

# SACH

South Asian Composite Heritage

ISSUE NO. 48 ■ OCTOBER-DECEMBER, 2017

---

## Tyranny of the Majority

A systematic eradication of the identity of argumentative Indian is one of the ironies of contemporary Indian history and culture. It has given way to the resurgence of majoritarian Indian. In his book “Argumentative Indian”, the Nobel Prize winning Indian economist Amartya Sen outlines that argumentative tradition and intellectual pluralism have been an integral part of India’s intellectual and political heritage where conflicting opinions and interests were able to co-exist. They also helped in creating a variety of opinions, varying cultures and abundance of viewpoints. The eagerness – to argue, cutting across social and religious lines has been vital for the success of Indian democracy and secular politics and especially for the pursuit of sub-continental peace.

The resurgence of majoritarianism and gradual shift toward the right-wing politics in the subcontinent in general and India in particular has been the most disturbing challenge. Today, the Indian secular and civic nationalism as propagated by Jawaharlal Nehru has degenerated into the ethnic and chauvinistic nationalism of the majority and ultra nationalist Hindutva forces. Scholars argue that the rising ethno-religious nationalism is seeking to fuse the state, geographical territory, culture, and religious text, and impose and define it through state institutions and public bodies. The strident call of the religious nationalist groups is a return to unfettered majoritarian, patriarchal politics guised under democracy in its populist variants. Their assault on economic, social and cultural rights of people has been intense. They dislike liberty of personal choice or plurality of thought. Recognition of existing historical and cultural diversities are all viewed as threats to the majority. They repudiate others for their right to freely express their views. Hate speeches keep political interests secure and threaten democratic principles and values enshrined in codified laws of the country. They dictate even individual cultural choices like food, dress and living style and rubbish all liberal traditions intrinsic to a cultural milieu.

The identity based on faith and religion in particular has acquired strong mass appeal in a country like India. It is argued that the institutional practice of secularism and the processes of modernization have made religion a political category particularly prone to politicization. Religion based identity politics and its success in garnering votes has legitimized its use. Some argue that country today faces the conflict between two different ideas — secularism and fundamentalism. But historians working on history and cultural in South Asia claim that the secularism-communalism divides in India’s political discourse is essentially a false dichotomy. It is majoritarianism that needs to be contested by taking a firm stand on the rights of diverse Indian religious groups and federalism as intrinsic features of India’s democracy. The British philosopher, John Stuart Mill, used the phrase the “tyranny of the majority” to highlight this repressive urge in his monumental essay “Liberty”: “Like other tyrannies, the tyranny of the majority was at first, and is still vulgarly, held in dread...there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling, against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them...”

# Sorrow of My Youth

Poem by **MOHAMMAD TABISH**

Mohammad Tabish's poems are a poetic epitaph, aesthetically narrating the myriad hues of human suffering and longing in Kashmir's conflict. From trauma of separation to horrifying bloodshed, the essence of his words is human-centric and encapsulates the very span of human reach. The poems are a delight to read and an eternal treat for the soul, pricking it with depth, sensitivity and beauty.

People I see them cry  
Sniveling for light  
And holding myself aloof  
I have lit the dark  
With a candle stoic

Forsaken it melts  
Bleeding white  
With no complaints  
Learning the secret of pain  
-silence

On the other side of the window  
It's dark  
And sleeps a world  
Worried inside  
The watch consuming time  
From ages – deciding fate  
It's my sorrow that makes me write

As my pen starts to rain  
They throw stones at me  
Stones melt on me  
The ichor trickles down

Ah... the beloveds hand  
And the taste of pain  
I have learned to forgive  
This has become fate  
And these stones they keep  
Adding fuel to my fire

Cold shivers over my skin  
A burning wick any name set fire  
A tulip from belief  
My petals dipped in peace

It's my sorrow that makes me write  
Idols prisoned inside themselves  
Smiling I know not at whom  
To which god I belong there's only a sky  
Where to bow my head where to sigh  
I have been told goodbye

Doors unable to sound my knock  
Abandoned I'm left with a void  
Collecting rain I ramble, calling names  
Crossing countries, tearing mountain chests  
I'm singing the pipe of hope

It's my sorrow that makes me write.

# Afghanistan : Paradoxes of Peace Building and Reconstruction

By SUNIL KUKSAL, INDIA



**THE** war torn Afghanistan is struggling to rebuild itself even fifteen years after the peace and reconstruction process which began in 2002. This is despite the fact that billions of dollars of aid has been pumped into the country. The war has resulted in a grinding stalemate, with the government unable to maintain control. With whatever fragile gains that have been made since the fall of the Taliban regime, the nation faces a daunting array of security, political and economic risks. Afghanistan's war, the longest ever involving international troops, has shown no sign of letting up and the introduction into the battle of an Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS) affiliate has made the country only more volatile. The persistence of the Taliban insurgency is perhaps still the most debilitating challenge facing the country; despite the expensive and concerted efforts of the United States, its international allies, and the Afghans themselves, it is far from being extinguished.

## RE-EMERGENCE OF TALIBAN

The Taliban have fought their way back to control swathes of Afghanistan since the bulk of NATO forces withdrew by the end of 2014. In September 2015, the Taliban recaptured the strategically vital capital of Kunduz province in the north, which government forces recaptured from the Taliban only after intense fighting. The Taliban also expanded their presence across Faryab,

Jawzjan, and Baghlan provinces in the north. Helmand province remains one of the most contested regions between the government and Taliban. The group brought much of the two provinces (Kunduz and Helmand) under its control. The state lost control over 15% of its territories since September 2016 and until March 2017. According to a U.S government report from early 2017, approximately 57 percent of Afghanistan's 407 districts were under Afghan government control or influence, a 6 percentage-point decrease from late August 2016, and nearly a 15 percentage-point decrease since November 2015. These numbers have not significantly improved during the first half of 2017, with new and previously liberated districts falling, at least temporarily back under Taliban influence. According to a report of August 2017 from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, or SIGAR, in total, about 43 per cent of Afghanistan's districts are either under Taliban control or being contested, three percent higher than six months ago. The security environment in Afghanistan is still precarious, evidenced by the uptick in violence in 2016 and 2017 and the diminishing government control in rural areas. The Taliban, which is battling the Western-backed government and a NATO-led coalition for control of Afghanistan, has launched a wave of attacks around the country in recent months. The 2017 fighting season began with one of the most lethal attacks in the war, when ten Taliban fighters killed more than 150 Afghan soldiers and civilians after

infiltrating an army base of Afghan National Army's 209th Corps near Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan in April 2017. On May 31, 2017, a massive truck bomb killed up to 150 and severely wounded hundreds more in a busy square near the German embassy in central Kabul. No group claimed to be behind that attack but the Afghan government accused the Haqqani group, an affiliate of the Taliban. A suicide attack on a Shia mosque in the city of Herat in western Afghanistan killed at least 29 people and wounded more than 64 in August 2017.



### CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

Despite the fact that this war is being fought by an international coalition of troops, the vast majority of victims have been Afghan civilians. The number of civilian deaths in the Afghan war has reached a record high, continuing an almost unbroken trend of nearly

a decade of rising casualties. According to the report of the Congressional Research Service, 11,864 civilians have been killed in the conflict since 2007, when the United Nations began reporting statistics, to the end of 2011. According to UN figures, 'the number of deaths of women and children grew especially fast, primarily due to the Taliban's use of homemade bombs, which caused 40% of civilian casualties in the first six months of 2017'. "The UN recorded 5,160 security incidents between November 18, 2016, and February 14, 2017, representing a 10% increase from the same period the previous year, and a 3% increase from the same period in 2014-2015."

### ECONOMIC SITUATION

The economic situation indicates the failure of the country's reconstruction. The US is estimated to have spent over \$700 billion on military assistance, reconstruction and economic aid to Afghanistan, but any improvement is held back because of widespread corruption, bribery and money laundering problems and a lack of appropriate accountability structures. A large portion of financial aid money is reportedly squandered by the country's military and political elites. Military defections and the use of "ghost soldiers" (to siphon funding) within the military have weakened the Afghan military's ability to effectively counter Taliban offensives, further diminishing government influence and authority. Integrity Watch Afghanistan's (IWA) 2016 National Corruption Survey concluded that some \$3 billion was paid in bribes in 2015, an almost 50 per cent increase over 2014. The IWA survey and the 2016 Asia Foundation Survey found that after insecurity and unemployment, Afghans ranked corruption as the most serious and growing problem. Extortion and kidnappings are particularly acute in major cities, including Kabul which has added insecurities in the lives of ordinary and educated Afghan citizens. Despite the massive amount of foreign aid committed to the country, reconstruction has been slow, unemployment remains above 40

per cent. The UN estimates for 2017 show that there are currently 1.5 million people displaced across Afghanistan and almost one third of the national population, 9.3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. This represents a 13 per cent increase from 2016. With well over three million more refugees are believed to be in Pakistan and Iran. The withdrawal of international combat troops between 2011 and 2014 left a fragile security environment and a struggling national economy.

### **FRACTURED AFGHAN POLITICS**

In 2014, after a controversial presidential election, the U.S.-brokered power sharing agreement led to the formation of National Unity Government (NUG) in Afghanistan. The two main candidates were put in power - Ashraf Ghani as President and Abdullah Abdullah as Chief Executive. Ghani and Abdullah agreed to share the role of appointing a cabinet and tried to balance competence and factional interests. The NUG agreement included pledges to hold a constitutional Loya Jirga to formalise the CEO's position as a "Prime Minister" within two years and adopt comprehensive electoral reforms within a year and prior to parliamentary elections. But from the start the government has been beset by disputes over appointments being carved up on ethnic lines. As parliamentary and district council polls have repeatedly been postponed due to security and political instability concerns, a constitutional Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) could not be held to formalise the CEO's position, as pledged in the NUG agreement. The setup has been unwieldy and animosities and power struggles have hampered attempts at good governance. Ethnic divisions created by Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, former being Pashtun and latter a Tajik, created rift in the national unity government and instability in Afghanistan.

Reliable data comparing 150 appointments has revealed that over ethnic grounds President's team favoured Pashtuns whereas Abdullah Abdullah supported Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks. The government remained under intense pressure and criticism over such ethnic divide and ill security situation.

After May 31, 2017 blast on diplomatic enclave near German embassy, Jamat-e-Islami, a predominately Tajik Islamist political party held a protest and demanded that the government leaders should resign, because it lacks capability to provide security. Ghani's main supporters the three major minority political leaders Uzbek leader Abdurrashid Dostom, Tajik leader Mohammad Atta Noor, and Hazara leader Mohammad Mohaqeq occupying important positions in his cabinet



demanding that reforms should be made or that Ghani should step down from office. Political favoritism with rampant corrupt state institutions has been responsible in undermining the command structures of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and their capacity to counter a growing insurgency. As a result they are suffering high casualty rate. Corruption, nepotism and factionalism have been the main hurdles to initiate reforms in the Afghan National Police (ANP). These weaknesses have

facilitated Taliban advances countrywide. After almost 3 years later, the agreement's lack of clarity in defining the roles and responsibilities of the president and CEO has largely been responsible for internal tensions and hence governmental dysfunction.

Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission has announced that long-delayed parliamentary and district council elections will be held in the war-torn country on July 7, 2018, almost three years late. The vote will elect representatives to the 249 seats in the lower house of Parliament (Wolesi Jirga). Originally scheduled to be held in 2015, rampant insecurity caused the long delay. Crucial governance reforms that the vast majority of the Afghan people expected from the National Unity Government (NUG) of President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah have moved rather slowly with negligible changes. Moreover, the NUG faces challenges by the opposition led by ex-President Hamid Karzai, who has publicly criticized it on issues ranging from foreign policy to governance. The postponement of political and electoral reforms has deprived the NUG of its authority and legitimacy among the Afghan people. The people's confidence in the NUG has been gradually declining as a result of the current poor prospects of employment and limited human security.

### THE US POLICY

The war in Afghanistan has proved to be the United States' lengthiest and costliest to date. Former American President Barack Obama campaigned for president on wrapping it up, but the emergence of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, as well as the resurgence of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, have prolonged the U.S. troop presence. In August 2017, after several months of deliberations, the US President Donald Trump announced a new strategy for Afghanistan in which he decided to send additional more than 3,000 troops to Afghanistan in an effort to win America's 16-year war. The move was in a clear reversal of

President Trump's earlier promise to minimize America's involvement abroad. The strategy also appears to convey US message to assert pressure on Pakistan to deny safe haven to Afghan militants. In June 2016 former President Obama amended prior troop reduction plans in order to keep 9,800 U.S. forces there through 2016, and to decrease to 8,400 as of the beginning of 2017. President Obama opted to let his successor determine the future of the US troop contingent in Afghanistan. There are approximately 11,000 US troops (estimated actual figures) already serving in Afghanistan. The addition of U.S. troops will bring the total to at least 14,000. These new service members will support and mentor the Afghan security forces which may be a critical element of a possible plan to strengthen the government's position and forestall collapse or loss of significant territory to the Taliban, ISIS or both.

Over the last 15 years, the international community led by the United States has made attempts by providing resources to transform Afghanistan into a more stable, modern and prosperous country. Assessment of the ground situation in the last three years shows that the Afghan government cannot survive without foreign assistance, much of it from the US. NATO has already committed in July 2016 Warsaw summit to fund the ANDSF until 2020. The total financial aid for 2017-2020 committed by the international community for Afghanistan at the Brussels conference amounts to approximately EUR 13.6 billion, one third of which is committed by the European Union (EU) and its Member States (around EUR 5 billion). Afghanistan faces challenges in social and economic sectors which are reflective of a deep humanitarian crisis. After decades of death and destruction, Afghanistan deserves a stable peace which can ensure rehabilitation and security of millions of suffering Afghan people inside and outside the country and credible rebuilding of its conflict ridden politics and ravaged economic infrastructure.

# Nepal's Transitional Justice Process : A Gender Perspective

By **SUSAN RISAL**, Nagarik Aawaz, NEPAL



**THE** post conflict Nepal continues to live with uneasy peace. The transitional justice process initiated after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of November 2006 failed to fulfill the promises and reforms agreed to be implemented. Little attention has been paid to the spectrum of violations and abuses directed against women and girls. During Nepal's armed conflict, women were victims of torture, abuse and sexual violence. Gender based violence continues to remain invisible even years after the end of conflict as women and girl victims and survivors continue to suffer with the faint hope to rebuild their lives again.

In the current scenario it is evident that the lingering after-effects of 10 year long conflict continue to haunt women. The widespread traumas caused by the atrocities and sufferings still hamper their psychological, social, political and economic well-being, another legacy of the conflict. Till date there are no efforts from the state to formulate effective mechanisms to respond to conflict era abuses and ensure justice especially for women and girls who were raped, physically abused and tortured. In the Comprehensive Peace Accord, 2006 it has been pronounced in clear terms that the truth and reconciliation commission will be set up within six month of the signing of the Peace Accord which will

carry forward the truth seeking process. Whereas the two Truth Seeking Commissions: Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons were formed under Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, (2014) after almost 10 years in 2015. They failed miserably to incorporate and address issues of gender justice. Without criminalizing sexual violence and torture in the current act of Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, (2014), women who suffered sexual abuses and torture are left far behind in seeking justice to rebuild their lives.

Recently in July 2017 the government again redistributed an amount of Rs.500,000 as compensation to the victims and survivors of the conflict. But again women survivors of gendered based atrocities especially those who faced heinous crimes like rape and physical torture were excluded from receiving the compensation just because they are not identified as conflict victims in the Nepal's Citizens Relief, Compensation and Economic Assistance Procedure, 2009. The Nepalese government refused to recognise women survivors as a category of conflict victims especially those who faced gendered based violence. This is despite the fact that several Nepalese human rights and peace building organizations vociferously advocated for their inclusion. The government decision smacks of a contradictory approach in meeting its

obligations reflected in several government sponsored bills and plans. The fact is that the National Action Plan of United Security Council 1325 and 1820 clearly recognised sexually abused and tortured women as conflict victims whereas Nepal's Citizens Relief, Compensation and Economic Assistance Procedure, 2009 has excluded these women by refusing to define them as conflict victims. It is worth mentioning that both the government bills and plans are formulated under Nepalese Federal Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction.

Nagarik Aawaz, Nepal organised a National Sharing Workshop on July 31, 2017 in which representatives from both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Investigation on Enforced Commission, women survivors from 32 districts of total 75 districts of Nepal, organizations working on peace building, Nepal media and the Commissioner from Truth and Reconciliation participated. During the workshop it was informed that there are more than 300 cases of sexual violence and torture which have been filed. Though it was not mentioned but the cases also include cases of rape and unlawful acts brought out by Nagrik Aawaz in 2017. However, till now no reliable data is available to reveal actual number of cases of sexual violence filed before the commission through Local Peace Committees. The fear of stigmatization, lack of safe spaces and other security measures also contributed in preventing women to approach Local Peace Committees to submit their case applications as happened in similar situations for women in transitional justice process in countries like Guatemala, Ghana and Yugoslavia. In many Local Peace Committees, the posts of secretaries are held mostly by men who were responsible to

collect the applications related to crimes committed in war time era. This discouraged most of the women survivors to approach the peace committees to present their cases.

From Nagrik Aawaz's perspective we feel that the approach of truth seeking commission suffers from serious implementation gaps in particular they are not reaching out to the communities and not been able to give assurance to the women for their safety. This ground reality was also validated by the questions raised by the participants to the commission during the National Sharing Program. One participant asked, "how many times you have reached into our district?" (Nagrik Aawaz, 2017). Moreover, there are no serious efforts from the state to formulate state-formulated transitional justice mechanism to deal delicately with women who suffered gender based violence such as rape and torture during the conflict era. The two commissions, Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Commission on Investigation on Enforced Disappearance, emphasize on giving amnesty to the people accused of committing crimes. Although, the government approved the rules and regulations for the conduct of commissions, but it has taken away their crucial powers including the power to arrest an accused. Furthermore, to collect the cases of the victims, commissions coordinated with Local Peace Committee (LPC), which is also a highly politicized institution. Under such a scenario it is very unlikely that the cases of

the women who faced gendered based violence will be treated with all sensitivity including at the stage of making an application as well. Besides, these women find it extremely difficult to openly express their sufferings in their families and with their relatives as



it is considered a matter of prestige for the women, their families and their communities. In the absence of any kind of support system within the families and at the level of state, women are compelled to hide their traumas and sufferings within themselves. Women not only suffer at psychosocial levels but they also have to go through various physical problems along with their reduced self-esteem which denies women to live in a state of human dignity.

Although the National Action Plan on Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security 2015, clearly states the special needs of women in war including victims of sexual violence (Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, 2011), but nothing has been done to support these women so far such as creating spaces where they can find opportunities to live dignified lives. It is all the more important because Nepal is currently in the process of formulation of second National Action Plan in response to the Security Council Resolution 1325 and 1820. Further in Nepal's conflict era many women suffered from physical and mental torture from both warring parties, the Maoists and the State, as weapons of war, which had made profound physical and mental impacts on their lives. These women were tortured in the form of rape, sexual assault, beating, electrocution, premature burial, urination in their mouth, sexual assaults, being locked in dark rooms for several days, and being forced to carry weapons and other tools for long hours. Although the United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT), Article 4 highlights that the act of torture must be punishable. However, due to weak policy implementation, Nepal has not incorporated

acts of torture as punishable offences in its domestic laws to provide punishment for such ghastly crimes committed against humanity. In this scenario, once again, women who faced gendered based violence are compelled to live with the notion of victimhood with a long awaited journey in their quest for justice. Paragraph 135 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the fourth World conference in 1995 emphasize on the need to address the issues of women in armed conflict. Ironically, while Nepal government formulated the interim compensation bill, but women who faced gendered based violence especially those raped and physically tortured



were not included under the category of conflict-affected women. As a result they were excluded and denied their rights to avail any compensation from state. Besides, in a patriarchal society like Nepal, the women could hardly share their agonies with people around them as women's sexuality is considered an issue of individual honour or prestige for the women themselves, their families and their society.

Even after the 11 years of peace accord, the women survivors of gendered based violence especially the women who were raped and physically tortured, still continue to live

with the notion of victimhood and many struggle hard to reintegrate into their society and culture. These women also develop various physical and mental problems as highlighted by scholar Hamber, B in *Transforming Societies after Political Violence: Truth Reconciliation and Mental Health* such as lack of sleep, headache, restlessness, anger, sense of hopelessness, sadness, laziness, lack of appetite, feeling of isolation, severe other mental problems and lack of confidence to face outsiders. In this context, they alone are not suffering but their families and friend too are also affected. This is also a contributing factor leading to societal damage through infliction of trauma. Furthermore, with the absence of any support mechanisms women are facing disempowerment as far as their psychosocial well being is considered. Due to the inability of the state to manage the transition phase in a delicate manner and respond to the emerging conflict, the issues of women who faced gendered based violence have not been streamlined in government plans and policies. The newly formulated Commissions have a greater role in dealing with issues related to women and in providing adequate legal, economic and mental support to them so that they can feel assured of getting justice in their lives.

Scholars of armed conflict on the causes of civil war Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler has argued in a paper 'Greed and Grievances in Civil War' that in many instances armed conflicts are caused by a combatant's desire for self-enrichment. Similarly in Nepal the social grievances like inequality and discriminations in the society as contributing factors did pave the way for armed conflict but at the same time there were many Nepali youth that were unemployed and seeking immediate change and incentives also supported the Maoist movement. The individual context analysis after the peace accord of 2006 reveals that the Maoist movement turned out to be greed led movement where the so-called political transformation benefitted only limited groups

like men leaders of some ethnic cast of the rebellion group, which consequently led to the emergence of new conflict in Nepal during the period of 2006-2016. There is a nominal representation of women in army reintegration, despite the fact that 40% of the first line combatants in the Maoist movement were women. The promises made to women that they would enjoy their powers and rights after the political transformation remained merely a lip service. Only certain groups enjoyed the dividend of peace process. The state and the Maoist party failed to address the serious human rights violations such as sexual and physical assaults in the transitional justice mechanisms. It forced women to live with the notion of victimhood that exemplifies the vested interest and the greed of the leaders of the rebellion group, as they become mainstream political party of Nepal.

In Nepal, failure on the part of the state and political parties to provide opportunities to people who suffered during the armed conflict, played a vital role in emergence of new conflict also known as 'conflict trap' as mentioned by Barbara F. Walter while explaining about phenomenon of recurring civil war in societies. In post conflict Nepal women who have undergone the brutalities of a long drawn armed conflict face another conflict situation. Women survivors of sexual and physical abuses who lived during the time of internal conflict continue to struggle to achieve favourable social and political situation which can ensure their basic rights/needs (physical, economical and psychological). Nepali armed conflict has severely affected one generation and the absence of any ground breaking peace initiative in the country is likely to create a situation of trans-generational hatred creeping in the minds and hearts among people and the communities. Today Nepal needs an effective and responsive transitional justice process to address women's issues which is essential for the reconciliation both at the individual and community level in order to achieve sustainable peace.

# Pakistan, Land of the Intolerant

By **MOHAMMED HANIF**, PAKISTAN

**KARACHI**, Pakistan — This country has a poor record of protecting its religious minorities, but we outdo ourselves when it comes to Ahmadis. Members of the sect insist on calling themselves Muslims, and we mainstream Muslims insist on treating them like the worst kind of heretics.

The day I wrote this piece, a small headline in a newspaper informed me that an Ahmadi lawyer, his wife and two-year-old child had been shot dead by gunmen at home, for being Ahmadis. Killings like this have happened so many times that the story wasn't even the main news. On May 28, 2010, some 90 Ahmadis were killed during attacks on two mosques in Lahore. No public official attended the funerals.

You would think that the government, law enforcers and the courts would do something about such sustained acts of brutality. But they are too hard at work. I learned from another recent headline that a district court near Lahore, in eastern Pakistan, had sentenced three Ahmadi men to death for blasphemy. A fourth man was shot dead before the trial while in police custody.

It is always prudent not to ask what blasphemous act is said to have been committed, because under the law, repeating something blasphemous can itself constitute blasphemy. According to one newspaper report, the men were on trial for attempting to remove from a wall religious posters that incited hatred against Ahmadis. That's right, they were sentenced to death for taking down posters that incited people to kill them. (The prosecution argued that since the posters were religious, removing them was an insult to the Prophet Muhammad.)

The Ahmadi (or Ahmadiyya) sect is a reformist movement founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad toward the end of the 19th century in the city of Qadian, in what is today the Indian part of Punjab. Ahmad claimed to be the incarnation of a Messiah promised in Islamic holy texts. That challenged the mainstream Muslim belief that Muhammad is Islam's last and final prophet. Ahmad was accused of being an agent of the British Empire.

There are no reliable statistics about the number of Ahmadis in Pakistan today. Many Ahmadis don't publicly identify as Ahmadi; others refuse to take part in the census. Estimates range from 500,000 to four million. In 1974, Pakistan's elected Parliament declared Ahmadis to be non-Muslims. Religious parties had held street protests demanding this, and even though Parliament back then was full of liberals and socialists, there was hardly a dissenting voice when the time came to pass the law.

Our Parliament today is still at it. Last week Muhammad Safdar, a son-in-law of the recently deposed prime minister, thundered against Ahmadis, demanding they be banned from joining the armed forces. He also demanded that a physics department of a university in Islamabad be renamed because in 2016 it was named after Abdus Salam, the only Pakistani scientist to become a Nobel laureate. The Pakistani government had already taken close to four decades to name anything after Mr. Salam, a theoretical physicist, because he was Ahmadi. It appears that not a single parliamentarian spoke up against Mr. Safdar's diatribe.

Earlier this month, Parliament also

changed the oath that Pakistanis are required to take to get a passport or run in an election. A standard version of the statement goes: "I hereby solemnly declare that I consider Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani to be an impostor nabi and also consider his followers, whether belonging to the Lahori or Qadiani group, to be non-Muslims." (Nabi means prophet.) Language in the election law was changed from "I solemnly declare" to "I believe." It's not clear why this happened. The government claims it was a clerical error. But there was a public uproar over the change, including accusations that the government was going soft on Ahmadis. Parliament promptly backtracked, and we all resumed solemnly declaring rather than just believing.

The word "Ahmadi" was hardly even used during the debate in Parliament. We prefer to call the Ahmadis "Qadianis," meaning from Qadian. Ahmadis consider the word derogatory, which is why we use it. I got a call a few months ago from my family who still lives in my ancestral village in Punjab. A stranger had come asking about me, I was told. He claimed to be my friend from school. While I was still trying to put a forgotten face to the name, my relative asked, "Is your friend a Qadiani?" I suddenly remembered the boy from my school who was indeed a friend and happened to be Ahmadi. I asked the relative, "How did you know he was a Qadiani?" The reply shouldn't have shocked me, but it did. "I have an inbuilt Qadiani detector. I can always smell them." I wanted to remind my relative that when I was a kid and he was a young man, all his best friends were Ahmadis and I had seen him locked in our bathroom smoking his first cigarette with those infidels. But then I remembered the slap.

It must have been around 1974. I was about nine years old and was taking my Quran lessons. My teacher was gentle. At the time, protesters in the bazaars were asking shoppers not to go to Ahmadi-owned shops. I asked my teacher who the Ahmadis were, and he patiently explained that they were heretics, because they challenged the notion that Muhammad was Islam's last prophet. I said,

even if they are heretics, does Islam say we can't buy stuff from their shops? The slap was full and hard. As I grew up, Ahmadis went from being treated as zealous reformist Muslims to non-Muslims to kafir, or heretics — worse even than Hindus or Jews. In the mid-1980s, a decade after Ahmadis were declared non-Muslims, another set of laws forbade them to act like Muslims.

This is the tricky bit, because Ahmadis insist on calling themselves Muslim and behave like Muslims. They pray in mosques, they call out the azaan at prayer time, they say "assalam alaikum," they invoke Allah's will or his mercy — and every time they do any of the above, they violate the law of the land. If they call their mosque a mosque, they become criminals. If they call their daily prayers namaz, as Muslims do, they risk imprisonment. Ahmadis have been charged with blasphemy for printing a verse of the Quran on wedding invitations.

Early this month, I saw Pakistan's foreign minister, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, give an interview on television. He had just returned from a tour of the United States and had been accused of hobnobbing with Ahmadis while there. He was at pains to explain that he had never met an Ahmadi in his life. To prove his point, he said that once, while he was sitting in a restaurant in Islamabad, two boys came up to get a selfie with him. "I asked them, 'I hope you are not Qadianis.'" The foreign minister and the show host shared a hearty laugh.

I called up my long-lost Ahmadi friend recently and the brief conversation that followed was full of blasphemies. He was acting all Muslim. "Assalam alaikum," he greeted me. By the grace of Allah, he said, he still has a job. Sometimes, when people suspect him of being Ahmadi, he is thrown out of shops or business meetings. But Allah is kind, my friend insisted. His wife, a teacher of fashion design, still has a job at a university — though she doesn't use the staff room because some people have become suspicious. The kids are doing well, thanks to Allah, but

*Continued on page 21*

# Blurring Divides

By R. KRISHNAKUMAR



**NEARLY** 130 years after Sree Narayana Guru challenged the injustices of the caste system in 19th century Kerala by consecrating a rock and calling it “Ezhava Siva” for worship by the backward classes who were then not even allowed to go near temples, the formal entry of Dalits as main priests in Hindu public temples has just become a reality in the State.

Keezhcherivalkadavu, a village near Thiruvalla in central Kerala, celebrated one such event on October 9 when 22-year-old Yadu Krishna, who was born into the Pulaya Dalit caste and is well versed in rituals and was properly trained in a Vedic school, took charge as the melsanthi (main priest) of the 150-year-old Manappuram Siva Temple run by the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB).

To the credit of the entire State, local people accorded a stirring reception to Yadu Krishna when he reached the temple along

with his guru, K.K. Anirudhan Tantri of the Sree Gurudeva Vaidika Tantra Vidyapeetham at Moothakunnam near North Paravur in Ernakulam district, who himself was born into an Ezhava backward class family and achieved renown as a religious scholar and teacher.

The local people took the new melsanthi to the temple in a ceremonial procession with an ensemble of temple music and “vanchippattu”, the rhythmic songs of the traditional oarsmen of the region.

Five other Dalits and 30 other non-Brahmins have also been appointed priests along with Yadu Krishna by the Devaswom Recruitment Board (DRB), a body established by a State law on the recommendations of a Kerala High Court committee and is meant to bring in transparency in devaswom recruitments in the State.

Yadu Krishna, an M.A. (Sanskrit) second-

year student who began his religious education at the age of 12, and is considered a dedicated student, was ranked first among the Dalit candidates, 42nd in the merit list and fourth in the rank list for final appointment prepared after the first-ever examination and interview conducted by the recruitment board. Of the total 62 persons in the merit list (which has a validity of three years), more than half are non-Brahmins. Among them, the majority belong to the Ezhava community, which was, incidentally, the main focus of emancipation activity by Sree Narayana Guru, who is best known for his over a century-old social reform creed, "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man".

Incidentally, the entry of Dalits into the sanctum sanctorum of Hindu priesthood with government and legal sanction occurred 81 years after the last maharajah of Travancore issued a proclamation in 1936 allowing the entry of all classes and sections of Hindus inside public temples in his orthodox Hindu state, a region that now constitutes the entire southern part of Kerala and parts of southern Tamil Nadu.

"This is not the first time that people belonging to the backward communities have become temple priests in Kerala. But this is the first time that [32 per cent] reservation norms applicable in State government services have been applied also in the appointment of priests in Devaswom Board temples in the State," DRB chairman M. Rajagopalan Nair said.

#### **RECRUITMENT OF TEMPLE EMPLOYEES**

There are more than 15,000 temples in Kerala, many of them run by the different devaswom boards or management committees under the control of the State government and others run by private trusts or individual families. As per the Travancore-Cochin Hindu Religious Institutions Act of 1950, all temples in Kerala except private temples are under State ownership and are run by devaswom boards and officials appointed by the government.

Until recently, appointment of temple employees, including priests, was done by the respective devaswom boards or committees on the basis of their own separate rules. But over the years, several such appointments were

challenged before the courts in Kerala. In one such case relating to the Travancore Devaswom Board, the High Court ordered an inquiry by a three-member committee led by former Supreme Court judge K.S. Paripoornan. After a detailed study, the committee recommended the establishment of a recruitment board to make appointments in State-run temples transparent.

The Congress-led United Democratic Front government constituted a six-member Devaswom Recruitment Board through an ordinance in 2014, and an Act was passed in 2015 to formalise it. However, before the board could start functioning, elections were announced and the Left Democratic Front came to power in the State. The new government reconstituted the board with just three members in December 2016, and the current spate of priest recruitments is the first such exercise of the new body.

In many other States, temple management and priesthood still remain largely a preserve of the Brahmin community, even though the legal position has been made clear in several judgments by courts in India, including the apex court. The courts have mainly held that (a) freedom of religion is not confined to doctrines and beliefs but extends to "essential practices" done in pursuance of that faith; (b) "denomination"

(of a person) and "usage" and many such traditional principles of appointment of priests ordained by age-old religious treatises by themselves would not amount to a violation of the right to equality, but such treatises should necessarily conform to the constitutional mandates; and that (c) the inclusion or exclusion of a person from priesthood should not therefore be based on the criteria of caste, birth or any other constitutionally unacceptable parameters.

In a prominent instance, pertaining to the controversial appointment of K.S. Rakesh, son of a well-known tantric scholar and a person belonging to the Ezhava community, as the chief priest of a temple in North Paravur in Kerala in 1993, a complaint was raised by N. Adithayan, a Malayali Brahmin devotee. In an all too familiar vein, the petitioner claimed "the appointment violates the long followed

mandatory custom and usage of having only Malayali Brahmins for performing poojas in the temples” and that “it denied the rights of worshippers to practise and profess their religion in accordance with its tenets and manage their religious affairs as per Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution”.

The Supreme Court, however, upheld the appointment and made significant observations that laid down the law with no room for doubt. It said: “If traditionally or conventionally, in any temple, all along a Brahmin alone was conducting poojas or performing the job of santhikaran (priest), it may not be because a person other than the Brahmin is prohibited from doing so because he is not a Brahmin, but those others were not in a position and, as a matter of fact, were prohibited from learning, reciting or mastering Vedic literature, rites or performance of rituals and wearing sacred thread by getting initiated into the order and thereby acquire the right to perform ‘homa’ and ritualistic forms of worship in public or private temples. Consequently, there is no justification to insist that a Brahmin, or Malayala Brahmin in this case, alone can perform the rites and rituals in the temple.”

The court further held that “as long as anyone well versed and properly trained and qualified to perform the puja in a manner conducive and appropriate to the worship of the particular deity is appointed as santhikaran de hors his pedigree based on caste, no valid or legally justifiable grievance can be made in a court of law”.

It also rejected the petitioner’s demand stating that “there is also no plea or proof of any custom or usage specially created by the founder of the temple or those who have exclusive right to administer the temple”; and that, “nor does the temple belong to any denominational category with any specified form of worship peculiar to such denomination or to its credit”.

Following this judgment, the State government issued directions asking all devaswom boards to fine-tune their recruitment processes and ensure that there was no discrimination based on caste, and subsequently tried to leave all such appointments to the State Public Service Commission. However, despite

the acute scarcity of properly trained Brahmin priests, with very few from the community opting to join the traditional line and instead opting to seek other jobs, several temples in Kerala, including those under the devaswom boards, have shown a reluctance to appoint non-Brahmins, let alone Dalits, as priests.

State Devaswom Minister Kadakampally Surendran described the introduction of reservation norms in the appointment of priests as a “silent revolution”. “We must not fail to see the social context in which Dalits and other backward community members are being appointed as priests in devaswom temples in Kerala,” he told *Frontline*. “It is happening in a country where Dalits are being attacked for sporting a moustache; where people belonging to the Scheduled Castes are forced to eat human excreta, or are being killed for eating beef. Even in Kerala, there are protests against the appointment of the Scheduled Castes for even menial jobs in private temples.”

It is, however, too early to say whether Kerala’s Hindu society has imbibed the spirit of this “revolution” wholeheartedly. “There are stray instances of protests against the government decision, for example, by members of organisations such as the Yogakshema Sabha, which had leaders like E.M.S. Namboodiripad and V.T. Bhattathiripad, who fought against orthodoxy within the Brahmin community. But it is a sign of the evolution of Kerala society that though people may have protests in their hearts, it is embarrassing or not easy for them at all to express it openly today,” the Minister said.

Yadu Krishna told *Frontline* that he started learning to be a priest at the age of 12, and so far in over a decade, the last seven years of which were spent doing poojas in private temples, he has never felt his caste come in the way of his education or work. “My guru knew that I was a Dalit only when I showed him my appointment order. He never asked me about my caste. At the Vaidya Tantra Vidyapeetham, where my guru taught me, at any given time there were nearly 50 students belonging to all castes who used to eat, bathe, sleep and learn together. After I got the new appointment, the local people have all treated me well and have been very cooperative,” he said.

In contrast, just two months earlier, a major controversy arose at the Chettikulangara Devi Temple at Mavelikkara in Alappuzha district, a prominent temple under the Travancore Devaswom Board and run by an administrative body with representatives from 13 surrounding "karas" (or villages), when an Ezhava youth named Sudhikumar was transferred and posted there as keezhsaanthi (assistant priest).

Trouble started when the posting was objected to by the tantri (the hereditary chief priest of a temple who is by tradition the deciding authority in all religious matters concerning it) and the local administrators, represented by the Sreedevi Vilasom Hindumata Convention, on the grounds that his appointment went against established customs "because many of the important rituals of the temples should by tradition be done only by Malayala Brahmins".

Counter-protests too arose, threatening to mar the peaceful atmosphere of the temple, and soon after Sudhikumar approached the State Human Rights Commission, quoting the 2002 Supreme Court verdict among other things, his appointment was formalised.

A representative of the convention told *Frontline* on condition of anonymity: "This is not an issue of caste at all as outsiders may want to believe. Every temple has a tradition and as per the tradition of this temple, which is run by people from 13 karas, many rituals are to be conducted only by Malayala Brahmin priests. Each locality and each temple has its own customs and traditions, and decisions on them should be taken only by the tantri and the people of the locality. But when it comes to Hindu temples, everyone has an opinion. That is not the right way. During February to the end of April, the major festival season in the temple, for example, the assistant priests mostly are in charge of many of the rituals that take place in the 13 localities. The festival agenda is so tightly scheduled that even a delay of an hour will lead to trouble in its conduct. Objections can be raised by anybody who wants to insist on tradition and customs and the whole programme would go haywire."

There have been other isolated reports too in the recent past of non-Brahmin applicants

being rejected or not allowed to function properly by temple authorities, who claimed that their appointment went against established temple traditions.

#### OPINION DIVIDED

A top functionary of the Kerala Yogakshema Sabha said that opinion was sharply divided in the organisation on the issue. "One group is taking extreme positions and wants the organisation to react strongly. Many want to approach the court. Another group wants all to see the reality of the changing times but are regarded as villains," he said.

Subramanian Namboodiripad, Thiruvananthapuram district secretary of the Yogakshema Sabha, was quite vocal in his criticism of the government policy: "Politicians now say that a man can become a Brahmin through his deeds but are trying to put down people who are already Brahmins by birth and by deed. If a man can become a Brahmin by learning the job, then what is the rationale in applying reservation norms in the appointment of priests? Why can't merit be a criterion at least here? One can convert to another religion, but is there a way in India for a person to convert from one caste to another? Will we also be eligible for reservation benefits in other fields then? We are a community that suffered the most when land reforms were introduced in Kerala by the communist governments. Now only 10 per cent of the community still works in temples. Many seek jobs in the IT industry, do you know why? The pay is good and there is no reservation there."

According to him, the government is trying to gain political mileage by projecting "one Yadu Krishnan, who is a capable, able person whose knowledge we respect. But can the authorities ensure that all those who are recruited as priests through the reservation system are equally capable? Moreover, new recruits want only plum postings and do not want to work in the hundreds of temples where the daily income is almost zero and board pay is extremely poor."

"It is not the Brahmins who are against such reforms. In fact there are several instances of people from the community taking the lead to impart training to people of other castes,"

said Akkeeramom Kalidasa Bhattathiripad, national vice-president of the All-India Brahmin Federation, an apex body of several Brahmin organisations in the country. "However, we should not forget that it is a job that requires a lot of dedication, interest and discipline. It should not be seen as just another job or like a trade union system. We have a belief system and if we are careless in how we handle it, our spiritual world will become distorted and will lead to a lot of trouble. That is the concern. We are not questioning the right of any person to become a priest if he has the training and the knowledge and capability for it. We accept merit as a criterion. But introducing reservation in the spiritual world, without ensuring quality, would only lead to its corruption and eventual destruction. Reforms should be introduced with care and only with good intentions. They should not be merely for propaganda or scoring political points," he said.

He also said the Devaswom Board treated its priests only as Class IV employees, and so it was no longer considered a dignified job, like being a priest in other religions. "Men from the Brahmin community are finding it difficult to get brides, also because priesthood is not a paying job and it demands long, hard hours. The Brahmin community had helped preserve and sustain such Hindu heritage all this long, without any vested interests and with a lot of dedication and personal hardships. But government policies now tend to ignore them completely. They should not be treated like enemies and the job should not lose its sanctity. It should not become just another government job."

Recruitment Board Chairman Rajagopalan Nair, however, said that in the interviews conducted by a three-member board, with a tantrika as the subject expert, several Dalit and non-Brahmin candidates performed better than candidates who belonged to Brahmin families with a tradition of worship in temples.

Asked about the concern that reservation in temple priest recruitment would lead to dilution in the scheme of things, he said similar concerns were there earlier too, for instance when the Temple Entry Proclamation was made,

but it seemed more like a fear about losing privileges. "It would all depend on the system used for selecting the right candidates. If we stick to a model that ensures transparent assessment of candidates, only suitable candidates will be recruited."

While earlier efforts to recruit non-Brahmin or Dalit priests used to meet with vehement opposition from caste Hindu lobbies in Kerala, the recent recruitment process has progressed rather smoothly at least in its initial stages. The Devaswom Board's backward class recruits in the late 1960s were never even allowed to settle down in the job, left on their own volition or were forced to seek other posts in the board. In 1993, a backward class aspirant who passed a common examination had his appointment challenged in the courts and eventually gained employment through a Supreme Court order nearly a decade later in 2002. But in the recent instance, when Kerala passes another milestone in its long journey, the resistance seems to have mellowed out a lot.

Anirudhan Tantri, the man who taught Yadu Krishna and runs a respected vaidika tantra school, is, however, "hundred per cent certain" that irrespective of the caste of the candidate, if a person gets good training as the new breed of educated recruits have obtained, then "that is the way forward for temple reform in an educated, enlightened society like Kerala". "Caste bias and prejudices are everywhere. But the opposite also is true, and after experiencing the magnanimity of several Brahmins who helped me in my life and education, how can I say one community alone is at fault?"

"I was born an Ezhava, and in the late 1970s, when I was young, my guru Puthanmadathil Venkata Raman, an orthodox Brahmin, took me into his fold and gave me education and helped me in my life without any reservations. On his deathbed, my guru took my hand and said: 'Only my body is leaving you; my spirit will always stay with you.' It is that spark that sustains my institution today and allows me to teach students like Yadu Krishna and many like him, without ever wondering about their caste."

*Courtesy : Frontline*

# Caste, Gender and the New Historiography

Book Reviewed by JOEL LEE

A new historiography of modern India is emerging—a historiography that reveals the constitutive role of late colonial conflicts over untouchability in the formation of the contemporary political landscape. With some exceptions, earlier historians who took cognizance of Dalit lives in the archive used such material to make arguments about happenings on the margins of society. History’s “mainstream” remained untouched, so to speak, by untouchability. Now, however, it is becoming increasingly clear that such cardinal features of Indian political life as constitutional democracy, the secular value of tolerance, laws regulating religious conversion, and the idea of religiously “hurt sentiments”—all of which present themselves as having little to do with caste—have the contours that they do precisely as a consequence of bitter, early twentieth-century struggles over the control of Dalit labor, political agency, and social value. Recent monographs by Anupama Rao (*The Caste Question*, 2009), C. S. Adcock (*The Limits of Tolerance*, 2013), Rupa Viswanath (*The Pariah Problem*, 2014), and others demonstrate that the insight of W. E. B. DuBois into the constitutive centrality of race in American history applies, *mutatis mutandis*, with equal force in South Asia: the generative problem of the twentieth century—and indeed, of the twenty-first—is the problem of the touchability line.

Suggesting new angles of enquiry to this emerging historiography, and supplying it with north Indian archival ballast, are not exactly the stated goals of Charu Gupta’s *The Gender of Caste*. I would argue, however, that these are

among the book’s signal achievements, and are elements of Gupta’s monograph that will make it a resource of enduring value to a range of fields: not only Dalit studies and gender studies—to which the book primarily addresses itself—but also religious studies, sociology/anthropology, and above all, modern Indian history. As Gupta’s analysis makes clear, representations of Dalit women in early twentieth-century Hindi print publics throw at least as much light on their “mainstream” authors as they do on their “peripheral” subjects; and such representations were foundational, not marginal, in the consolidation of Hindu majoritarian nationalism.

Gupta frames *The Gender of Caste* as a corrective to social histories of the colonial period. Such are the blind spots of prevailing historical narratives that “the implicit conclusion has been that in colonial India most women were upper caste and middle class, while virtually all the lower castes and Dalits were men.... So this book questions both the presumptive maleness of most Dalit studies, and the presumptive upper-casteness of many feminist writings of the colonial period” (p. 6). Gupta also seeks to reveal in the historical record indications of the agency of Dalit women and men despite their structural dispossession. “Through showing and discussing dialogical counter-representations, and dissonant voices and actions, this book ... also venture[s] to decode the concealed scripts of Dalit agency” (p. 269). Such “decoding” of subaltern agency is, of course, a genuinely thorny endeavor; like other scholarly efforts in this direction, Gupta’s

is more persuasive in certain domains and less in others.

Equally as significant as the book's explicit aims, though, are some of its unheralded accomplishments. Anchored in the archives of Hindi print publications in the first half of the twentieth century, *The Gender of Caste* considers topics as apparently disparate as conversion to Islam, labor migration to Fiji, sartorial revolutions, folktales of the witch-goddess Nona Chamarin, and stories of women who were militants in the revolt of 1857. But this is no miscellany. Rather, Gupta is stitching together a fabric of north Indian Dalit lifeworlds that the division of scholarly labor has long rended asunder. Instead of relegating conversion to religious studies, Nona Chamarin to folklore, and Fiji to labor history—as norms of academic specialization would tend to encourage—Gupta demonstrates that for Dalit women in the 1910s, each of these phenomena was readily at hand, and represented a potentially emancipatory path or agentive model; for the Hindi writers and publicists that depicted these phenomena in word and image, they represented a collective threat to caste Hindu dominance and nationalist integrity.

Another of the book's contributions is the opening it provides for theorizing caste in terms of intimacy. While the application of this category may seem, at first blush, counterintuitive, Gupta deploys it for good reasons: "Intimacy provides us with a new way to talk of caste, not only through identity categories, politics, and structural and institutional inequalities, but also as an idea made material through the physical body. It allows us to see the subtle manner in which caste functions as body history and body language, the politics of which permeates the most intimate spaces of our lives" (p. 15). Caste's intimacy, that is, is part of its insidiousness: we can neither leave it at the door nor shed it with our clothes; our very bodies, styles of comportment, and modes of intimate engagement with the world are trained by our social location. That caste works upon us intimately, and that its intimacy is essential to its power, is among the most fertile insights of

*The Gender of Caste*.

A discussion of two arguments sustained across multiple chapters may help substantiate these observations. One of the central claims of *The Gender of Caste* is that there was a gradual but definite shift in the representation of Dalit women in Hindi print publications in Uttar Pradesh over the early decades of the twentieth century, a shift from stereotypes of filth and dangerous sexuality to stereotypes of patient and forbearing victimhood. Drawing on figures of Hindu mythology present in her sources, Gupta glosses this transformation of the represented Dalit woman as the shift from Surpanakha—the aggressive "demoness" and target of Lakshman's disciplinary violence—to Shabari—the humble devotee who gathers fruit daily in hopes of offering it to Rama. The evidence for this claim is overwhelming, and a biting reminder (particularly on the Surpanakha side of things) of how socially acceptable the public expression of caste contempt was. For instance, in the popular Hindi monthly *Chand* in 1927, privileged-caste writers held that "They [untouchables] are completely indifferent to personal cleanliness. They do not bathe for months together. Their hair is a jungle-house of lice. Their clothes are a bundle of filth and their teeth show half an inch of grime deposit. Muck has seeped into their very veins; that is to say, they have made dirt their everyday and constant companion" (p. 62). Or consider this sample from the didactic literature aimed at privileged-caste women, warning them against closeness with their Dalit women servants: "We have to engage daily with women like the malin, nain, kaharin, chamarin, dhobin, pisanharin, maniharin, and dai. All these women also indulge in forms of pimping. They provoke quarrels in peaceful homes. They roam around criticizing others.... These kutnis [home-breakers] work hand in glove with other wicked characters.... Dear daughter, be very careful of these women. They are notorious for their false and unwholesome tales. You must clearly tell them you have no time for their dirty stories" (pp. 34-35).

Having demonstrated the ubiquity of such characterizations in the archive, Gupta argues

that Dalit women provided the foil against which the ideal woman of Hindu and nationalist narratives was constructed. "The crafting of an ideal upper-caste woman ... required a repeated denigration of the perceived practices of low-caste women" (p. 32). A parallel argument, notably, could be made using Urdu didactic literature of the same period; for example Ashraf Ali Thanvi's influential *Mirat-ul Urus* (*Mirror for brides*), a story structured on the contrastive opposition of the virtuous daughter who keeps her distance from Dalit women, and the wicked daughter who fraternizes with them and adopts their putative habits, illustrates how caste contempt was as constitutive an element of ideal ashraf femininity in colonial north India as it was of ideal Hindu femininity.

The Surpanakha stereotypes do not disappear from Hindi print; they are, however, gradually superseded by the figure of the Dalit woman as a humble bhakta or as the victim of British or Muslim depredations. Gupta suggests a number of conditions that enabled this extraordinary shift. One was the migration of north Indian women—including relatively high numbers of Dalit women—to the plantations of colonial Fiji as indentured laborers, whose brutal exploitation became an impetus to and focus of anticolonial Indian nationalism in the 1910s. A key text in catalyzing organized opposition to the indentured labor system was the account of Kunti, a Chamar woman of UP who migrated to Fiji as a worker, of an attempted rape by a white overseer in 1913. In taking up Kunti's cause, nationalists were, probably for the first time, claiming a Dalit woman not as "Other" but as one of their own, as someone whose injuries should be understood as injuries to the nation. Other causes of the shift toward sympathy were as Hindu majoritarian as they were nationalist: the Arya Samaj, whose role in refiguring the Dalit woman as victim in Hindi print was paramount, pursued this path precisely insofar as her victimizer could be identified as Muslim, and in the interests of "incorporating the untouchables within a putative Hindu community and nation" (p. 52). Gupta adduces often startlingly frank evidence of the rationale that Hindu reformists

offered for extending sympathy to Dalit women, such as this from Chand: "If untouchables eschew the protection of Hindus and convert [to Islam], will you clean your own toilets? Will your women do the work of midwives? Will you do the work of a washer man? Will you do all the work of Chamars?" (p. 116).

Another key set of claims, sustained across chapters 3, 4 and 6, relate to Dalit masculinity and various domains in which Dalits have had some measure of agency in representing themselves in Hindi print. One such domain is the popular literature—poems, plays, and counter-histories penned primarily by Dalit men—of Dalit viranganas, or martial heroines in the revolt against the British East India Company in 1857. In chapter 3, Gupta considers how the portrayal of viranganas in this literature counters privileged-caste stereotypes about Dalit women with "what might be termed the Dalit Amazonian," an emancipatory yet almost superhumanly unattainable narrative figure in which "an embattled Dalit masculinity can be seen as professing itself in the public-political sphere" (p. 106). That representations of Dalit women in the virangana literature are mediated by Dalit men is demonstrable, and raises important questions about the relations between discourses of gender advanced by dominant and subordinate castes, by women and men, in print and in oral tradition. The complexity of this terrain is acknowledged in the virangana discussion and at times in chapters 4 and 6; at other times, however, a somewhat reductive approach is on display, wherein acts of Dalit political and labor assertion are interpreted as perforce masculinist and at the expense of Dalit women, when the evidence adduced does not seem to support such a claim.

Much of chapter 4, for example, is devoted to an analysis of the labor struggles of UP sanitation workers from the 1920s to the 1940s. With considerable archival detail Gupta recounts a series of collective actions through which sweepers and conservancy workers fought colonial municipalities over working conditions and hereditary rights to nightsoil. She then writes: "During a strike the sweeper

was king, ruling the city and robustly marking his presence and importance in urban civic public life.... He was claiming his masculinity through stigmatized symbols, but turning them into statements of power for that short time" (p. 151). But this is problematic; first, because it obscures the fact of women's significant participation both in the labor of street sweeping and in sweepers' strikes—the refusal of women sweepers to submit to arbitration in sanitation laborers' strikes sufficiently impressed M. K. Gandhi that he remarked on it in his mouthpiece *Harijan* in 1946. Second, the claim that strikes represented an assertion of Dalit sweepers' masculinity is made in the absence of any evidence other than a caricature by a British cartoonist, in the *Civil and Military Gazette*, of a moustachioed sweeper wearing a crown. That is, the imputation of an androcentric Dalit discourse to sweepers' strikes is given no evidentiary ground in Dalit writing or even the Hindi print sphere. The problem is not one of lack of sources that might shed light on Dalit perspectives; one could imagine mounting an effective argument about gendered discourses of assertion based on a close reading of lists of sweepers' demands, speeches made and posters distributed at workers' rallies, and other such sources. And indeed, in some of the other domains in which Gupta presents the "claiming masculinity" argument—efforts to increase Dalit recruitment in the colonial army and struggles over "respectable" women's clothing, for instance—the evidence makes for a persuasive case. In other domains, like the "marriage" of Nona Chamarin to Ravidas in

twentieth-century reworkings of myth—the "Dalit masculinist ethos" (p. 163) is not so much demonstrated as assumed, when one suspects something more complex might be at work. To point this out is by no means to imply the absence or irrelevance of androcentrism in these spheres of early twentieth-century Dalit assertion; rather, precisely because the interrelations of caste and gender ideologies have been so consequential in the transformation of north Indian society, it is to call for treating them with the same care for evidentiary anchoring that the Surpanakha-to-Shabari argument—and indeed most of the book—exemplifies. These concerns by no means detract from the indispensability of *The Gender of Caste* for students and scholars of caste, gender, religion, and modern India. The book's archival richness, its success in drawing together spheres of Dalit experience ignored or kept separate in historical narratives, and its generative suggestions about the intimacy of caste make it a landmark study. And in its demonstration of the centrality of representations of Dalit women—as indentured worker, as potential convert to Islam, as vamp and victim, Surpanakha and Shabari—to the middle-class Hindi print publics that so decisively shaped nationalism and Hindu majoritarianism in north India, *The Gender of Caste* opens an important front for the emerging historiography.

Review of Charu Gupta's book, 'The Gender of Caste : Representing Dalits in Print'. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016.

Courtesy: *South Asia Citizens Wire (sacw.net)* & <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=49571>

## Pakistan, Land of the Intolerant

he has told them not to tell even their closest friends that they are Ahmadis. He tried to make us both feel better: Thanks to Allah, it's not as bad for us as it is for Shias. Look how many of them get killed for their beliefs.

Pakistan was essentially created to protect the religious and economic rights of Muslims who were a minority before India's partition in 1947. But since the country's inception, we have created new minorities and

keep finding new ways to torment them.

*Mohammed Hanif is the author of the novels "A Case of Exploding Mangoes" and "Our Lady of Alice Bhatti," and the librettist for the opera "Bhutto."*  
 Courtesy: *South Asia Citizens Wire (sacw.net)* & <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/19/opinion/pakistan-muslims-ahmadis.html> P.S. The above article from *The New York Times* is reproduced here for educational and non-commercial use.

Courtesy : *The New York Times*

# The World and the “I”

By CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL

*...Continued from previous issue*



Let us study the Word. just as that simple thing, a pound note, reveals a staggering intricacy when we pursue its reflection in the spheres of value and price, supply and demand, profit and cost, so the word is a microcosm of a whole universe of ideological

elaboration.

The word has a subjective side (feeling) and an objective side (perception). But these do not exist in the word-as-itself, in contemplation, any more than a pound note exists in itself as paper and print. They exist only in the word as a dynamic social act, just as a pound note only exists in exchange.

The word is spoken and heard. Let us call the parties to this act speaker and hearer. The word indicates some portion of reality sensorily perceptible: this is its symbolic or referential context. The speaker wishes to change the hearer's perceptual world so as to include the thing the word symbolises. For example, he may say, "Look, a rose!" He wishes the hearer to see a rose, or be aware of the possibility of seeing one. Or he may say, "Some roses are blue"; in which case he wishes to modify the hearer's perceptual world to the extent of including blue roses. And so on up to the most elaborate and abstruse mathematical discourse.

But in order to do this, there must be a Common Perceptual World – common to both speaker and hearer – with Common Perceptual Symbols – symbols for indicating entities in that common world which are accepted as current by both speaker and hearer.

This Common Perceptual World is the world of reality or truth, and science is its most general expression. We have already seen how it was built up by men's experience of changing reality. It is sometimes described as the world of percepts or concepts (the distinction is artificial). Because "blue" and "rose" are common to this world, the speaker can change the hearer's perceptual world by the injection of a blue rose into it. Blue and rose are now combined and make a new entity – one which was not before in the Common Perceptual World, but now colour each other in a whole which is more than the sum of the parts.

What, then, has been the result of the transaction? A blue rose, which was in the speaker's perceptual world, but not in their common perceptual world or in the hearer's perceptual world, has been formed in the common perceptual world and introjected into the hearer's perceptual world. Hence both the hearer's perceptual world and the common perceptual world are changed. Thus, if now the speaker says, "A blue rose is scentless," the sentence will have a meaning it would not have had before, because blue roses now exist in the common perceptual world of speaker and hearer.

Notice that a new word is not essential to introduce a new entity to the common perceptual world, although it is sometimes used. We might have said, "N is a blue rose," "N is scentless." Most new entities are introduced by recombination, expansion, condensation and displacement of existing symbols rather than by neologism.

But the transaction does not change only the hearer's perceptual world and the common perceptual world. For, in order to body forth his

unique individual experience of a strange blossom to the hearer, the speaker had to transform it into current coin. From a unique blossom, unlike anything seen before or since, it had to become for him a blue rose – as a blossom, belonging to the order rose; as a visual rose, to the colour blue. Thus the act of communication changed his experience and as it were kept it on the social rails, just as it changed the common perceptual world and the perceptual world of his hearer.

But it would be inverting the process to suppose that the common world cheapens our impressions by making unique individual experiences conceptual and trite. We respond to experience with broad instinctive drives, which divide experience into “edible,” “non-edible,” “dangerous,” “neutral,” “light,” “dark.” The possession of the common world of experience enables us to discriminate flowers among the non-edible, roses among flowers, colours among lightness, blue among colours. Objective reality thus separates itself out by social means from a vague humming chaos on the threshold of consciousness. The more complex our social world, the more the individual phenomenon becomes an intersection of a number of concepts and therefore the more individual and unique it is. Once again we must repeat: society is the means of realising individuality and therefore the road of freedom. Keeping the perception on the social rails is merely keeping it conscious.

This change in the perceptual worlds of speaker and hearer and in the common perceptual world, is the essence of the Word. The lightest word produces such a change, however trifling. We measure the Power of the word by the degree of the change.

The word is not fully realised except as a dynamic social act. We overlook this just as we overlook that a pound note only exists importantly as a social act, because the complexities produced by the division of labour delay the impact between producer and consumer by the interposition of a market. The pound note, like a word, is only the expression of a transfer between one man and another – of goods in one case, of ideas in another – but the conditions of commodity-production give them

a mysterious existence in their own right as concepts – the concept of “value” in the one case, the concept of “meaning” in the other.

We must therefore picture men’s heads as full of these private perceptual worlds and then certain percepts in common (or concepts) which form a common perceptual world, and therefore give them the means of modifying each other’s private worlds. Truth is not just the lump-sum of all private worlds; it is the common world – the means whereby these private worlds modify each other. These private worlds have relations with each other just as do the men who bear them in their heads. This plexus of relations is Truth.

But neither truth nor perception exist as a self-contained superstructure. They only exist as reflections of material changes. The common perceptual world contains both truth and error. True or false means just this: “Living in the common perceptual world.” Truth only separates out from falsehood by the active relation of the common perceptual world with material reality.

We saw that man’s interaction with Nature was continuously enriched by economic production. Economic production requires association which in turn demands the word. For men to work together, that is, to operate together non-instinctively, they must have a common world of changeable perceptual reality, and by changeable I mean changeable by their actions; and by changeable by their actions I include predictable change, such as dawn and eclipse, and locatable change, such as “here” and “there,” for man’s control over himself makes it possible for him to be at such-and-such a place by night, for example, and so in effect change reality by his actions as a result of simple perceptual discrimination of sequence and location. Hence, by means of the word, men’s association in economic production continually generates changes in their perceptual private worlds and the common world, enriching both. A vast moving superstructure rises above man’s busy hands which is the reflection of all the change he has effected or discovered in ages of life. Presently this common world becomes as complex and remote from concrete social life as the market,

of which its secret life and unknown creative forces are the counterpart.

This is the shadow world of thought, or ideology. It is the reflection in men's heads of the real world. It is always and necessarily only symbolical of the real world. It is always and necessarily a reflection which has an active and significant relation to the object, and it is this activity and significance, and not the projective qualities of the reflection, which guarantee its truth. Every part of the Universe projectively reflects the remainder; only man is conscious of his environment. The idea is not the thing: the reflection is not the object; but one expresses or reflects the other. The words are tied to percepts which are photographic memory-images of bits of reality. These percepts are fused into concepts, are organised and ordered in the broadest and most abstract way. Or, more accurately, out of the broad, humming chaos of "existence" – the simplest percept – other concepts and percepts arise by differentiation and integration. All this phantasmagoria is accepted by man as only symbolic, just as a remembered percept is accepted as symbolic. When man recalls a certain horse or dwells on the concept "horse," in neither case does he suppose a horse is actually in his head. Even when he dwells on the refined concept "two" he still does not suppose all two things are in his head or that his head is double.

The word refers to this shadow world of thought, and conjures up portions of it in a man's head. The Common Perceptual World, with all the condensations, organisations and displacements it has undergone, refers to and symbolises outer reality. It is all the percepts of reality mobilised for action. It is a compendium of what happens to percepts when the underlying reality is affected. The word symbolises this shadow world which it has

helped to create, and is therefore the symbol of a symbol.

This is the sphere of truth and error. The word expresses a social convergence of action. "X is here." This is true if a number of people arrive in practice "here" simultaneously. "S is blue" is true if there is a general similarity in society's reaction to S as a result of the message (for example, in comparing it with an already agreed colour on a chart). Of course we do not always refer to the concrete living of society – the Common Perceptual World is so organised as to make reference to it alone sufficient in most cases (logic, laws, records). But if there is any difference not solvable by recourse to this shadow world (contradiction between a hypothesis and experience) it can only be settled by a recourse to material reality (the crucial experiment) whereby the common perceptual world is changed (new hypothesis). In this way the shadow world is in organic connection with material reality and continually sucks life and growth from its contradiction. The contradiction between theory and practice is what urges on both. Only their organic unity enables them to contradict each other. False cannot contradict hot because they live in different spheres: they are not one. False is contradicted by true, hot by cold. Truth and error cannot rest within the framework of the shadow world; their resolution demands recourse to the real material world. Any dispute which remains within the confines of the shadow world is not a dispute about truth and error but about consistency. The whole use of this world is to be a correct and compendious reflection of material reality; not merely a still reflection but a dynamic one.

*to be continued...*

*Courtesy—Illusion and Reality*

Your support and contribution will help ISD spread its message of Peace.  
For queries regarding donation and support write to us at [notowar.isd@gmail.com](mailto:notowar.isd@gmail.com)

Your stories are valuable to us. Share them so that others can also read.  
Mail us at [notowar.isd@gmail.com](mailto:notowar.isd@gmail.com)

---

INSTITUTE *for* SOCIAL DEMOCRACY, New Delhi, India  
E-MAIL : [notowar.isd@gmail.com](mailto:notowar.isd@gmail.com) / WEBSITE [www.sach.org.in](http://www.sach.org.in) / [www.isd.net.in](http://www.isd.net.in)