While Kamlabehn was old enough to have taken part in the ensuing chaos, she was traveling on Samiti work and hence absent for the duration of the conflict. She notes, however, that her brother and father were both present and participated in Sangh relief work between designated curfews. Although almost twenty years separates the two riots, Kamlabehn's projected memory of them is practically identical. Having been absent for both of the insurrections, she draws her visions of the riots from her family's personal experience, the Shakha's ideological training sessions, as well as Sangh and non-Sangh media coverage. Bacchetta notes certain Hindu nationalist clichés and markers that pervade her descriptions: "Muslims on the warpath," and "Muslim barbarism" are two

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[52]     Ibid, 79-80.
[53]     Ibid, 80.

particular phrases that overwhelm her speech.[54] Archetypal projections seem to pervade her account, in which any detail or specificity is alarmingly absent: "They humiliated our men. They raped our women. They destroyed or property. It was just like partition all over again."[55] Kamlabehn's hatred seems to be reserved for the collectivity, embodied in the preposition "our." Personally, Kamlabehn maintains: "I have nothing against them. Earlier they were Hindus but they turned traitors. They could become Hindus again, but you see what they have done to our people. That is why we don't like them."[56] Her guilt, like her hatred, finds it most potent expression in its positionality within the collective. It emerges in the context of her inability and failure to provide protection despite her paramilitary skills in the second set of riots: "They lost everything. They even lose their lives. We did nothing to save them from the Muslims. I was outside."[57] Kamlabehn's conscious differentiation between the collective Hindu community and her location within, effectively asserts her position as an individual actor and subject. Thus, "if" she had been in Allahabad during the riots, she "could" have saved her fellow Hindu's lives. This sense of self-guilt also projects the failure of the male contingency who "did nothing to save them from the Muslims" and her feminine militancy, which although absent could have offered relief. While Kamlabehn often does fall prey to the collective consciousness, through positioning herself in relation to the collectivity she asserts her status as an individual woman subject within. She is thus never completely reduced to the mass.

Kamlabehn, by situating herself as a singular agent traversing between the poles of victimhood and regenerative feminine force, emerges as a potent subject and model for female activism. She employs her victimhood, through her assertion of self-sacrifice for a paternalistic state, to deter all forms of daily subjection to male dominance. Further, she exploits the notion of self-defense to legitimize those transgressive practices that occupy her autonomous space within. Kamlabehn is thus able to live by herself in Allahabad, directly accountable to no one and continue to practice and train other women in para-military skills. Like Rithambara, this *sevika* effectively resists categories of normative femininity while remaining a prominent and respected woman of the Hindu collectivity. The prominence and respect that Kamlabehn asserts rests upon the continual construction and inflation of the existent, imminent, and devastating threat of the othered Muslim male and his communal consciousness.

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[54]     Ibid, 81
[55]     Ibid, 82.
[56]     Ibid, 82.
[57]     Ibid, 82.

## Conclusion

As I maintained in my introduction, there is "no South Asian outside history."[58] It is Kumar's agenda, specifically, that encouraged me to read and analyze the narratives and subjectivities of women within and against the history and dominant discourse which figuratively and literally birthed them. Only through placing the narratives of my subjects against the dominant discourse of the Sangh, was I able to grasp and posit the significance and implications of their words. The subject positions of both Rithambara and Kamlabehn are inherently tied to an other, the Muslim, whose communal identity is reliant on the essentialized and naturalized boundaries of the Hindu body politic. It is only among and within this history that these two seminal women become subjects. Taking their practices, whether Rithambara's vulgar masculine language or Kamlabehn's proficiency in arms, outside of their immediate context would seriously undermine their significations. However, recognizing either as inherently and unconsciously part of the larger ideology out of which they are drawn is just as dangerous. By positioning themselves between two distinct interpretations of the dis-membered Bharatmata, that of victim and regenerative agent, both Kamlabehn and Rithambara exhibit desires and intentions which can be reduced to neither polarity. They straddle free will and no will in the realm of opportunism, conviction, and active choice. Their subjectivity is constructed in their modes of (re) pelling, (re) bounding, and (re) flecting the history that envelops them. By providing an account of Hindutva via two subjects personal narratives, I demonstrate those methods by which they construct, practice and live the ideology which they so ceaselessly propagate.

In doing so, I offer an example of how women frame and are framed by the "nation." Both Rithambara and Kamlabehn, through their gendered bodies and sexual significations, act as "territories, markers and reproducers" of the narratives that they preach and practice. [59] As markers of the "inner sphere" they represent a sort of last bastion of cultural authenticism; agents, who unlike their male counterparts, have evaded the polluting elements of any extra territorial cultural and political threats. Their reproductive qualities are thus bestowed with an almost transcendental symbolic attribute; as carriers of true and fixed communal identities, women become the lone agents able to effectively replicate and proliferate their traditional boundaries. According to Yuval-Davis, women's self-regenerative capabilities, both literal (motherhood) and figurative (cultural reproduction), assume what she terms a "burden of

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58      Kumar, *Women as Subjects*, 12.
59      Nira Yuval-Davis. *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage publication, 1997), 39.

representation." [60] Women, in order to protect the boundaries of the collective identity, must adhere to certain gender appropriate guidelines as espoused by the dominant masculine authority. This burden, or rather submission, includes, among other things, " proper" behavior and clothing. Within the present context it requires Hindu women to relinquish their sexual being and entrust it with their husbands, fathers, and brothers, to ensure the protection of their honor, both personal (literal) and collective (figurative), from the menacing and hypersexual Muslim other.

It is within and among the burdens presented by Yuval-Davis that the subjects of my analysis seem to effectively depart. While Rithambara and Kamlabehn do actively assume the subject position of markers and reproducers of Hindutva's territory, they do so while dynamically transgressing all those "proper" guidelines that bound the addressed sphere. Rithambara's appropriation of male affinities and vulgar speech patterns as well as Kamlabehn's distinctively male dress effectively attest to such disobedience. These two women challenge and critique the space and subject positions that Nina Yuval- Davis and her contemporaries assign her.

It remains to be asked, however, what is at stake in those spaces and practices we have encountered? While Rithambara has herself effectively overcome the patriarchal significations of Sangh ideology, with every speech she perpetuates the strength and momentum of a discourse which aims to keep women within traditional boundaries. How can Rithambara, who has herself been subject to the consequences of marginality, both classed and gendered, advocate violence against a powerless minority? It would be unjust and erroneous to assume she is a mere dupe of a patriarchal movement, however we would be mistaken if we considered her subject position entirely removed from the discourse that the RSS propagates. I would like to suggest that we begin to understand subjectivities through practice. That academics construct a space that is neither postmodern nor postructualist; that does not reduce the subject to free will or no will at all, but rather situates individuals, like Rithambara, within an agenda of opportunism, conviction, and predicated choice. It is only through the active construction of narratives and subjectivities within such spaces that we can effectively reformulate notions of feminism and empowerment and divorce agency from objectives. Only within an agenda of practice can we effectively account for women like Rithambara; recognizing the opportunities and boundaries that such subject positions pose.

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[60]      Ibid, 45.

# TRANSNATIONAL BELONGING: THE EFFECTS OF THE INDEPENDENCE AND PARTITION OF INDIA ON THE INDO-AFRICAN DIASPORA

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**ABSTRACT:**

The independence and partition of India in August 1947 fundamentally changed how members of the Indian diaspora community in Africa identified and defined themselves by focusing on the experience of Indians in Mauritius, East Africa, and South Africa. First, independence caused them to move away from India as the source of political identity and see themselves as a distinct community defined by the unique context of their adopted country. Second, the partition of India required Indians in Africa to re-define notions of territorial belonging as Indians in the face of an India fundamentally different than the one they left. In some cases, the religious divisions exacerbated by partition also caused Indians in Africa to identify more strongly along religious lines. Different circumstances in Kenya, Mauritius, and South Africa caused the Indian populations in those countries to react differently to the independence and partition of British India.

The independence and partition of India in August 1947 fundamentally changed how members of the Indian diaspora community in Africa identified and defined themselves. First, independence caused them no longer view India as the sole source of political identity and see themselves, for the first time, as a distinct community defined by the unique context of their adopted country: culturally different from Indians in India, and anywhere else. Indian independence shifted the focus of Indians living in Africa inward to their status in Kenya, Mauritius, and South Africa. Second, the partition of India required Indians in Africa to re-define notions of territorial belonging as Indians in the face of an India fundamentally different than the one they left. In some cases, the religious divisions exacerbated by partition also caused Indians in Africa to identify more strongly along religious lines.

The context in which Indian emigration to Africa occurred between 1834 and 1917 is important in understanding the complex relationship between India and the diaspora in Africa. While Gujarati traders settled and established profitable trading posts in East Africa as early as the fifteenth century[1], and some free traders emigrated to East Africa and South Africa during the colonial period[2], the majority of the Indian population in Africa at the time of Indian independence was— or were the descendents of— conscripted laborers. The system of indentured servitude that was devised by the British to provide cheap labor to sugar plantations and infrastructure projects throughout the empire after the abolition of slavery in 1833 left the colonial machine without sufficiently cheap labor to support it.[3] Wary of inciting the same activists who fought for the abolition of slavery, the British, Indian, and colonial governments were careful to frame the indentured labor system as a mutually beneficial enterprise— one that provided much needed cheap labor for European interests within the empire and economic opportunities for Indians suffering from famine and lack of employment in India. In practice the system was essentially slavery in a different guise and many illiterate Indians looking for improved opportunities signed strict contracts that bound them to years of labor far from their homes, often under harsh conditions.[4] At the turn of the twentieth century strong, anti-colonial

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[1]     Kauleshwar Rai, *Indians and British Colonialism in East Africa: 1883-1939* (Patna: Associated Book Agency, 1979), 1.

[2]     Surendra Bhana and Bridglal Pachai, eds., *A Documentary History of Indian South Africans* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1984), 2.

[3]      Kay Saunders, ed., *Indentured Labour in the British Empire 1834-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 79.

[4] Milton Israel and Narendra K. Wagle, eds., *Ethnicity, Identity, Migration: the South Asian Context* (Toronto: University of Toronto, Centre for South Asian Studies, 1993), 271., Saunders, 110.

Indian political leaders emerged and began drawing attention to the contradictions of empire, as particularly evident in the indentured labor system. The coercive and exploitive elements of indentured labor recruitment were revealed and the often deplorable conditions of indentured servants in countries such as Kenya, Mauritius, and South Africa mobilized public opinion in India to take up the cause of their countrymen overseas. At a time when leaving one's homeland was a permanent action – both physically and mentally – the relationship between India and the diaspora took on a political element, with India assuming responsibility for the cause of Indians overseas. Increased activism and organization of Indians on the behalf of their countrymen abroad led to the abolition of the indentured labor system by Viceroy Hardinge in 1920.[5] The context of the relationship between India and its diaspora in the empire was thus established through the activism of Indians in the sub-continent to alter the status quo under British rule, in the name of those abroad. Although they fought on behalf of Indians overseas, Indian nationalists continued to use the cause of the diaspora to gain concessions from the British Indian Government until India achieved independence in 1947.

The independence of India in 1947 affected the Indian diaspora in Africa profoundly in terms of cultural and political identities. Prior to independence, the home country was the source of political identity for the diaspora, who saw themselves as merely an extension of the Indian population within the British empire. The diaspora shared a common "pan-Indian" identity that was reinforced by a common subordinate relationship with the British. Writing in 1946, Nagendranath Gangulee clearly saw the interests of Indians at home and abroad as identical and demanded support for the Indian diaspora from the British Indian Government; "However, it is no longer possible for us to evade the issue that concerns the life and labour of the Indians in the Empire overseas; and since the issue is inter-related with the politico-economic system of the Empire, our task is to bring about fundamental change in our alliance with that system if we desire an equitable settlement of the problem of Indian immigration and settlement within the Empire."[6] Gangulee believed that the severe oppression of Indians in the diaspora should be a main concern of the British Government of India. He argued that if the New Indian Constitution of 1935 protected British enterprises in India from racial discrimination, but the British could not protect Indians in overseas British colonies from racial discrimination, "then

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[5] K. Hazareesingh, *History of the Indians in Mauritius* (London: MacMillian, 1975), 87.

[6] Nagendranath Gangulee, *Indians in the Empire Overseas* (London: New India Publishing House Ltd., 1947), 20.

there lies the parting of ways."[7] Gangulee took up the cause of the Indian diaspora so enthusiastically that he argued that the failure of the British and Dominion governments to protect Indians in their territories alone was reason enough for India to demand independence. Like Gangulee, early Indian politicians and activists sought to highlight the contradictions of empire in order to reject British rule through logical and legal arguments. Gangulee's position was a significant example of the ways Indian activists employed the cause of the diaspora to intellectually undermine the legitimacy of British domination in India.

In addition to seeing the fate of Indians at home and overseas as intertwined, Gangulee and other Indian nationalists in the twentieth century saw the causes of the diaspora as a useful political tool against British domination in India. As South Africa and Kenya took measures to limit or eliminate Indian immigration, politicians in India revealed the essential contradictions of empire and argued for independence. "A discriminative policy in regard to the rights of British subjects to migrate from one part of the Empire to another is undoubtedly responsible for the conviction that India cannot remain as a 'free partner' within the Empire if her nationals are subject to racial segregation."[8] Politicians and nationalists directly employed the cause of Indians abroad to argue for the independence of India itself: "it is obvious that the position of Indians in the Empire overseas cannot improve unless, and until, India is able to gain for herself the status equal to that of an independent state."[9] The irony of such a statement would be evident to Indians living abroad in the first few years after India achieved independence.

The case of South Africa was unique from those of Kenya and Mauritius because of its Dominion status, but offered examples of Indian politicians and the British Government of India taking an active interest and action on behalf of Indians living there. This interest was especially significant because the influence of the British Indian Government on the government of South Africa was particularly weak owing to South Africa's status as a Dominion. Dominions were self-governing countries whose independence from the control of British Parliament was recognized by the 1931 Statute of Westminster.[10] The British Government of India had even less influence over racial policy in South Africa than in the colonies of East Africa because the Home Government had no legal influence. This made the efforts of the British Indian Government on behalf of Indians in South Africa all the more significant as evidence that India

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[7]    Ibid., 41.
[8]    Ibid., 23.
[9]    Ibid., 24.
[10]   Ibid., 42.

was actively engaged in the cause of the diaspora.[11]

The arrival of Indians in South Africa began in 1860 when the first indentured laborers were sent to Natal to work on sugar plantations, inspired by the success of those imported to Mauritius beginning in the 1830's.[12] Due to Gandhi's involvement in their cause at the turn of the twentieth century, the intense discrimination experienced by the Indians domiciled in South Africa is perhaps more commonly known than the discrimination faced by Indians in Kenya or Mauritius. Gandhi arrived in 1893 to work as a lawyer for a Gujarati Muslim businessman in South Africa and was appalled by the treatment of Indians there. He founded the Natal Indian Congress in 1894 and was the first to employ Indian public opinion at home for the cause of Indians living abroad.[13] This practice continued up to the moment of Indian independence whereby Indian leaders abroad used public opinion in India to advance their cause, and political leaders in India drew attention to the plight of Indians overseas to subvert the British empire in India. Gandhi's ability to rally Indian public opinion in his fight for South African Indians was another example of how Indians at home and overseas saw themselves as one unit, bound by membership in the British empire. As the twentieth century progressed Indian communities abroad developed distinct features related to their country of adoption. It was this perceived mutual citizenship that kept their interests tightly allied with those of India. In South Africa Gandhi successfully created a sense of "Indian-ness" among a very heterogeneous group of immigrants form the sub-continent that facilitated the strong connection between Indians at home and abroad.[14]

Of the Dominion countries, South Africa had the most aggressive policies of racial discrimination, and the British Government of India employed what measures it could to fight such discriminatory policies. As retaliation for the harsh treatment of Indians, specifically in response to a three-pound poll tax, the British Government of India stopped valuable indentured labor from India to the Union of South Africa in 1911.[15] After World War II, at the same time that he condemned the racial doctrines of the Nazis in Europe, South African political leader General Smuts introduced ever more restrictive legislation against Indians, culminating in the Asiatic

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[11]     I. R. Bahadursingh, *The Other India: The Overseas Indians and their Relationship with India: Proceedings of a Seminar* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1979), 64.

[12]     Brigdal Pacahi, *The International Aspects of the South African Indian Question: 1860-1971* (Cape Town, South Africa: C. Sturik Pty Ltd., 1971), 6.

[13]     Martina Ghosh-Schellhorn and Vera Alexander, eds., *Peripheral Centres, Central Peripheries: India and its Diaspora(s)* (Berlin: Lit Verlag Berlin, 2006), 83.

[14]     Surendra Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy: The Indian National Congress 1894-1994*. (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1997), 31.

[15]     Israel, *Ethnicity, Identity, Migration,* 288.

Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of 1946 that confined Indian populations to certain geographic areas and barred them from owning businesses.[16] This Act provoked the Central Legislature in India to apply economic sanctions on the Union of South Africa and to remove the Indian High Commissioner. However, such sanctions carried little weight and produced no notable positive results for Indians living in South Africa.[17]

Activism in India in response to the increasingly poor treatment of Indians in the colonies of East Africa was of more significance to Indian nationalists as a political tool against the British Empire because unlike the Dominions, the British Home Government had direct control over the policies of colonies. Mistreatment of Indians in the colonies of East Africa provided more direct leverage for Indians claiming the British Imperial system, of which they were a part, failed to protect them.

Indians on the sub-continent were gravely concerned about the welfare of their countrymen in Kenya, as was the case in South Africa. After Winston Churchill gave a speech at the East African Dinner in London in 1922, in which he assured Europeans that their exclusive rights to the fertile Kenyan highlands would be maintained, public and political opinion in India once again rallied for the cause of Indians overseas. "The Legislative Assembly raised a voice of protest against the 'indiscreet, unwise, reckless and irresponsible' pronouncement from a member of the Imperial Government, and passed a resolution stating that any attempt to violate principle of equality of status of Indians in Kenya would create a further breach in the relationship between India and the Empire."[18] Again, India demonstrated interest in the plight of Indians overseas and used the discrimination against them as just cause for the termination of the "relationship between India and the Empire."

The relationship between Indians at home and overseas was important and useful not only to India, but also to the diaspora. From the "Milner Solution," which maintained the racial segregation of Indians in Kenya from both native and European populations and reserved exclusive land ownership rights to the desirable Kenyan highlands for Europeans, "It became increasingly clear to Indian leaders in the colony that no redress of their legitimate grievances would be secured unless their case was taken up by the Indian National Congress."[19] After a three day round table meeting with the British Imperial Government failed to bring about any compromise,

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[16]     Gangulee, *Indians in the Empire Overseas,* 25.
[17]     Bahadursingh, *The Other India,* 65.
[18]      Gangulee, *Indians in the Empire Overseas,* 95.
[19]     Ibid., 98.

the Indians of Kenya "relied increasingly upon the Government of India to represent their case before the Colonial Office."[20] Thus both Indians at home and abroad looked to each other for support.

The common "pan-Indian" identity, shared by India and the diaspora, and characterized by Indian political activism on the behalf of the diaspora, was fundamentally altered when India obtained political independence in 1947. After independence, evidence shows a deliberate shift in the policy of the Indian government, now comprised of the same politicians who fought for the diaspora under British rule, away from political concern for the welfare of Indians living abroad.

One explanation for this shift could be found in the new concerns India faced as an independent nation. Independent India gave less support to the ongoing struggle for the better treatment of Indians within the diaspora because it now had to develop relationships within an international context.

> Prior to independence India was part of a larger and closely-knit entity—the Empire. What went on within this group elicited the interest of the people of India. With the replacement of the Empire by self-governing countries, the continuation of the old relationships became difficult. Diplomatic considerations became paramount after independence…India was no longer a subject nation fighting against its colonial master.[21]

For a number of internal and external reasons the cause of the diaspora community was one that independent India could not afford, or was unwilling, take up. In addition to internal financial, social, and political strains that prevented direct support for the diaspora, newly independent India sought to be the example for all countries seeking to throw off colonial domination. Both sets of concerns meant that India was less directly engaged in the cause of the diaspora.

In fact, after the independence of India, the Indian Government seemed to do even less for the diaspora population than the British Government of India had done.[22] Prior to independence, the British Government of India had formulated policies to help the imminently independent Indian Government manage the diaspora population. Due to the rigorous support the Indian diaspora received

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20      Ibid., 99.
21      Bahadursingh, *The Other India,* 61, 62.
22      Ibid*.,* 65.

from Indian nationalist politicians these policies anticipated that upon independence India would want to extend full citizenship rights to all people of Indian descent in the empire overseas.[23] While India remained under British rule, all Indians, at home or abroad, had the same status as citizens of the British Empire. Thus the British Government of India assumed independent India would want to continue that status quo by granting all people of Indian descent equal citizenship in India. However, the independent Indian Government did not utilize the British Indian Government's policy formulations and chose not extend citizenship rights to people of Indian descent unable or unwilling to return to the sub-continent.

In terms of foreign policy, the independent Indian Government was still interested in putting an end to colonial domination, but its sights were now set higher than the liberation of Indian minority communities abroad. Instead, it was largely concerned with promoting third world solidarity and encouraging budding full-scale national liberation movements. After its own struggle to end colonial rule, independent India would not support the rights of Indians in Kenya, Mauritius, and South Africa at the expense of local populations still oppressed by colonial rule. Therefore the Indian Government focused its energy on improving the position of native Africans in Kenya, South Africa, and Mauritius and offered little support to Indians in conflict with them.

Nationalist liberation movements led by Africans in South Africa and Kenya that gained momentum between the two world wars often "saw the Indians in their midst as colonial legacies, as poachers and exploiters."[24] This view of Indians as just another ethnic group that would exploit local populations was particularly evident in Kenya and South Africa where successful, free Indian traders (who migrated outside the indenture system) were conspicuously economically better off than African ethnic groups. The severe antipathy of local Africans toward Indian populations in their midst came to a head in South Africa where, in 1949, riots led by South African blacks targeted Indians.

In light of the clash of interests between Indians in Africa and local populations, as perceived by Africans, Independent India pursued a course of policy that supported native populations under British and French domination over Indians also domiciled in those countries. Where the interests of African people clashed with people of Indian descent, the government of India supported the former and urged Indians to assist rather than exploit African people.[25] Prime

23  Israel, *Ethnicity, Identity, Migration,* 284.
24  Bahadursingh, *The Other India,* 65.
25  C. Kondapi, *Indians Overseas 1838-1949* (New Delhi: Indian Council of

Minister Nehru made this policy very clear in many speeches and letters. When the large-scale racial riots took place in Durban, South Africa, Nehru refrained from demanding justice for the injured Indians. Nehru reiterated India's policy in a statement in response to the riots: "While Indians, wherever they may be, expect to receive courteous treatment and protection and opportunity, we recognize that no vested interest must come in the way of the progress of the African people in their homeland, and that the progress and advancement of Africans must have priority over the claims of other people."[26] This statement, and many others like it, showed that the new role of India on the world stage was as a source of opposition to European colonial domination as a whole and took precedence over the specific grievances of the Indian diaspora, even as directly related to colonial exploitation as they were.

The shift of Indian support towards Africans caught the Indian diaspora in Africa by surprise. Many recalled how, before independence, Nehru expressed that the only way to improve conditions for overseas Indians was for India itself to be independent and be their advocate.[27] In light of such rhetoric Indians in the diaspora looked forward to increased intervention on their behalf after Indian independence. Prior to the independence of India, Kenya, due in large part to the prosperous free-trader Gujarati population, was one of the most important centers of the Indian diaspora in the minds of Indian political leaders at home. After independence was achieved "any such racial fellow feeling" was lost and India formulated a policy toward Indians in Kenya that echoed its decision to not extend citizenship to all people of Indian descent, "that as British passport holders, the East African Indians were Britain's responsibility."[28] Gandhi himself echoed this position when he wrote in *Satyagraha*, "Indian emigrants in other parts of the British Empire…if they are suppressed, will be suppressed thanks to the absence of *satyagraha* among themselves, and to India's inability to protect them."[29] Members of the diaspora community in Africa found that upon the independence of India, tireless supporters of their cause such as Gandhi and Nehru had moved away from their interests in favor of the new interests of the independent nation. These interests focused on ending colonial domination as a whole rather than the specific plight of the Indian diaspora.

Though outside the geographical scope of this paper, further

World Affairs, Oxford University Press, 1951), 521.

[26]    Jawaharalal Nehru, *The Selected Works of Jawaharalal Nehru: Second Series, Volume Nine* ed. S. Gopal (New Delhi: Teen Mutsi, 1991), 482.

[27]    Bahadursingh, *The Other India,* 55.

[28]    Ibid., 60.

[29]    Mahatma Gandhi, *Satyagraha* (New York: Schocken Books, 1951), 307.

evidence for the deliberate shift away from the diaspora by the independent Indian government appeared in a 1948 letter from Nehru to the Indian representative in colonial Indonesia. This letter showed how the interests of native people, upon India's independence, superseded those of Indians overseas. In response to a request for support for Indians in Indonesia Nehru wrote, "I am only sorry that we cannot help them more than we have done. We are facing trouble in so many directions that our hands are full."[30] A month later Nehru reiterated the stance of India to the same representative in Indonesia: " We have realized quite well the difficulties of the position in Indonesia. I wish I could help but you know how we stand in the world and in our own country and apart from our full sympathy we can do little."[31] Such a dismissal showed how India's position in the existing world order as an independent nation and its commitment to support native people against colonial aggressors were the primary influences on India's new foreign policy.

Karen A. Ray argued that the policies of the independent Indian Government toward the diaspora were a marked shift from that of the British Government of India. These policies left many Indians overseas cut off from India at a time when they looked to their country of origin with excitement and pride and began to "seek out their roots in the sub-continent and asking their Indian colleagues for political guidance."[32] Upon independence, the Ministry of Overseas Indians, established by the British to promote relations with Indian communities abroad, was dismantled and "the overseas Indians left to their colonies of residence."[33]

In 1946 Nehru instituted the aforementioned unilateral trade embargo on South Africa. True to India's new foreign policy goals this action was intended to unequivocally oppose the apartheid regime and show support for *all* South Africans oppressed by white domination. However, this policy served to cut off the Indian population of South Africa from India for almost four decades, leaving them culturally, politically, and economically isolated.[34] In Kenya the "newly independent government of India tried to pressure East African Asians into allying with African nationalism".[35] Ironically, the cause of the diaspora in Africa was taken up to justify the independence of India but once that independence was achieved

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[30] Jawaharalal Nehru, *The Selected Works of Jawaharal Nehru: Second Series, Volume Five,* ed. S. Gopal (New Delhi, India: Teen Murti House, 1991), 531.

[31] Nehru, *The Selected Works of Jawaharal Nehru,* 532.

[32] Israel, *Ethnicity, Identity, Migration,* 283.

[33] Ibid., 284.

[34] Mulloo, *Voices of the Indian Diaspora* (Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Ltd., 2007), 102.

[35] Clarke, Colin, Ceri Peach, Steven Vertovec, eds., *South Asians Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 157.

the interests of the diaspora were overshadowed by those of native Africans.

With their main source of identity, as well as political support, no longer adamantly attached to their cause, the Indian communities of Kenya, Mauritius, and South Africa turned inward and began to focus on the national movements of their adopted countries.[36] These communities, particularly in Mauritius, retained cultural ties with India as much as possible but saw that their political future rested within their adopted countries. Policies of the Indian Government such as the 1946 trade embargo on South Africa facilitated a profound shift in the identity of the Indian diaspora in Africa.[37] In place of a "pan-Indian" identity that was located in the home country, distinct Indo-Mauritian, Indo-Kenyan, and Indo-South African identities that "assumed additional [localized] features" were formed.[38]

Indeed, the shift of the diaspora away from India as the center was more political than cultural. Even so, political linkages between India and the diaspora were far from lost. The Indian independence movement, as well as Gandhi's early work in South Africa and the Arya Samaj movement of the 1920's in Mauritius[39], heavily influenced nationalist movements in Africa. The success of the Indian nationalist movement, combined with the resulting distance it created between India and the diaspora, inspired Indian leaders in Africa to lead nationalist movements of their own. After all, *satyagraha* and the bases of India's independence movement were not developed in India, but in South Africa specifically for the "struggle of overseas Indians for the dignity and political recognition to which they were entitled as Indian citizens of the British Empire."[40]

Dr. Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the father of independent Mauritius, was influenced by Gandhi's Quit India Campaign and used similar tactics to secure a new Mauritian constitution that enfranchised the Indian population in 1947.[41] Hazareesingh considered the independence of India a "milestone in the political development" of Indians in Mauritius and an event that "completely changed their outlook" in terms of their own political situation.[42] The shift away from India as the source of political support, though not

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[36]     Mulloo, *Voices of the Indian Diaspora*, 106.

[37]     Ibid., 103.

[38]     Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy*, 5.

[39]     Mullo, *Voices of the Indian Diaspora*, 96.

[40]     Israel, *Ethnicity, Identity, Migration,* 270.

[41]     Moomtaz Emrith, *History of the Muslims in Mauritius* (Vacoas, Mauritius: Editions Le Printemps, 1994), 290.

[42]     Hazareesingh, *History of the Indians in Mauritius,* 130.

as the source of political ideas, was reinforced by a letter from Prime Minister Nehru in 1947 to the Indian community of Mauritius thanking them for their "keen interest" in their ancestral cultural heritage, but added that the "first duty of Indo-Mauritians was to show loyalty to their country and that it was by integrating themselves in Mauritian life at all levels, that they could contribute to a wider appreciation of the cultural legacy of India."[43]

The influence of Indian politics, especially those of Gandhi, was particularly strong among Indian leaders such as Yusuf Mohamed Dadoo in South Africa, who corresponded with Gandhi directly about the plight of Indians in South Africa[44], and Dr. G. M. Naicker, president of the Natal Indian Congress. Dadoo and Naicker toured India before independence in 1946 and, after meeting with Gandhi, found the inspiration to launch a passive resistance campaign in South Africa which lasted from June 1946 to May 1948.[45] A speech on 1 June 1947 given by Dr. Naicker made very clear the direct influence of Indian politics on the struggle of Indians in South Africa for justice in their own country: "We were inspired not only by India's great leaders and national organizations to continue unswervingly along our path, but also by the fighting spirit of the masses of India, who everywhere greeted us with spontaneous enthusiasm and encouraged us to fight with increased vigor."[46] The language of this speech showed that the political relationship between India and the diaspora had shifted to one of inspiration and borrowing, one where India offered moral support rather than direct political intervention. Instead of looking to the Indian Government to solve their political woes, South African leaders Dadoo and Naicker sought to take action themselves using their ancestral and cultural connections to India as inspiration.

In addition to the shift in political identity, the independence and partition of India, marked by the violent clash between Hindus and Muslims, affected the identity of the diaspora along religious lines. Due to the circumstances of their migration, the history of the Hindu and Muslim Indian immigrants in Africa was closely knit. They enjoyed close relationships and less was thought about religious distinctions that were paramount at home. Regardless of the social differences they experienced in India, indentured immigrants in Africa in the nineteenth century found themselves living and working side by side, often in very difficult conditions. Survival in their new land required Indian indentured laborers to band together, and

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[43]     Ibid., 130.

[44]     Yusuf Mohamed Dadoo, *Dr. Yusuf Mohamed Dadoo, Perosnal Papers,* ed. Peter Limb (Bellville, South Africa: University of the Western Cape, 1995), 4.

[45]     Bhana, *A Documentary History of Indian South Africans*, 194.

[46]     Ibid., 189.

distinctions of caste and religion were rendered less important.[47] In Mauritius, Hindus took part in the Muslim religious celebration of Moharram and Muslims celebrated alongside Hindus during Phag.[48] Moharram was also an occasion for Indians of South Africa to come together in celebration regardless of creed.[49] According to Gangulee it was necessary for Indians overseas to compromise and adapt their "habits" in order to live in their adopted African countries. Intermarriage between castes that was forbidden in India also occurred regularly.[50] For Indians born abroad, differences of caste and religion carried less cultural significance than in the home country.[51]

While Indians in Africa shifted away from India as the source of social identity and political power, concepts of religious identity were not as easily isolated from the subcontinent. In light of the extreme violence between Hindus and Muslims that followed partition on the sub-continent, it seems likely mutually tolerable relationship enjoyed by Indian Hindus and Muslims in the diaspora was also fundamentally harmed or altered. It is evident that divisions between Hindu and Muslim communities in Kenya and South Africa occurred later in the twentieth century. These were related to the partition of India— mostly through a shift by which Muslims of Indian descent identified with Pakistan or the global Islamic community instead of the territorial location of their ancestral homeland.[52] But what happened in the diaspora along religious lines at the *moment* of partition, when mass violence between Hindus and Muslims reached it peak?

The pre-partition Indian diaspora included people from both present-day India and present-day Pakistan who, regardless of religious affiliation, identified as "Indian". The decision to divide India and Pakistan was rooted in deep tensions between Muslims and Hindus and partition transferred these animosities into distinct territorial divisions. The division of the ancestral homelands of Indians abroad occurred along religious lines *after* their departure from the sub-continent. Many Indians in the diaspora, accustomed to using India as a cultural reference point, found that their ancestral homeland no longer lay in India at all.

That the division of India occurred after the departure of

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[47]    Emrith, *History of the Muslims in Mauritius*, 117.

[48]    Hazareesingh, *History of the Indians in Mauritius,* 60.

[49]    Brij V. Lal, Peter Reeves, and Rajesh Rai, *The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006).

[50]    Gangulee, *Indians in the Empire Overseas,* 190.

[51]    Clarke, *South Asians Overseas*, 153.

[52]    Crispin Bates, ed., *Community, Empire, and Migration: South Asians in Diaspora* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave, 2001), 109.

Indians in the diaspora from the sub-continent led Bal and Sinha-Kerkoff to assert that "partition along religious lines has made it difficult for scholars since 1947 to link Hindus to Pakistan and Muslims to India"[53] The problem faced by scholars in conceptualizing the identities of diasporic Indians is, in fact, the exact same problem faced by Indians overseas at the time of partition. Bal and Sinha-Kerkoff found that in Mauritius, after "the partition of British India in 1947, people's relation to the idealized ancestral motherland as well as to post-partition India changed."[54] Thus Hindus, regardless of whether the location of their ancestral homes fell within the borders of Pakistan, emphasized their relationship to India, whereas Muslims distanced themselves from India and in some cases referred to Pakistan as their "homeland" even when the physical location of their ancestral homes fell within India.[55] It is evident that the division of India forced Indians overseas to re-conceptualize their relationship with an ancestral homeland that was now fundamentally altered.

In Mauritius, the shock of the partition and the ensuing violence in India and Pakistan was enough to override the history of solidarity among the Indians and brought religious tensions to the forefront. The partition of India and Pakistan "accentuated their identities as two very distinct communities regardless of the common ethnic affinities"[56]; with Indian Hindus continuing to identify themselves with India and Indian Muslims looking away from India toward roots in Pakistan and the larger global Muslim community. From this point on, in Mauritius there was no longer an Indian community but a Hindu one and a Muslim one. This split was reflected in the political participation of both groups after granted the franchise under the new constitution in 1947. Instead of voting with the Hindu majority, which was closely aligned with their interests, Muslims in Mauritius joined the conservative party, motivated by fears of Hindu rule without Muslim representation. "Thus, it came to pass that the Muslims, who together with the Hindus, formed two segments of the Indo-Mauritian community and had gone through many trials and tribulations together over the years, found themselves taking different paths in politics."[57] In Mauritius the partition of India did create new divisions among Hindus and Muslims. These divisions were reflected mostly in the political realm and never reflected the extreme communal violence of the subcontinent, but were significant as a direct result of the partition of British India.

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53    Gijsbert Oonk, ed. *Global Indian Diasporas: Exploring the Trajectories of Migration and Theory* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 119.
54    Ibid., 129.
55    Ibid., 129.
56    Emrith, *History of the Muslims in Mauritius*, 295.
57    Ibid., 298.

I found little evidence to suggest that the communal divisions created so immediately by partition in Mauritius were reflected in Kenya or South Africa, though I suspect similar problems of how to relate to such a dramatically altered homeland did occur. The absence of communal divisions in Kenya or South Africa are well explained by Chandrashekhar Bhat's theory that the internal relationships in Indian communities abroad were often defined by the external conditions of their adopted countries. When writing of Indian immigrants in Africa prior to partition, Bhat described how "Indian identity supercedes all other bases of identity to enter onto ethnic competition often leading to conflict with other immigrant groups."[58]

India served as a uniting force that allowed the diaspora to define themselves as Indian against a common British enemy and local populations. In Mauritius Indians formed the majority ethnic group. In the absence of another competing ethnic group the loss of India as the uniting force caused Indians to re-conceive their identities by defining themselves against each other, and fragment along religious lines. In Kenya and South Africa the Indian communities were a small ethnic minority, surrounded by a large native African population. This meant communal divisions were less significant than racial ones.[59] Speaking specifically of South Africa, Brij Maharaj wrote, "Caught between an antagonistic colonial minority government and fear of the indigenous masses, the Asians confirmed their cultural identity."[60] When threatened by or competing with larger ethnic groups, Indians in Kenya and South Africa were less concerned about the religious divisions among themselves.

In addition to having to compete with larger ethnic groups for economic rights and colonial favor, Indians in Kenya and South Africa also faced a more hostile and discriminatory colonial government than those in Mauritius. At the time of partition, Kenyan and South African Indian populations were engaged in an intense struggle against a common oppressive colonial entity that was increasingly hostile. According to Bhat's theory it was not in the interest of Indians in these countries to divide internally against each other when facing such a strong colonial force.[61] While Indians in

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[58] Chandrashekhar Bhat, "Contexts of Intra and Inter Ethnic Conflict Among the Indian Diaspora Communities," *Occasional Papers 5* (1999): 4.

[59] Richard Harvey Brown and George V. Coelho, eds., *Migration and Modernization: The Indian Diaspora in Comparative Perspective* (Williamsburg, Virginia: College of William and Mary, 1987), 67.

[60] Parvati Raghuram, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, Brij Maharaj, and Dave Sangha, eds. *Tracing an Indian Diaspora: Contexts, Memories, Representations* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 26.

[61] Bhat, "Contexts of Intra and Inter Ethnic Conflict Among the Indian Diaspora Communities", 1.

Mauritius still faced a struggle for equal rights relative to a small group of powerful European elites, they did not experience the degree of racial and economic discrimination that their counter parts in Kenya and South Africa did.[62]

The presence of a common British force to which all Indians could be opposed unified colonial India with its countrymen overseas. After achieving independence in 1947, India was no longer united with its diaspora in Africa through mutual opposition to the British, and this led India to divide itself from the fate of the Indians who remained overseas in the empire. After independence when the British ceased to be a unifying force for Indians in opposition, communal divisions exploded on the subcontinent. These divisions were carried to Mauritius because the Indians there faced a relatively accommodating colonial government, due largely to the fact that Indians were the majority ethnic group on the island and had the capacity to compete economically with the European elites. In South Africa and Kenya, Indian populations were a small percentage of the whole and needed to remain unified to face hostile, racist, and exploitive colonial regimes.

The independence and partition of the Indian sub-continent directly affected lives of Indians living overseas and confused long-held notions of cultural, religious, and territorial belonging. Due to new foreign policy concerns that focused on the rights of native Africans and a diminished political use for Indians abroad, the independent Indian Government was less engaged in the cause of the diaspora than its colonial counterpart had been. The loss of support from India caused Indians overseas to shift away from India as the only source of identity and define themselves through the unique contexts of their positions as Indo-Kenyans, Indo-Mauritians, and Indo-South Africans. No longer able to depend directly on India, Indian political leaders in Africa such as Ramgoolam, Naicker, and Dadoo shifted their focus inward to create their own independence movements. Also, the partition of India required Indians in Africa to re-define notions of territorial belonging as "Indians" in the face of an India fundamentally different than the one they had left. In Mauritius, the communal violence that broke out in India caused Muslims and Hindus on the island to move away from ethnic conceptions of identity and define them selves along religious lines more than ever before. The independence and partition of the Indian sub-continent created a unique and pluralistic diaspora with very complex notions of belonging and identity and continues to inform the study of Indians overseas today.

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[62]    Hazareesingh, *History of the Indians in Mauritius*, 133.

# SLUM DIVERSITY IN KOLKATA

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**ABSTRACT:**

Kolkata's slums contain a wealth of diversity that is obscured by the poverty and disorganization surrounding the communities. This paper delineates the categories of slums according to their historical generative forces, details the ethnic composition of slums, and examines the historical patterns of slum policies. Case studies from other researchers are used to paint a picture of slum diversity. The data from the studies is also foundational in the analysis of how historical influences and ethnicity have shaped current conditions in the slums.

## Introduction

Slum-dwellers account for one-third of Kolkata's total population. This amounts to 1,490,811 people living without adequate basic amenities in over-crowded and unsanitary settlements.[1] Considering the challenge of counting undocumented squatters and residents of sprawling bastis, this number may be a generous underestimate by the Indian census. The slums' oftentimes indistinguishable physical boundaries further complicate researchers' investigations of slums' diverse physical, social, and economic compositions. In this paper, I will elucidate the qualities of Kolkata's slums by utilizing past researchers' admirable efforts to overcome these barriers in studying the slums.

The general term slum can refer to both bastis and squatter settlements. Bastis are legally recognized settlements that the Kolkata Municipal Corporation supplies with services such as water, latrines, trash removal, and occasionally electricity. Basti huts typically are permanent structures that the government will not demolish, which allows basti communities to develop a sense of permanency and to focus on issues of poverty beyond shelter availability.

Squatter settlements are illegal clusters of impermanent houses predominantly located along canals and railways. The municipality usually does not supply squatters with basic amenities, so residents must seek access to water and other resources from the settlement's environs, including other slums and waterways.[2] Furthermore, squatters live in anticipation, though of different degrees depending on settlement location and political affiliation, of their potential evictions.[3]

However, the distinction between bastis and squatter settlements does not embody the diversity of slum life. In fact, residents may not even know whether they live in a basti or a squatter settlement.[4] Formative history, migration patterns, ethnic

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[1] Vikram Sen, Director of Census Operations, *Census of India 2001: Provisional Population Totals, West Bengal* (West Bengal, Delhi: Controller of Publications, 2001), T-131.

[2] Mallika Bose, "STILL A LONG ROAD AHEAD: Women in Calcutta Slums," *Women & Environments International Magazine* 50/51 (2001): 16.

[3] R. Biswas-Diener and E. Diener, "Making the best of a bad situation: Satisfaction in the slums of Calcutta," *Social Indicators Research* 55 (2001); and Dhurjati Mukherjee, "The Calcutta experience of slum development," in *India's growing slums*, ed. John Desrochers (Bangalore: Centre for Social Action, 2000), 200-1.

[4] Uddalak Mukherjee, "Slumgirl in a million," *The Telegraph*, March, 1 2009, front page.

composition, employment opportunities, and political history have helped shape Kolkata's slum conditions in ways not explained by the simple basti/squatter settlement distinction. This article will analyze several additional factors that influence slum life, with ongoing consideration of how such factors relate to the basti and squatter settlement classifications.

First, I will describe how industrialization and the partition of India created two types of slums in Kolkata, and why slums that formed as a result of industrialization contain greater variability in location and social structure than slums that developed from refugee settlements. Second, I will explain why religion and language are stronger factors than caste diversity in determining slums' social and economic characteristics, and why neither religion, language, nor caste can be shown to have a stronger influence on the physical structure of slums. The significance of language, religion, and caste in the slums' social, economic, and physical features will be established by comparing, respectively, case studies of slums with Bengalis to slums with Hindi-speakers, slums with Muslims to slums with Hindus, and two studies of slums with Chamars . Third, after comparing post-independence slum policies to colonial policies, I will explain how post-independence policies are simultaneously more committed to slum improvement and slum demolition than colonial policies were.

## Variability in Industrial Bastis and Refugee Settlements

A comparison of bastis and squatter settlements is not complete without an understanding of how historical generative forces shape the conditions in slums. For example, a basti may form at the behest of a factory owner and become dependant on that factory, or a basti may rely on a railroad if it is the long-term product of what was once a squatter settlement along a railroad. On the other hand, refugees may flood vacant land on the outskirts of the city, or rural migrants may slowly develop a squatter settlement through evolving rural-urban linkages. However, the uncertainty and diversity behind the formative histories of non-industrial slums and rural-urban squatter settlements places a comparison of these two slum categories outside the scope of this paper. Instead, I will elucidate some of the variability in the subcategories of bastis and squatter settlements by comparing industrial bastis and refugee settlements.

*Industrial Bastis*

Slums were a fixture of colonial Kolkata prior to industrialization, but enduring patterns of slum formation and growth took shape as industries created a demand for labor. Before

Kolkata's industrial transformation, the first slums emerged to house the migrant rural poor, ironically fleeing corruption in the rural tenancy system, that found employment as domestic servants for British settlers and Bengali babus.[5]  After the middle of the 19th century, the slum population boomed as rural migrants flocked to Kolkata to work in the new industries.[6]  It was estimated that slums grew to cover a third of Kolkata over the next forty years.[7]  The factories did not provide housing,[8] effectively forcing migrants to establish slums as close as possible to their factories.[9]  Employer location continued to dictate the locations of slums through the 20th century.

Settled migrants' low incomes ensure that they become spatially immobile,[10] thus proximity to a work place is essential to a slum-dweller.  Only the most well off can use public transportation to get to work.[11]  For example, the 100-year old Tangra slum described by Dutt, et. al originated because of its proximity to chemical and rubber industries, but it has expanded due to employment opportunities in nearby tanning and shoe industries as well as a slaughterhouse.[12]  The Tiljala basti described by Pal was formed after Indian independence.  Factory owners imported Chamars from the Bihar province, and the Chamars developed their own slum on the periphery of the factory.[13]  These are just two examples that demonstrate that industry locations, both before and after Indian independence, directly determine slum location and growth.

Pal's Tiljala basti exemplifies how a slum's ties to an industry can affect the social conditions in a slum.  Approximately 95% of Chamars in the Tiljala basti are employed in leatherworks, their

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[5]　　Krishna Dutta, *Calcutta: A Cultural History* (Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2008), 32; and Ashok K. Dutt, Animesh Halder, and Chandreyee Mittra, "Shifts in slum upgrading policy in India with special reference to Calcutta," in *Regional development and planning for the 21st century*, eds. Allen George Noble, et. al (Bookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 130.

[6]　　Unnayan, *Basti movement in Calcutta: Housing struggle of basti dwellers in the 1950's in Calcutta* (Calcutta: Unnayan, 1992), 7; Dutt, et. al, "Shifts in slum upgrading policy," 130.

[7]　　Christine Furedy, "Whose responsibility? dilemmas of Calcutta's bustee policy in the nineteenth century," *Journal of South Asian Studies* 5 (1982): 27.

[8]　　Unnayan, *Basti movement in Calcutta*, 7.

[9]　　Furedy, "Whose responsibility?" 27.

[10]　　Dutt, et. al, "Shifts in slum upgrading policy," 140-2.

[11]　　Ashok K. Dutt, Suprabha Tripathi, and Anupa Mukhopadhyay, "Spatial spread of daily activity patterns of slum dwellers in Calcutta and Delhi," in *The Asian city: processes of development, characteristics, and planning*, ed. Ashok K. Dutt (Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 515.

[12]　　Ibid., 312.

[13]　　Surajit Kumar Pal, "The Chamars of Tiljala slum: a preliminary study on some aspects of their socio-economic adaptation in an urban setting," *Human Science* 35 (1986): 121-3.

traditional occupation.[14]  These tasks are considered ritually unclean and reinforce the Chamars' position as a scheduled caste.  The rigid caste structure dissuades most members of other castes from engaging with the Chamars, in effect isolating the Chamar basti from slums with other castes.[15]

The effect that the relationship between industry and caste can have on social structure is further demonstrated by the impact weather has on seasonal migrations in the Chamar basti.  Chamars may close their leather shops during the monsoon season[16] or ask kin or neighbors to replace them in the factory[17] while they return to the villages for agricultural labor.  Perhaps a result of this seasonal male migration, most of the females remain in the village year round – 78.7% of the 480 people in the basti are male.  Additionally, 47.15% of the population live in dorms that house seasonal migrant males from the same villages.[18]  Pal's study of the Tiljala basti provides evidence that industry ties can create unique, long-term social patterns in a slum, represented here by the effect that leatherwork and tanning have on the caste and gender composition of a basti.

*Refugee settlements*

The refugee movement after the partition of India initiated a new wave of slum establishments with unique settings and social features.  Refugees initially squatted along train stations, but once they realized that the newly instated Indian government was not going to aid their transition, they began to seek out vacant lands.[19]  They found suitable locations in the Dum Dum municipality near the airport, inside metropolitan Kolkata, and along an arc on the city's southern outskirts.[20]  The southern regions clearly were the most appealing to the refugees.[21]  Sanyal provides the example of a squatter settlement growing out of an abandoned US World War II military base along the southern arc.[22]  It is particularly noteworthy that slums had been less common in the south of Kolkata during the colonial era as the resident European population in the south sought the demolition of nearby slums.[23]  It is evident, then, that settlement

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[14]      Ibid., 122.

[15]      Ibid., 120-3.

[16]      Sanjay K. Roy, "The applicability of the concept of marginality in a mono-caste slum in Calcutta," *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society* 27 (1992): 109.

[17]      Pal, "The Chamars of Tiljala Slum," 123.

[18]      Ibid.,122-3.

[19]      Romola Sanyal, "Contesting refugeehood: squatting as survival in post-partition Calcutta," *Social Identities* 15 (2009): 69-70.

[20]      Ibid., 71.

[21]      Asok Sen, *Life and labor in a squatters' colony* (Calcutta: Centre of Studies in Social Sciences, 1992), 11.

[22]      Sanyal, "Contesting refugeehood," 72.

[23]      Unnayan, *Basti movement in Calcutta*, 7-8.

location was significant to refugees and that settlements developed in predictable locations according to land availability.

The social conditions in refugee settlements derive from the social conditions in the refugees' original homes. However, the intrinsic nature of being a refugee minimized the social distinctions within the settlements. During the partition, the Hindu middle and upper classes of East Bengal lost socioeconomic power that derived largely from their elevated positions in the caste structure. Their humiliating tumble in the face of rising Muslim power may have been a significant motivation for their migration.[24] As they established themselves in Kolkata, their old caste structure faded. Sanyal claims that,

> class and caste divisions that existed in East Bengal continued after partition as well although less rigidly as people now shared an almost equal socioeconomic deprivation, and lived in closer proximity to each other.[25]

Their new identities as refugees and physical proximity to 'untouchables' forced them to relinquish the sense of superiority that they had tried to maintain by leaving East Pakistan.[26] The refugees experienced a profound transformation, but their transformation resulted in a relatively homogeneous social structure.

### *Which demonstrates greater variability?*

The slums that have formed in close proximity to industries and other employment opportunities reveal a greater variability in their location and growth than do refugee settlements. First, the location of a slum that forms due to job opportunities cannot be accurately predicted until an industry arises. Once an industry creates a demand for labor, a slum must be woven into the pre-existing fabric of the city, or if the industry settles on the city's periphery, then the slum will gradually be enveloped by the city's expansion. The Chamars' Tiljala basti was just a small section that developed within the sprawling slums of Tiljala.[27] On the other hand, refugee settlements followed clear patterns based on land availability, specifically along the city's southern arc. They may be viewed as the cause for substantial changes to Kolkata's slum layout, but there was not significant variability within the location of the settlements. Second, as the example of the Tangra slum proves, industries other

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24  Sanyal, "Contesting refugeehood," 68-69.
25  Ibid., 76.
26  Ibid., 78.
27  S. Roy, "Marginality in a mono-caste slum," 105.

than that which acted as a slum's economic foundation may flourish nearby and result in significant slum growth. Job opportunity is the major motivation for rural to urban migrations, and according to Ray's study of a squatter settlement with both Muslims and Hindus, 99% of the slum dwellers learned of the opportunity from relatives already established in the settlement.[28] These slums will continue to grow as long as there is enough housing space, labor demand, and connection between rural and urban populations. However, the refugee squatter settlements, with no employment pull factor, typically cannot grow without the population inflow of refugee migrations. In fact, some of the refugee settlements lost their squatter identity as refugees became economically successful and their neighborhoods were formalized.[29]

The industrially inspired slums also introduce greater social variability to the slum landscape than do the refugee settlements. First, the example of the Tiljala basti demonstrates how a specific social group can be interjected and maintained in a diverse slum environment. The development of refugee settlements resulted in the opposite as the refugees lost their class and caste distinctions over time. Second, while a slum may contain both Muslim and Hindu rural migrants from south West Bengal[30] or migrants from other states, the refugees from East Pakistan after partition were all Hindu and shared the Bengali language.

## Religion, Language, and Caste: Influence on Social, Economic, and Physical Characteristics of Slums

The religious, linguistic, and caste diversity amongst Kolkata slum-dwellers is reflected in the wide spectrum of slums' social and economic features. Limitations on vital resources occasionally require slum dwellers of different ethnic backgrounds to mix in one slum. However, self-segregation has proven to contribute to community strength, and slum dwellers demonstrate a tendency to self-segregate when possible both within a slum and between slums. After using case examples of segregated slums to elucidate the effects of caste, religion, and language on slum life, I will argue that religion and language are stronger than caste in shaping slum conditions.

### Chamars and Non-Chamars

The Chamars in the Tiljala industrial basti studied by Ray have developed a residential area that suits their rural background and

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[28]     Subha Ray, "Rural-urban migration: a case study of a squatter settlement," *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society* 38 ( 2003): 56.
[29]     Sanyal, "Contesting refugeehood," 82.
[30]     Ray, "Rural-urban migration," 55.

needs in the slum.[31]   As previously mentioned, the Chamar females remain in the villages while the seasonal migrant males live in dormitories and perform their traditional leatherwork in the city.[32] Many of the leatherwork shop owners employ their relatives, a source of solidarity in a slum environment.[33]  The gender composition and employment in leatherwork indicate the effects that caste can have on the development of slum-specific social relationships and economic support networks.  Additionally, the *thikadars* that rent huts to the Chamars are often the tenants' relatives.  The tenants feel obligated to the *thikadars*, who may be local political leaders, and view them as their guardians.[34]     The *thikadar*-tenant relationship further demonstrates how bonds within a single caste can produce social hierarchies that determine access to secure housing.

Pal's study on a Tiljala industrial basti with clusters of different castes reveals that Chamars' slum experiences remain mostly the same when other castes are introduced, except when the other castes engage Chamars in commercial activity.  First, that the Chamars are employed in leatherwork in this basti confirms that caste can determine occupation in both a homogenous slum and in a slum where different castes interact.[35]  Second, caste leadership, which Pal says morphed in the slum environment, is vital for incorporating new Chamar migrants to the slum, for encouraging the Chamars to maintain cultural tradition while proposing caste integration, and for controlling political influences within the slum.[36]  This evolving caste-leadership system demonstrates that localized caste idiosyncrasies can regulate social structure within a slum.  Third, it is particularly noteworthy that some members of higher castes have erected tea stalls, grocery shops, and narcotic shops within the Chamar clusters. Interaction between Chamars and the other castes is usually limited to the purchase of these otherwise unavailable commodities, meaning that the Chamars are socially isolated with the exception of some commercial exchanges.[37]  The higher castes clearly take advantage of the Chamars' dependancy on a singular occupation and fill an economic role.   The Chamars must then adapt for their own prosperity to the higher castes' economic activities.  This example of

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[31]      See S. Roy, "Marginality in a mono-caste slum;" and Pal, "The Chamars of Tiljala Slum;" These studies refer to two different Tiljala bustees populated by Chamars.  Despite the overlap in qualities, including gender ratio and occupational status, it is evident that they are different because the basti Roy studied had 70 households while the basti Pal studied had 123 households.

[32]      S. Roy, "Marginality in a mono-caste slum," 107-8.

[33]      Ibid., 111.

[34]      Ibid., 111-3.

[35]      See Pal, "The Chamars of Tiljala Slum," 123; This slum should not be referred to as heterogenous because the Chamars are still in clusters around the factory.

[36]      Pal, "The Chamars of Tiljala Slum," 123-4.

[37] Ibid., 124-5.

Chamar clusters within a more expansive slum demonstrates how caste segregation within a slum produces similar social and economic characteristics to caste segregation between slums, except when economic interests compel the segregated castes to adapt to one another.

*Muslims and Hindus*

Muslim and Hindu migrants settle in and develop slums that suit their cultural and economic priorities. P. Roy et. al's study on adjacent Muslim and Hindu bastis, which are defined according to religious predominance in the populations, reveals significant contrasts in the slums' social, economic, and physical features.[38]

Of the 160 households in the Muslim basti, none house Hindu families, leading to a nearly homogenous community with the exception of a pocket of eighteen Christian families.[39] Similar to the Chamars, 90% of the Muslims are engaged in leatherwork, a culturally-specific occupation that few Hindus would take. Some of the Muslim women also assist their husbands in leatherwork.[40] It does not appear that the leatherwork industry itself drove the formation of the slum; rather, rural-urban linkages brought migrants that were stimulated to move by riots in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the 1940s, agricultural issues, and unemployment in villages.[41]

Muslims' housing structures in this basti reflect some of their cultural values. Most Muslim houses, which hold seven to eight families, have an inner courtyard with a bathroom. This encourages increased social cohesion between families and allows conservative Muslim women to bathe in greater privacy. In the Hindu basti, houses hold fewer families and do not have an inner courtyard with a bathroom.[42]

In the 1000-household Hindu basti, 25% of the population is Muslim.[43] The notable difference between mixing in the Hindu slum but near homogeneity in the Muslim slum may exist because Muslims do not want Hindus in their community, Hindus do not want to be in

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[38]     See Prodipto Roy, Arun Ghosh, Rashmi Sinha, "Measuring bustee environment in Calcutta," *Social Change* 22 (1992): 128-30; This study also describes an adjacent Christian slum. He notes a number of the Christians' unique features, including their knowledge of English and the fact that they migrated within Kolkata. This was not used in the body of the paper because Christianity is not common in the slums.

[39]     P. Roy, et. al, "Measuring bustee environment," 128-9.

[40]     Ibid., 128.

[41]     Ibid., 128.

[42]     Ibid., 129-130.

[43]     Ibid., 128-9.

a Muslim community, the bastis were filled at different times, or significantly larger bastis inevitably have more religious mixing. There is not enough evidence available in Roy's study to make a reasonable conclusion. The population in this basti demonstrates further self-segregation as Bengali refugees form a homogenous section, and non-Bengali Hindus, Muslims, and Christians mix in the rest of the basti.[44]

Economically, the occupations vary greatly within this basti, but Hindu men oftentimes are financially better off than Muslim men because they can have secure government jobs. Hindu women may be domestic servants or vegetable vendors, as well.[45] The jobs that Hindu women hold entail significant exposure to the public. These are less likely occupations for Muslim women because Muslim women in slums typically earn a wage inside their homes.[46]

There are two other particularly noteworthy distinctions between Muslim and Hindu slum populations. First, Dastidar and Ghosh argue that Muslims in Kolkata's slums are less likely to accept family planning measures. They found that 52.7% of Hindus accept modern contraceptive methods compared to 39.8% of Muslims.[47] This disparity may affect slums' population growth rates, which in turn may place different financial burdens on already impoverished Hindu and Muslim families. Second, Ray's study on adjacent clusters of Hindus and Muslims showed that Hindus maintain a greater attachment to their rural homes than Muslims. 28.74% of Hindus in the study said that they wanted to return to their village while only 14.16% of Muslims said the same. Considering that 99.0% of participants in Ray's study learned about the squatter settlement from friends or relatives already settled there,[48] it is evident that ties between slums and rural villages can affect future migration patterns. Migration patterns directly affect slum growth,[49] which has an influence on access to resources and the housing and employment opportunities for both new and old slum-dwellers.

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44     Ibid., 129

45     Ibid.,129.

46     Bose, "STILL A LONG ROAD AHEAD," 16.

47     Madhusree Ghosh Dastidar and Ranjan Gupta, "A study on family planning, fertility and ideal family size among the Hindu and Muslim slum dwellers of Calcutta city," in *Contemporary research in anthropology: a felicitation volume in honour of Professor Aloke Kumar Ghosh*, ed. R. Khongsdier (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 2000), 246-7.

48     Ray, "Rural-urban migration," 56-7.

49     Dutt, et. al, "Shifts in slum upgrading policy," 135.

*Bengalis and Hindi-speakers*

Bengalis and Hindi-speakers self-segregate according to their migratory patterns and their knowledge of the local language, which in turn shapes social integration in the city and employment options. A Paikpara basti population mostly consists of permanent-migrant Bengalis from rural West Bengal and Bangladesh. They quickly assimilate to living in an urban Bengali environment and relinquish their connection to their rural homes. The exceedingly rare remittance that Bengalis send back highlights their disconnect from their hometowns. Most Bengalis are hawkers or vendors,[50] occupations that likely are easier for them than Hindi-speakers. Their ability to communicate fluidly with potential customers must facilitate commercial transactions. This indicates that linguistic similarity between a slum's population and the greater city's population encourages integration.

The Tangra slum population mostly consists of Hindi-speakers, whose particular language and culture have isolated them in a Bengali city. First, as previously mentioned, this slum developed around industries. Industrial labor jobs may be more suitable occupations than vending for Hindi-speaking migrants because less communication in Bengali may be required on the job. However, it is also particularly striking that a quarter of the heads of households are self-employed.[51] Self-employment may ease a non-native speaker's transition into a slum environment. A self-employed slum dweller does not need to speak Bengali to gain employment, and depending on his job, he may not need to speak Bengali to carry out his job's tasks. Second, the potential for cultural value differences between the Hindi and Bengali groups is represented by the emphasis placed on education by the Hindi population in the Tangra basti.[52] Third, the Hindi-speakers maintain close contact with their rural homes, sending back frequent remittances, and consciously maintain their cultural traditions.[53] Similar to the Hindi-speakers in another slum studied by Dutt et. al, this can be attributed to their experience as "aliens" in a Bengali city.[54]

*Does caste or language and religion have a greater impact on slum life?*

From these descriptions it can be concluded that language and religion have more pronounced influences than caste on the

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[50]     Ashok K. Dutt, Chandreyee Mittra, and Animesh Halder, "Slum location and cycle of poverty," *Asian Profile* 25 (1997): 419.
[51]     Dutt, et. al, "Spatial Spread," 314.
[52]     Ibid., 313.
[53]     Ibid., 313.
[54]     Dutt, et. al, "Slum location," 421.

social life of slum dwellers. The exceptional gender composition in the Tiljala bastis appears unique to the Chamars' urban situation. However, case studies on the effects of caste on slum life are extremely limited. Thus, it must not be surmised that the entire caste system, or even just subcastes of the Dalits, affect social life as identifiably as in the case of the Chamars. On the other hand, ethnic groups exhibit consistent differences in their social lives that affect the economic aspects of their lives. First, Muslims and Hindus practice family planning differently and are not equally attached to their rural homes. These distinctions have ramifications on family life and migration patterns. Second, Bengalis integrate into Kolkata's Bengali social environment more easily than Hindi-speakers.

Religion and language also reverberate more consistently than caste in the economics of slum life. Chamars are known for their leatherwork, but it must not be assumed that other castes are as committed to a single occupation. In fact, as shown in the cases of the Tangra and Paikpara slums, members of other castes choose their occupation based on factors not related to caste. Bengalis and Hindi-speakers primarily base their occupational decisions on their ability to assimilate to a Bengali city. P. Roy's study on Muslims and Hindus shows that each may choose employment in a sector that the other is unlikely to join. Muslim and Hindu females' occupational decisions are equally as affected by their religions.

It cannot be concluded that religion and language or caste has a greater impact on the physical structure of slums. First, segregation is common in the physical structure of slums with caste, linguistic, and religious diversity. Second, while the dormitories in the Tiljala slum are a unique physical component, the different castes in the Bengali and Hindi-speaker slums do not require specific housing structures.[55] Additionally, Muslims may have a stronger cultural preference for having a bathroom within the house's confines, but such a bathroom is a luxury that most slums cannot offer.

An understanding of the variability introduced into slum life by language, religion, and caste is not comprehensive without factoring in the history and political status of the slums. Unfortunately, the wealth of case studies on Kolkata's slums does not encompass all the permutations of language, religion, and caste and the subcategories of the basti/squatter settlements distinction. Nevertheless, the politics of basti development and limitations on squatters' and refugees' access to secure housing, water, education,

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[55]     In each of these conclusions, the Tiljala bustees have proven to be insufficient evidence to make claims about the effects caste structure. However, it was necessary to include both examples to prove that caste can have a profound impact on slum life in both a homogenous slum and a slum that has caste diversity.

and employment must be developed as a context of structural constraints in which language, religion, and caste operate.

## The Politics of Slum Life: Historical Patterns

The future of slums has been a contested topic for two centuries. Both local and foreign political forces have debated the issue of slum improvement versus slum demolition. The British colonial government in Kolkata practiced both, but with an emphasis on demolition; the post-independence Indian government emphasized slum improvement but with the ultimate goal of slum demolition and relocation. In this section, I will describe British policies, trace some of the significant post-independence legislation, specifically the *Thika Tenancy Act of 1981* and the Bustee Improvement Programme, and describe the effect that communist parties have had on slum life. A comparison of British and Indian policies will reveal that Indian policies were more committed to both slum improvement and slum demolition than were British policies.

### *British colonial policies*

The British executed slum demolitions and slum improvements for personal gains. Furedy explains that the colonial government refused to take financial responsibility for improving slums because they existed on private lands.[56] The municipal corporation only acted initially out of concern for public health and fire hazards.[57] For example, to protect neighboring European houses from fires, the corporation prohibited thatched huts in 1837 and converted the roofs to tile in the 1850s.[58] In the 1880s, the municipal corporation actually began to focus on water provisions and sanitation to improve slum conditions.[59] However, landlords simultaneously evicted slum dwellers as property values rose and the corporation leveled slums to build more streets.[60] Prioritization of street construction over slum improvement grew during the 1890s and early twentieth century as power was allotted to the Calcutta Building Commission and the Calcutta Improvement Trust, respectively.[61] Slums were also cleared in the early twentieth century to make room for British settlers.[62] At no point were the authorities concerned with the welfare of displaced slum dwellers. Rather, the

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[56]     Furedy, "Whose responsibility?" 31.
[57]     Ibid., 30.
[58]     Unnayan, *Basti movement in Calcutta,* 12.
[59]     Furedy, "Whose responsibility?" 35-7.
[60]     Ibid., 30-1.
[61]     Furedy, "Whose responsibility?" 39-41; and Unnayan, *Basti movement in Calcutta*, 15.
[62]     Dutt, et. al, "Shifts in slum upgrading policy," 131.

British policies emphasized "commercial viability."[63]  Nevertheless, the colonial government accepted that slums were ingrained in Kolkata's landscape and thus were unlikely to be eradicated.[64]

*Post-independence policies*

After Indian independence in 1947, slum policies in Kolkata gradually shifted toward slum improvement.  In 1949, the city passed the first *Calcutta Thika Tenancy Act*.  This legislation was supposed to prevent landowners from evicting tenants unnecessarily.  However, it left loopholes for owners to evict if they decided to convert their blocks when land values increased.[65]  Despite the loophole, this legislation is an early sign of the independent state's willingness to supervise slum conditions on private land, something that the British would not do.

Indian independence did not immediately impede on the colonial era's slum demolition patterns.  Policies in the 1950s called for slum clearance but with provisions for evicted slum dwellers.  An amendment to the Calcutta Improvement Trust in 1954 required rehabilitative measures for evictees.  The *Calcutta Slum Clearance Bill* of 1957 proposed offering subsidized flats to evictees.[66]  Improvement of pre-existing slums did not take precedence nationally until the fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-1979),[67] but the Bustee Improvement Programme in Kolkata began the process in the late 1960s.

*The Bustee Improvement Programme*

The Bustee Improvement Programme (BIP) was Kolkata's most expansive slum improvement scheme.  At the urging of the World Health Organization, the city created the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation (CMPO) in 1961.  The CMPO developed the BIP in 1964, but the programme only made progress when the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority was created in 1972.[68]  The BIP proposes:

(1) the immediate implementation of a major programme of bustee improvement covering 400,000 slum dwellers within the next five years…
(2) that all future slum clearance be concentrated and accelerated as much as possible in the bustee areas

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[63]     Unnayan, *Basti movement in Calcutta*, 15.
[64]     Furedy, "Whose responsibility?" 42.
[65]     Unnayan, *Basti movement in Calcutta*, 17-8.
[66]     Ibid., 17-8.
[67]     Dutt, et. al, "Shifts in slum upgrading policy," 127.
[68]     Mukherjee, "The Calcutta experience of slum development," 201-2.

of the central city, and that specific re-housing programmes for the 170,000 bustee dwellers in those areas be expeditiously developed.

(3) the total acquisition of all bustee lands… <u>outside</u> the central city by… 1971.

(5) the preparation of a systematic programme for the eventual clearance and redevelopment of all bustee lands acquired, and the use of these lands to meet the present and anticipated social needs for such essential community facilities…

(8) the establishment of a strong administrative arrangement for the coordination and execution of the management functions essential to the improvement programme… and social management to enlist the effective voluntary participation of the bustee-dwellers themselves in a vigorous effort of bustee community development.[69]

[The fourth, sixth, and seventh proposals have been omitted.][70]

The first proposal clearly states the slum improvement objective, and the eighth proposal establishes a bureaucracy that can carry out that objective. The bureaucratic system specifically includes a place for basti-dweller involvement,[71] which British policies avoided.[72] In fact, for the social programme, the BIP wants "maximum possible voluntary leadership and participation by bustee-dwellers."[73] Basti improvement, whether basti-dwellers are active participants or not, is an integral part of the BIP because of concerns over "public health

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[69] Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation, *Bustee improvement programme: Calcutta and Howrah* (Calcutta: Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation, 1967), ii-iv.

[70] The fourth, sixth, and seventh proposals concern the legislation that will permit the programme to proceed, overall urban land policy, and the programme's financing methods. These have been omitted because they are not immediately relevant to this discussion.

[71] See Socio-legal Aid, Research, and Training Centre, *A report on the socio-legal problems in identified slum areas of Calcutta Slum Improvement Project*, comp. Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (Calcutta: The Centre, 1990's); Future bustee improvement programs enhanced community involvement. For example, authors of the 1990's report on socio-legal problems in bustees initially built rapport with community leaders. Then, they developed educational initiatives for both community leaders and disadvantaged females based on what the community said it needed.

[72] Furedy, "Whose responsibility?" 29.

[73] CMPO, *Bustee improvement programme*, 27.

and public welfare."[74] The public was assured that the improvement initiative "would rapidly benefit not only the bustee-dwellers but every citizen of the Calcutta Metropolitan District."[75] The projects that would improve public health and welfare called for amelioration of the unsanitary conditions and provision of basic amenities, including water systems, community war taps and baths, sanitary sewage system, sanitary latrines, storm drainage systems, pavements, street lighting, and the filling of unsanitary water tanks.[76]

The second, third, and fifth proposals clearly emphasize that slum clearance is the ultimate goal. The second proposal states that basti demolition in the center city should be expeditious. This was deemed necessary because of "economic as well as urgent health considerations."[77] The third and fifth proposals demonstrate the state's willingness to immediately begin preparations for the eventual clearance of all slums. However, the vast basti lands were not rapidly acquired by the state for demolition - they planned to acquire them by 1971, but the program did not begin to progress until 1972. Instead, the state later enacted additional legislation to provide slum-dwellers with more stable housing.

### The Thika Tenancy Act of 1981

The three-tiered tenancy system from the colonial era had been creating eviction and price-elevation issues since long before independence. The *Calcutta Thika Tenancy Act* of 1949 did not do enough to solve the problems. A *thika* tenant, described in the 1949 act as "any person who holds, whether under a written lease or otherwise, land under another person,"[78] was still subject to the economic interests of the *zamindar* and his *thikadar*. With the *Thika Tenancy Act* of 1981, "the State became the new landlord."[79] The legislation removed the *zamindars* from the equation and had the *thikadars* pay the state directly.[80] An appointed government "controller" had to be consulted by a *thikadar* before a tenant was evicted or prices were raised.[81] However, this system, designed by the communist parties after they gained power in 1977,[82] has not been fully implemented, essentially leaving the *thikadars* as the

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[74]    Ibid., i.

[75]    Ibid., ii.

[76]    Ibid., 6-8 and 17-8.

[77]    Ibid., ii.

[78]    West Bengal, *The Calcutta Thika Tenancy Act, 1949*, ed. Benode Behari Das Gupta 5th ed. (Calcutta: Nalanda Press, 1964), 4.

[79]    Unnayan, *Basti movement in Calcutta*, 19.

[80]    S. Roy, "Marginality in a mono-caste slum," 106.

[81]    West Bengal, *Calcutta Thika Tenancy Act,* 27-8.

[82]    Unnayan, *Basti movement in Calcutta*, 19.

property owners.[83]

### The communist influence

Communist political parties have affected the lives of slum-dwellers in Kolkata since India became independent. In the 1950's, "the Communist Party lodged itself in the leadership of the refugee movement in West Bengal,"[84] and it was the "pivot" of the basti uprising.[85] Asok Sen's (1992) study on a squatter colony by a railroad reveals the local-level power that communist parties held through the 20th century. When the government wanted to level the colony, the population was mobilized and confronted the police force. Congress and the Communist Part of India (CPI) supported them even though other nearby colonies had been wiped out.[86] In another instance, the government wanted to resettle the population. The resettlement was cancelled in part because the CPI had no influence in the proposed resettlement area.[87] When the railroad company tried to fence in the colony as it had done to others nearby, a press conference was convened and the squatters marched to the State Assembly. The CPI supported them and stopped the railroad company. [88] Even the local leader during Sen's study rose to power in part because of support from the CPI.[89] These examples demonstrate that connections to the communist parties can be the source of survival for all types of slums in Kolkata.

### How colonial and post-independence slum policies compare

Colonial and post-independence policies on slums exhibited a similar dynamic tension between slum improvement and slum clearance. Post-independence policies enacted by the local Indian government revealed policies at odds with each other. They were simultaneously more committed to slum improvement and slum clearance than colonial policies.

The British and Indian governments were motivated to improve slums for similar reasons, but post-independence activity was far more comprehensive. Both regimes hoped to improve the city's public health situation. The British, faced with a cholera epidemic, simply filled the slums' unsanitary water tanks.[90] Faced with a fire hazard for their settlers, they changed *thika* building

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83    S. Roy, "Marginality in a mono-caste slum," 106-7.

84    Sen, *Life and labor in a squatters' colony*, 13.

85    Unnayan, *Basti movement in Calcutta*, 74-5.

86    Sen, *Life and labor in a squatters' colony*, 14.

87    Ibid., 15.

88    Ibid., 15.

89    Ibid., 13.

90    Dutt, et. al, "Shifts in slum upgrading policy," 131.

materials. The BIP also improved sanitation out of concern for public health. However, it additionally provided access to basic amenities, strove to build a community that could sustain the improvements, and devised a way to overcome the issue of private land. The British authorities wanted nothing to do with slum-dwellers, but the Indian government extensively considered the living conditions in the slums. It is likely that winning slum-dwellers' support was a motivation for Indian politicians. The CPI's thorough infiltration of slums further proves politicians' interest in claiming the slum-dwellers' votes. The BIP and *Thika Tenancy Acts* demonstrate the lengths to which the Indian government would go to improve conditions for its enfranchised slum-dwellers.

Colonial and post-independence policies were openly committed to clearing slums, and they both admitted their economic and public health motivations. However, the British only cleared slums when they found it necessary, specifically when they wanted new roads or British settlers wanted more land. On the other hand, the Indian government aspired to dismantle all slums. This extreme ambition separates colonial and post-independence policies because, unlike the British, the Indian government apparently believed Kolkata's urban landscape could be effaced of its slums. Colonial and post-independence policies also differed on what should be done with displaced slum-dwellers. The British ignored the problem while the Indian government sought to provide varying levels of rehabilitation. This post-independence policy may again reflect the politicians' desires for votes. More likely, the Indian government recognized that, without re-housing options, their plan of sweeping slum demolitions would invite hundreds of thousands of former slum-dwellers into Kolkata's open streets.

## Conclusion

The slum-dwellers of Kolkata live "under physical conditions that are not fit for human habitation,"[91] despite the efforts of the BIP, a variety of philanthropic organizations, and slum-dwellers themselves. In order to accelerate amelioration of the grim slum conditions, slums' physical, social, and economic characteristics must be understood for the factors that shape them: the populations that inhabit them and the constraints imposed by the politics of bastis, squatter settlements, and refugee settlements. Lessons must be learned from the shortcomings of past policies on slum improvement, slum clearance, and slum-dweller rehabilitation. New policies must consider ethnic diversity, disparate occupational skills, and social and political structures that have proven critical to the survival of slums and their inhabitants.

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[91]     CMPO, *Bustee improvement programme*, i.