

In the Name of Krishna: The Cultural Landscape of a North Indian Pilgrimage Town

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## Acknowledgements

They say writing a dissertation is a lonely and arduous task. But, I am fortunate to have found friends, colleagues, and mentors who have inspired me to make this laborious task far from arduous. It was Frederick M. Asher, my advisor, who inspired me to turn to places where art historians do not usually venture. The temple city of Khajuraho is not just the exquisite 11<sup>th</sup>-century temples at the site. Rather, the 11<sup>th</sup>-century temples are part of a larger visuality that extends to contemporary civic monuments in the city center, Rick suggested in the first class that I took with him. I learnt to move across time and space. To understand modern Vrindavan, one would have to look at its Mughal past; to understand temple architecture, one would have to look for rebellions in the colonial archive.

Catherine B. Asher gave me the gift of the Mughal world – a world that I only barely knew before I met her. Today, I speak of the Islamicate world of colonial Vrindavan. Cathy walked me through Mughal mosques, tombs, and gardens on many cold wintry days in Minneapolis and on a hot summer day in Sasaram, Bihar. The Islamicate Krishna in my dissertation thus came into being. Ajay Skaria taught me that the modern was never truly modern. Even as we argued over the genealogies of the modern, of reason, and of the secular, I learnt to think religion with Ajay. How can one think religion today? After Ayodhya and Gujarat. With Gandhi and Kierkegaard, Ajay said. If *Hybrid Histories* provided a possibility of the modern that was never truly modern, another thinking of religion emerged from innumerable conversations with Ajay over the last eight years.

I first met Ritu Bhatt when I intrepidly walked into the School of Architecture, University of Minnesota in 2005 to take a course with her. Over the next few years, I learnt with Ritu that space was not just space and architecture not merely concrete and mortar. I learnt *Architext*, Henri Lefebvre, and Jane Jacobs. I learnt to see the colonial city anew. Yet, there is the body – the messiness of everyday practices that evades the archive, Jane Blocker reminded me after I returned from India with boxes full of colonial reports and court proceedings carefully culled out of the state’s archives. My dissertation could not do justice to that leap of faith that Jane urged me to take. My only consolation is that the project will take on a new life after the dissertation.

This dissertation, however, would have been impossible without generous support from the Department of Art History, University of Minnesota; the College of Liberal Arts, University of Minnesota; the Junior Research Fellowship, American Institute of Indian Studies; and the International Dissertation Research Fellowship, Social Science Research Council. In India, Purnima Mehta, along with the staff of the American Institute of Indian Studies, miraculously opened doors that seemed impenetrable. From finding research assistants to letters of introduction, the AIIS made research in India that much easier.

In Vrindavan, Shrivatsa Goswami graciously offered me a home at the Shri Chaitanya Prem Sansthan. I spent months at his guesthouse overlooking the river Yamuna. His staff was forever friendly, giving me advice, suggestions, and local histories. Shrivatsa Goswami himself introduced me to the complex world of pre-colonial theological texts. Archivists and librarians at the Vrindavan Research Institute, the



Vrindavan Municipal Board, the Mathura Nagar Palika Parishad, and the Mathura Museum were equally kind – unwearingly pulling out dusty reports from the depths of the archive. There were others in Vrindavan – pilgrims, priests, and local shopkeepers – who took time to talk to me, letting me enter their temples, their homes, their worlds, their devotion. Gently smiling as my obtrusive camera and recording devices disrupted their daily life, they patiently spoke about love for their beloved Krishna.

Much of my archival research was conducted at the National Archives, the Archaeological Survey of India Records Room, and the Central Secretariat Library in New Delhi; the National Library and the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences in Calcutta; the Uttar Pradesh State Archives in Lucknow; the Uttar Pradesh Regional Archive in Agra; the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Arabic and Persian Research Institute in Tonk; and the Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections at the British Library in London. I am thankful to the staff at these institutions for their cooperation. Shilpa Shah in Surat, Amit Ambalal in Ahmedabad, and Siddharth Tagore in New Delhi generously shared their private collection with me.

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postcolonial Art History. What began in Baroda in 2000 culminated in Minneapolis in 2012. A long journey indeed.

But, the journey began much before. With my parents, Krishna Ray and Bejoy Chakraborty. My sister, Panchali Ray. My extended family, Swapan Gupta and Tapati Gupta. They suffered, without complaint, when I insisted that family holidays were field trips to a few more temples. They suffered, without complaint, when I steered every dinner conversation to Vrindavan and its temples. They suffered, without complaint, when I abandoned early 20<sup>th</sup>-century moth-eaten devotional lithographs in their apartments for years. But that is the burden of having an art historian as a son and a brother! I can only sympathize.

Somewhere along the way, I met Atreyee Gupta. Together, we traveled the road. 2012 marks ten years of this journey. How else can I commemorate the last ten years but by saying this dissertation is for you, this dissertation is with you.

*For Mahant Laldas, former chief priest of the Ramjanmabhumi Temple, Ayodhya,  
who was murdered for opposing the demolition of the Babri mosque,  
who reminds us of a Hinduism that could be.*

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## **Note on Transliteration**

Given the diversity in regional iterations of Indic terms, names, and places, diacritical marks have been omitted with the exception of direct quotations from texts and the citation of book and manuscript titles. In the case of a direct citation, I have preserved the transliteration used in the original text or translation. All Indic names and terminology are transliterated in their generally accepted 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century westernized form. Thus, Kṛṣṇa is transliterated as Krishna and Vṛndāvana as Vrindavan. As much as this method of transliteration makes this text accessible, it also serves as reminder of the minute ways through which colonial modernity transformed indigenous ways of speaking and writing. To return to Vṛndāvana is then an epistemological impossibility, at least for me.

## Introduction

Historically, what exists is the church. Faith, what is that? Religion is a political force.

- Michel Foucault, 1978.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, "On Religion," *Religion and Culture*, trans. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), 106-109, 106.

In the fall of 2006, I reached Vrindavan – a Hindu pilgrimage town in the Mathura district of Uttar Pradesh, India – with a backpack filled with camera equipment, a reprint of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century gazetteer on the Mathura district, and a laptop with copious notes on the pilgrimage site. My plan was to spend the next two years in the region, documenting the material culture of Vrindavan – temple architecture, pictorial traditions, cartographic imaginaries, and sartorial cultures of temple deities. Indeed, I did spend the next two years in Vrindavan. But I also spent considerable time in a number of other pilgrimage sites in north India in hope of understanding how visual styles, theological ideals, and ritualistic impulses were transformed as they moved across linguistic and cultural borders in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century India. On one such trip in May 2007, I spent a few days in the city of Baroda (now Vadodara) in the western Indian state of Gujarat. I had hoped to map the development of a new post-18<sup>th</sup>-century architecture in Baroda that was considerably influenced by the temples of Vrindavan. Finally, however, I did not incorporate this research in my dissertation. But the trip to Baroda did change my dissertation radically and in ways I had not imagined.

Along with being an important pilgrimage center, Baroda is also home to the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University – my alma mater. I took this opportunity to visit the Department of Art History and Aesthetics, to spend some time with the faculty there, my teachers who first introduced me to the discipline of Art History. The few days that I planned to spend there coincided with the Annual Display, an exhibition of students' works that culminated with the annual examinations. On May 9, 2007, as I sat drinking tea with faculty and students at the Department, Niraj Jain, a

local lawyer and member of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) who had been accused of the 2002 Gujarat carnage by the Concerned Citizens Tribunal, burst into the campus with the media and the local police.<sup>2</sup> Within the next hour, Jain and the state police disrupted the Display and arrested a student, Chandramohan, under sections 153A, 114, and 295 of the Indian Penal Code.<sup>3</sup>

This was not the first time that the Hindu moral brigade used violence to silence voices that did not fit well with the dominant Hindutva rhetoric of the state's administration.<sup>4</sup> In the recent past, the state-machinery in Gujarat with its aggressive Hindu nationalist policies has instigated a reign of cultural censorship. For instance, in 1996, the artist Maqbool Fida Husain's paintings were vandalized in Ahmedabad for purportedly insulting Hindu gods and goddesses, ultimately leading to the artist's self-

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<sup>2</sup> The Vishwa Hindu Parishad, founded in 1964, was originally an umbrella movement that aimed to revitalize Hinduism through educational, ecclesiastical, and missionary work across regional, caste, and class divides. By the 1980s, the Parishad allied itself with the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (National People's Party) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Self-Help Organization, the primary Hindu nationalist volunteer organization) to create a united Hindu political front. Scholars such as Romila Thapar describe this movement as creating a "syndicated Hinduism" – an exclusionary, anti-minority Hindu politics that attempts to be the "sole claimant of the inheritance of indigenous Indian religion" by flattening differences and dissonances that constitute the myriad localized practices within "Hinduism." Romila Thapar, "Syndicated Moksha?" *Seminar* 313 (September 1985), 14-22. For this history, see Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies, and Modern Myths* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001) and Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1993), among others. On February 27, 2002, a train was attacked at the Godhra railway station in Gujarat killing over fifty Hindu pilgrims. The Godhra attack prompted retaliatory statewide massacres against Muslims in Gujarat. The Gujarat state government not only failed to prevent the riots, but actively fomented anti-Muslim violence in the state. For this history, see Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat: Plurality, Hindutva and Beyond* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Sections 153A, 114, and 295 of the Indian Penal Code allow for the imprisonment of individuals responsible for promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion and race, committing acts prejudicial to the maintenance of harmony, and defiling places of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class.

<sup>4</sup> Hindutva, a term coined in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, is best translated as Hinduness. Used broadly to describe political movements advocating anti-minority, chauvinist Hindu nationalism, Hindutva ideology asserts that the modern nation-state of India is essentially a Hindu nation where minorities (namely the Muslim community) would have to integrate themselves within the Hindu political-cultural landscape of the nation-state to be considered as Indian citizens.



imposed exile from the country. In 2006, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century Muslim shrine was demolished by the administration in Baroda. In the same year, the actor-director Aamir Khan's films were banned in Gujarat because of his purported anti-Gujarat stance. Hindutva protestors attacked theatres that screened Khan's films.

This time, the moral brigade found the young student Chandramohan's examination work – a woodcut print of the goddess Durga – offensive and an affront to ideals of Indian (Hindu) femininity. With support from the police, Niraj Jain and his associates confronted faculty who protested the disruption. Words such as *behen chod* (sister-fucker), *ma chod* (mother-fucker), and slogans such as *aaj Fine Arts ko nanga nachayenge*, “we will strip Fine Arts and make them dance today,” were used to intimidate women, both students and faculty, who opposed Jain and his companions. The irony of using an aggressive, masculinist language to intimidate women while simultaneously claiming for oneself a self-professed role as the protector of (Hindu) “tradition” and “womanhood” was, of course, entirely lost on Jain. Over the next few days, the situation deteriorated, culminating in the Vice Chancellor of the University suspending Shivaji Panikkar, the Acting-Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts, for supporting Chandramohan and the students against Jain's exhortations.<sup>5</sup> This act of state-sponsored censorship hardly surprises us today. I want to begin my dissertation by further disturbing these already-troubled waters.

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<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed description of the events at Baroda, see <http://fineartsfacultymsu.blogspot.com/>. The blog, run by students and faculty who were directly involved in the protests, acts as an archive of letters, petitions, and emails that were sent to various government agencies and the media over the next one year to harness support for Chandramohan and Shivaji Panikkar.

Not surprisingly, much has been written on the role played by the Hindutva in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Indian politics. It would be difficult to summarize this vast literature within the few pages of an introduction. However, a key moment in this historiography was the 1980s argument that Hinduism, in a peculiarly secularized, irreligious, and modernized form, “religion-as-ideology,” had become the crucial location for the struggle of a nationalized political identity in colonial India.<sup>6</sup> It is in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century transition from pre-colonial regional clusters of variegated religio-cultural practices, often at odds with each other, to an ordered, trans-regional, trans-sectarian, homogenizing religious entity that a new Janus-faced anti-colonial, and simultaneously exclusionary, political religion called Hinduism was born.<sup>7</sup> Scholars have argued that this new Hinduism, as it is defined today in opposition to its (Christian, Muslim, Dalit) Other, was a product of collusions between Orientalist scholarship, nationalist reform, and the colonial state.<sup>8</sup>

Pre-colonial Hinduism/s, on the other hand, was marked through an imagined “fuzziness” where organic bonds of kinship were apparently produced through

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<sup>6</sup> See especially, Ashis Nandy, “The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance,” *Alternatives* 13 (April 1988), 177-194. Later reprinted in Rajeev Bhargava, ed. *Secularism and Its Critics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 321-344. The citations in my notes refer to the reprint.

<sup>7</sup> Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); David N. Lorenzen, *Who Invented Hinduism? Essays on Religion in History* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2006); Will Sweetman, *Mapping Hinduism: “Hinduism” and the Study of Indian Religions, 1600–1776* (Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle, 2003), among others, have argued that have argued that the idea of a colonial construction of Hinduism is empirically indefensible. On the other hand, scholars such as Robert Frykenberg, Gauri Viswanathan, and Richard King have argued for a 19<sup>th</sup>-century construction of Hinduism. See Robert Frykenberg, “The Emergence of Modern ‘Hinduism’ as a Concept and as an Institution: A Reappraisal with Special Reference to South India,” in Gunther D. Sontheimer and Herman Kulke, eds. *Hinduism Reconsidered* (Heidelberg: South Asia Institute, 1989), 1-29; Gauri Viswanathan, “Colonialism and the Construction of Hinduism,” in Gavin A. Flood, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 23-44; and Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and “The Mystic East”* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> See *Ibid.*

unmapped, unenumerated modes of community formation.<sup>9</sup> Instances of transgressions and syncretic religio-cultural practices, “religion-as-faith,” allowed for the invention of a romanticized pluralist past untarnished by the crisis of colonial modernity. However, much of this debate, in focusing on the sociologism, or the political, of modern religion, has inevitably produced a bifurcated Hinduism – a Hinduism of social action (religion-as-ideology) and a Hinduism of pure faith, a *sui generis* Hinduism (religion-as-faith). Scholarly attempts in the 1980s and 1990s to locate the origins of a political Hinduism, a religion-as-ideology, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century arose out of an acute crisis in the Indian public sphere.<sup>10</sup> It was imperative to demonstrate the colonial origins of a political Hinduism as a response to Hindutva claims for a hoary past and thus a privileged location for this conceptual category.

The attack on the Faculty of Fine Arts at Baroda then can be located within a larger history of cultural censorship by Hindutva forces over the last twenty years.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the last twenty years have been marked by innumerable such acts of cultural censorship by Hindutva forces, forces that scholars identify as those who have made religion into an ideology. For instance, Ashis Nandy outlines a recent incident where Bombay’s (now Mumbai) Hindutva forces organized a demonstration in front of a theatre

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<sup>9</sup> Along with Nandy, Sudipta Kaviraj theorized the notion of a “fuzzy” unenumerated pre-colonial community formation. Sudipta Kaviraj, “The Imaginary Institution of India,” in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey, eds. *Subaltern Studies VII: Writings on South Asian* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1-39.

<sup>10</sup> Scholars saw the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 as a watershed in the post-1980s saffronization of the Indian public sphere. The Gujarat carnage of 2002 has unfortunately shown that the Babri mosque incident was but one of the many incidents that have marked contemporary Hindutva politics in India. Although Wilfred C. Smith first developed the argument about a colonial construction of Hinduism in 1962, it gained currency only as late as the 1980s and 1990s. See Wilfred C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

<sup>11</sup> See Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust, *SAHMAT – 20 YEARS, 1989-2009. A Document of Activities and Statements* (New Delhi: Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust, 2009) for this history.

where a play with Hindu gods and goddesses was being staged. The Muslim playwright was humiliated and forced to apologize for writing the play.<sup>12</sup> In 2003, Macalester Professor James W. Laine's book on the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Maratha king Shivaji was banned and a warrant issued for his arrest. The theatre director Habib Tanvir's plays critiquing caste inequalities were disrupted in the same year. An exhibition of modern Indian art in Surat was vandalized in 2004. One could go on. The incident at Baroda was then merely one of innumerable such incidents of Hindutva attempts to control the representation of Hinduism – attempts to transform Hinduism from “a tradition which is definitionally non-monolithic and operationally plural” into one that is a “subnational, national, or cross-national identifier of population contesting for or protecting non-religious, usually political or socio-economic.”<sup>13</sup>

After a week of protests, many of us left Baroda disheartened. Supported by the state administration, the Vice-Chancellor of the Maharaja Sayajirao University forbade the Acting-Dean Shivaji Panikkar to enter the very campus where he had taught for over ten years. Protests registered with the Prime Minister's Office, the Governor of Gujarat, the University Grants Commission (the apex body for university education in India) produced no results. Panikkar remained suspended and a legal suit ensued – one that would continue for the next four years.<sup>14</sup>

I returned to Vrindavan. Returning to the pilgrimage town in an over-crowded bus with pilgrims singing songs that extolled the love of Krishna, the incidents at Baroda

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<sup>12</sup> Ashis Nandy, *Time Warps: Silent and Evasive Pasts in Indian Politics and Religion* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2002), 129-131.

<sup>13</sup> Nandy, “The Politics of Secularism,” 322.

<sup>14</sup> The Maharaja Sayajirao University would finally accept Panikkar's resignation in 2011. Shivaji Panikkar is now the Dean of the School of Culture and Creative Expressions, Ambedkar University, Delhi.

rushed through my mind. Was this the Hinduism that I had spent years researching? Was modern Hinduism by definition exclusionary and genocidal in its language of violence?

Yet, I was not willing to give up on the political, to create a synthetic divide between faith and ideology, between love and hate, between a political Hinduism and a Hinduism of faith, a Hinduism of the Hindutva and a popular Hinduism untouched by the vitriolic politics of the former. As Michel Foucault writes:

I do not think it possible to say that one thing is of the order of “liberation” and another is of the order of “oppression.” There are a certain number of things that one can say with some certainty about a concentration camp to the effect that it is not an instrument of liberation, but one should still take into account – and this is not generally acknowledged – that, aside, from torture and execution, which preclude any resistance, no matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings. [...] Liberty is a *practice*.<sup>15</sup>

I spent the next few months re-reading the debates on political Hinduism. I realized that there was a need to locate this debate within a specific historical imagination. I realized that the assumption of a distinct sphere of the secular (religion-as-ideology) and the sacred (religion-as-faith) has obfuscated a clear understanding of modern Hinduism. The separation of the secular and the sacred in post-Enlightenment western thought still informed the modes through which we understood this modern Hinduism. For instance, while historians, anthropologists, and political scientists characteristically focus on the supposed exterior shell of political action, scholars from within Religious Studies

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<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, “Space, Knowledge, and Power,” in James D. Faubion, ed. *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: The New Press, 2000), 349-364, 354.

continue to argue for an inner core of pure faith, a *sui generis* Hinduism. I realized that the “practice” of Hinduism had multiple histories. If the oppressive forces of the Hindutva provided one genealogy of a political Hinduism, there are other Hinduisms that were equally political – Hinduisms that offered “the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings.”

Not surprisingly, arguments for the westernized middle class origins of political Hinduism have received vehement criticisms from a number of quarters – the most palpable being critiques by Hindutva ideologues. Within academic discourses, scholars have argued that 19<sup>th</sup>-century subaltern political religions that did not fit well into an easy definition of a modern middle class secularized Hinduism have often been overlooked by scholarship.<sup>16</sup> Simultaneously, scholars have argued that colonial knowledge and the epistemological disruptions that it brought to the colony is ascribed with much more hegemonic power than perhaps it ever had.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the move to create a modern secular Hinduism deprived the colonized subject of any agency while making 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hinduism fit Judeo-Christian conceptions of a monotheistic religion. It thus privileged and normalized an urban, nationalist, middle class Hinduism as the only available model of political action in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Scholars, for instance Gyanendra Pandey, have thus described attempts to trace the genealogies of a religion-as-ideology to earlier moments in India’s history as products

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<sup>16</sup> See Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1998), among others, for a critique of middle class histories of Hinduism.

<sup>17</sup> Richard M. Eaton, “(Re)imag(in)ing Otherness: A Postmortem for the Postmodern in India,” *Journal of World History* 11:1 (2000), 57-78 and Lorenzen “Who Invented Hinduism?” among others.

of a “liberal-nationalism” or even a “liberal-colonialism.”<sup>18</sup> Retorting to Christopher A. Bayly’s essay on “communal” violence in pre-colonial India, Pandey writes: “In effect the argument here is that much, if not nearly all, that happened in colonial India had its beginnings in the centuries before the coming of the British, and (logically) that the colonial intervention did not mark the break in Indian history that it has so long been represented as marking.”<sup>19</sup>

A different reading of pre-colonial texts can very easily provide instances that contradict much of today’s arguments for a “fuzzy” pre-colonial past and 19<sup>th</sup>-century constructions of concept-terms such as Hinduism and religion-as-ideology. As early as 1776, Nathaniel B. Halhed, an officer in the East India Company, had suggested that the term “Hindoo” was a defining category of self-imagining consciously articulated in opposition to a Muslim presence in the subcontinent.<sup>20</sup> In the more recent past, scholars such as Gijs Kruijtzter and David Lorenzen have argued that by the 16<sup>th</sup> century Hinduness as a conceptual category was already articulated in opposition to its *mleccha* (“foreigner, barbarian, non-Aryan, man of an outcast race”<sup>21</sup>) Other – the Muslim and the

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<sup>18</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 14.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 15. Pandey was responding to Christopher Bayly’s 1985 essay. Christopher A. Bayly, “The Pre-history of ‘Communalism’? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860,” *Modern Asian Studies* 19:2 (1985), 177-203.

<sup>20</sup> As Halhed writes, “Hindoo therefore is not the Term by which the Inhabitants originally ftiled themselves, but, according to the Idiom of their Language, Jumboodeepee, or Bherckhuntee; and it is only lince the /Ers. of the Tartar Government that they have afl’umed the Name of Hindoos, to diftinguifh themselves from their Conquerors, the MufTulmen.” Nathaniel B. Halhed, *A Code of Gentoo laws, or, Ordinations of the Pundits, from a Persian translation, made from the original, written in the Shanscrit language* (London: Publisher unknown, 1776), xxii. See David N. Lorenzen “Who Invented Hinduism?” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41:4 (October 1999), 630-659 for a history of pre-colonial articulations of “Hinduism.”

<sup>21</sup> Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1972, Reprint of 1899 edition), 837.

Adivasi.<sup>22</sup> Hinduism as a political strategy was thus well in place before the coming of colonial modernity.

My dissertation then returns to this political Hinduism. I suggest that political Hinduism/s were not necessarily always embedded within the modern secularizing discourses of the Hindutva – an exclusionary Hinduism that was made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in conversation with the private/public, secular/sacred dichotomies of post-Enlightenment thought. However, unlike Bayly, I am neither suggesting that pre-colonial conceptualizations of a political Hinduism can be mapped onto 19<sup>th</sup>-century articulations of the religion. The epistemic violence of colonialism, modernity, and the Enlightenment cannot be mitigated and the Empire cannot become, in a Nehruvian mode, just “one of the unhappy interludes in her [India’s] long story.”<sup>23</sup> My dissertation then attempts to bring religion within political struggle as a way of understanding subjectivities that resisted both nationalist traditions and the Empire. Acknowledging that the category religion itself was a product of post-Enlightenment thought, I begin by stressing its distinct limitations, as it was re-configured vis-à-vis Hinduism in colonial Vrindavan.

If Niraj Jain’s vitriolic Hinduism is one model of a political religion that can be traced back to the secularizing modernity of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Hindutva, I hope to delineate yet another political Hinduism in this dissertation – a Hinduism that resisted the exclusionary regimes of Hindutva politics and its language of modern genocidal violence. I hope to make visible in the local practices of Vrindavan a political religion that resisted

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<sup>22</sup> Lorenzen, *Who Invented Hinduism*; Gijs Kruijtzter, *Xenophobia in Seventeenth-century India* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985, Reprint of 1946 edition), 52.



the purported fissure between faith and action. But, even as I delineate this Hinduism as political, I am not, for once, suggesting that there is a religion without politics. Perhaps the act of naming this religion as political suggests one without. In this dissertation, I however, use the frame political religion deliberately to think of religion-as-faith and religion-as-ideology as mutually imbricated.

Arguments of a “nationalism gone awry,”<sup>24</sup> “good and bad nationalisms,”<sup>25</sup> or of an “instrumental concept of piety”<sup>26</sup> have been routinely employed to explain away the development of a 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century political Hinduism. If indeed this separation of faith and action is “a modern Western norm, the product of a unique post-Reformation history,” can we find another history of Hinduism that challenged, subverted, and remade both the national and the colonial to articulate a new political for the local?<sup>27</sup> As Richard King writes:

Critics of the Western colonial legacy should not allow themselves to be ‘blackmailed’ into thinking that there are only two alternatives – Western colonialism or Hindu nationalism – and that to repudiate the former is to align with the latter. [...] By ‘anthropologizing’ (rendering exotic) Western secular forms of nationalism and contemporary Hindu nationalisms, one calls into question such either/or dichotomies and creates a space for alternative models to emerge in a post-nationalist world.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*, 13-14.

<sup>25</sup> See Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) for a discussion on “good and bad nationalisms.”

<sup>26</sup> Ashis Nandy, Shikha Trivedi, Shail Mayaram, and Achyut Yagnik, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 60.

<sup>27</sup> As Talal Asad writes, “Yet this separation of religion from power is a modern Western norm, the product of a unique post-Reformation history.” Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 28.

<sup>28</sup> King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 217.

What then were the terrains of this Hinduism? How was it conceived and articulated? And, how did it resist the epistemological tyranny of both the metanarrative of the Enlightenment and the exclusionary politics of a nationalist Hinduism? These were the questions with which I returned to Vrindavan in 2007. My dissertation, then, attempts to address these questions, at least in part. Let me begin with a synoptic history of the pilgrimage town of Vrindavan.

### **Vrindavan: The Grove of the Goddess Brinda**

Although theological texts such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* describe Vrindavan – literally the grove of the goddess Brinda (sacred basil) – as a region where Krishna, an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, defeated the evil serpent Kaliya, slew the demon Keshi, and danced with his devotees, archaeological remains suggest that the town of Vrindavan was an important Buddhist center by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE.<sup>29</sup> A number of archaeological remains including Buddhist railing pillars, doorjambs, and statuettes excavated from this town places Vrindavan within a larger Buddhist settlement in the first millennium that extended to Mathura, a town approximately seven miles south of Vrindavan and the current headquarters of the Mathura District (See Map 1).<sup>30</sup>

Visiting Mathura in ca. 400 CE, the Chinese pilgrim Faxian thus described the town as a thriving Buddhist pilgrimage center with over twenty monasteries and three

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<sup>29</sup> For the early history of Vrindavan, see Doris M. Srinivasan, ed. *Mathura: The Cultural Heritage* (New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies, 1989); Alan W. Entwistle, *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1987), among others. Corcoran, on the other hand, suggests that the name Vrindavan refers to a grove used by ascetics. Maura Corcoran, *Vṛndāvana in Vaiṣṇava Literature: History - Mythology - Symbolism* (Vrindavan: Vrindaban Research Institute, 1995), 20.

<sup>30</sup> V. S. Agrawala, "Catalogue of the Mathura Museum: Architectural Pieces," *Journal of the Uttar Pradesh Historical Society* XXIV–XXV (1951-1952), 1-160.

thousand monks.<sup>31</sup> In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, yet another Chinese monk, scholar, and traveler, Xuanzang, claimed that, along with the twenty Buddhist monasteries, Mathura now had five temples to non-Buddhist gods.<sup>32</sup> Post-3<sup>rd</sup>-century CE Hindu sculpture found in Mathura and Vrindavan suggests that Hindu temples were indeed being built in the region by this time. However, except the 8<sup>th</sup>-century Chaurasi Khamba at Kaman (a pilgrimage site forty miles west of Mathura) and the 10<sup>th</sup>-century Assi Khamba at Mahaban (a pilgrimage site nine miles south of Mathura), little remains have survived from this period.

It was only with the construction of four red sandstone temples in Vrindavan in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries that an extant artistic vocabulary came into being in the region (See Figure 1.3 to 1.6). However, the theological impetus for the construction of these temples, the marking of Vrindavan's sacred spaces, needs to be traced back to Chaitanya (1486-1533), the Hindu reformer from Nabadwip in eastern India.<sup>33</sup> Although the worship of Krishna was well in place by the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, Chaitanya was responsible for creating a new paradigm for Krishna worship in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>34</sup> In pre-16<sup>th</sup>-century north Indian theological texts, Krishna was usually portrayed as a *cakravartin* – a monarchical divinity who was the embodiment of a warrior-king, a *kshatriya*, Vishnu's representative on earth. In south India, on the other hand, this

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<sup>31</sup> Entwistle, *Braj*, 113.

<sup>32</sup> Samuel Beal, *Si-yu-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629)*, Vol. I (Boston: J. R. Osgood & Company, 1885), 179.

<sup>33</sup> For the life of Chaitanya, see Krishnadasa Kaviraja's early 17<sup>th</sup>-century *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*. Edward C. Dimock, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja: A Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> For the complex history of the transformations in Krishna worship, see Ramkrishna G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1965); Gérard Colas, "History of Vaiṣṇava Traditions: An Esquisse" in Flood, ed. *The Blackwell Companion*, 229-270.

monarchical figure had already been transformed into a divine lover by the 8<sup>th</sup> century with the rise of a more intimate form of devotion known as *bhakti*. This new Krishna, a playful cowherd, was radically different from the divine warrior-king of north India. By the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the love-play between Krishna and his consort, Radha, became the focus of a rich body of Vaishnava (those who worship some form of Vishnu as the supreme godhead) devotional poetry in eastern India.<sup>35</sup>

In this new form, Vaishnavism articulated a more intense emotional devotion for Krishna that moved away from earlier orthodox practices of seeing the divine as a supreme godhead. The symbolism of divine love, where the devotee imagined himself/herself as Radha, Krishna's consort, created a new vocabulary of religiosity where yearning for the divine, yearning for an absent lover, became the ideal form of *bhakti* or devotion. Scholars have suggested that this movement from the public, the god as a monarch, to the private, the god as a lover, created an intimate and introvert Vaishnavism, a Vaishnavism of erotic love, a Vaishnavism far removed from the political concerns of this world.<sup>36</sup>

Given that 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup>-century modern Hinduism with its Machiavellian politics was produced through a nationalization of this introvert Vaishnavism, scholars have suggested that the rise of the Hindutva was an anomaly – a deviant secularizing political phenomenon that had moved away from the religion's "true" principles of

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<sup>35</sup> The most influential work in this body of literature was Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* composed in the later half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century in the court of the Sena rulers of Bengal. For the history of Vaishnavism in Bengal, see Ramakanta Chakravarti, *Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal, 1486–1900* (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1985).

<sup>36</sup> David L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhana* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); William G. Archer, *The Loves of Krishna in Indian Painting and Poetry* (New York: Grove Press, 1957); Joseph T. O'Connell, *Social Implications of the Gauḍiṣya Vaiṣṇava Movement* (Ph.D. dissertation: Harvard University, 1970).

devotion and introvert love.<sup>37</sup> I begin my dissertation by arguing that the introvert Vaishnavism of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries already provided a model to rethink subjectivities within socio-political praxis. I argue that the political theological in India was not merely a product of the westernizing discourses of colonial modernity. Although the subsequent sections of this dissertation focus on the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Part One of my dissertation begins by arguing that the 16<sup>th</sup>-century material culture of Vrindavan had become symptomatic, even representative, of a certain political language – a visual language of power that was produced through allusions to contemporaneous Mughal architecture.

By including a section on the pre-colonial in a dissertation that attempts to engage with colonial modernity, I am not suggesting an unbroken continuity, a cohesive arrangement of lived practices that were inexplicably held together over time. Rather, in this dissertation the questioning of the inherently modernist assumption of the tradition/modernity and faith/ideology binary becomes a key maneuver to move beyond post-Enlightenment thought. The easy labeling of all traces of the “traditional” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as an “invented tradition” – a product of the colonizing/colonized imaginary – creates a peculiar dilemma where agency no longer resides with the colonized.<sup>38</sup>

Dipesh Chakraborty too engages with this vexed problematic of tradition and modernity. As Chakraborty writes: “If even invented traditions need genealogies for their

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<sup>37</sup> Vaishnava reformers such as Bharatendu Harischandra from Varanasi and Bhaktivinode Thakur from Calcutta played a key role in the making of a Hinduism that drew its tenets from earlier Vaishnava practices. See Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Benaras* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jason D. Fuller, *Religion, Class, and Power: Bhaktivinode Thakur and the Transformation of Religious Authority among the Gaudiya Vaisnavas in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Pennsylvania, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> See Rosalind O’Hanlon, “Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 22:1 (1988), 189-224 for a discussion on this problematic.

own effectiveness, no such genealogy can ever consist of an inventory of ideas alone. Ideas acquire materiality through the history of bodily practices. [...] The past is embodied through a long process of training the senses.”<sup>39</sup> Chakraborty’s argument for a “history of bodily practices” as a way to move beyond the tradition/modernity binary echoes, in certain ways, Henri Lefebvre’s claim that “[t]he historical and its consequences, the ‘diachronic’, the ‘etymology’ of locations in the sense of what happened at a particular spot or place and thereby changed it - all of this becomes inscribed in space.”<sup>40</sup> Drawing on this idea of “the ‘etymology’ of locations,” Part One provides a history of the modes through which spatial techniques – temple architecture and rituals, pictorial traditions, and even the clothing of temple deities – created a political religion, a religion that destabilized the purported faith/ideology binary, in pre-colonial Vrindavan.

By looking for the genealogies of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century political Hinduism in pre-colonial India and situating modern political religions within a deeper indigenous framework of thinking and doing, Part One complicates concept-words such as “belief” while moving beyond the faith/ideology binary that directs much scholarship on modern Hinduism. In essence, Part One attempts to question dominant narratives that privilege a romanticized reading of the past as providing an alternative to the vitriolic politics of modern Hinduism. To return the political to Hinduism is indeed a dangerous task today. But then political Hinduism/s do not solely belong to the Hindutva – to figures such as

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<sup>39</sup> Dipesh Chakraborty, “Afterword: Revisiting the Tradition/Modernity Binary,” in Stephen Vlastos, ed. *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 285-296, 294-295.

<sup>40</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 37.

Niraj Jain, the lawyer from Baroda, who was responsible for the loss of autonomy of the first post-colonial Art History department in India. By claiming a political religion in Vrindavan that was not necessarily anti-minority, I return to Foucault who reminds us that systems of power cannot “liberate” or “oppress.” “Liberty is a *practice*.”<sup>41</sup>

It was Chaitanya, the Vaishnava reformer from Nabadwip in the eastern Indian state of Bengal, who brought the new Vaishnavism of emotional sublimation to Vrindavan in 1514. Scorned by traditionalist Vaishnavas, Chaitanya is said to have had ecstatic fits when he danced and sung Krishna’s name on the streets of Nabadwip, the town in eastern India where he spent his youth. Chaitanya’s emotional devotion was based on earlier models of *bhakti* espoused by south Indian Vaishnava poets – a form of *bhakti* that reified emotional experience over ritualistic practice. Although ritualism was not completely rejected, Chaitanya asserted that rituals were merely a mode of disciplining the mind and the body. The ultimate goal of the devotee was to immerse oneself in Krishna.

The immense popularity of Chaitanya’s Vaishnavism led to the development of a new Vaishnava sect under the guidance of the direct disciples of the mystic saint. Although Chaitanya himself returned from Vrindavan to the pilgrimage site of Puri in Orissa, his disciples from Bengal formed a strong center of Vaishnavism in the region around Vrindavan. It was under these disciples that the theological and ritualistic frameworks of this new religion were scripted. Known as Gaudiya Vaishnavism since most of Chaitanya’s devotees came from the region of Gauda in Bengal, this 16<sup>th</sup>-century practice is still the most popular form of Vaishnavism in eastern India.

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<sup>41</sup> Foucault, “Space, Knowledge, and Power,” 354.

Along with the making of a new Vaishnava sect, Chaitanya is also credited with discovering the lost sites in and near Vrindavan that were associated with Krishna's life. Hagiographic accounts tell us that during his visit to Vrindavan, Chaitanya also visited a number of sites in the region including Kaman, Nandgaon, Govardhan, and Barsana (See Map 1). During his visits, Chaitanya is believed to have realized that these sites were sacred spaces associated with Krishna's youth. According to 16<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnava legends, Krishna was born in a prison in modern Mathura. On the very night of his birth, his father smuggled him out of prison to the encampment of his adoptive father, the herdsman Nanda, a place that was identified as the modern town of Gokul. Modern Vrindavan was the area where Nanda and his pastoral community set up a new encampment while Krishna was growing up. A hillock at modern Govardhan, a small town twenty-one miles west of Vrindavan, was identified as the hill that Krishna held up to protect his adoptive community from the torrential rain sent by Indra, the king of gods (See Figure 7.4).

Chaitanya found in the topography of the region geographic markers that allowed him to claim the area as that primordial space inhabited by Krishna. Scriptural descriptions of sacred spaces were marshaled as evidence. Thus, a grove with an old banyan tree on the east bank of the Yamuna, the river that flows through the region, became the sacred site of Bhandirban, the site where Krishna brought forth water from the ground. A well at Bhandirban is supposed to turn milky even today during the new moon. Describing the 16<sup>th</sup>-century making of this sacred topography, Alan Entwistle writes:



From the mid-sixteenth century onwards the number of sacred places around Mathura multiplies. Nothing was too trivial for the pioneers of the pilgrimage route, they discovered a location for every canonical episode and apocryphal incident in the life of Krishna; a sacred association was found for practically every village, pond, or landmark in the district. Apart from incorporating all kinds of natural phenomena, they also made use of such second-hand objects as ruins, mounds, and fragments of sculpture that had featured in earlier cults. So inflated was the number of places that came to light, so flimsy were the pretexts that inspired their discovery, so irrelevant were they for any kind of religious function, that many of them failed to gain recognition and can no longer be identified.<sup>42</sup>

In order to link the spaces of these newly discovered sites to the mythological realm where Krishna dallied with Radha, Gaudiya theologians reiterated a narrative from the *Skanda Purāṇa* that stated that Vajranabha, the great-grandson of Krishna, reclaimed the sacred spaces of Mathura and Vrindavan by building temples, establishing wells and tanks, and inviting Krishna's adoptive clan to return to the region.<sup>43</sup> Chaitanya then was not responsible for "discovering" these sites. Rather, he was responsible for re-initiating worship at sites that had already been discovered by Krishna's great-grandson himself.

The reclaiming of these innumerable sites across the region led to the creation of a pilgrimage practice known as the *vanayatra*, a journey through the forests of Braj, a circumambulation or *parikrama* of the sites where Krishna had purportedly spent his youth. Although the term *vraja*, literally an enclosure of herdsmen, was frequently used in scriptural sources to refer to the mythic space where Krishna had spent his youth, modern Braj as a geographic space was thus invented only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century through the

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<sup>42</sup> Entwistle, *Braj*, 275.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

marking of the sacred sites that surrounded the towns of Vrindavan and Mathura. The modern *parikrama* of Braj covered an area stretching seven miles to the east and south of modern Mathura and nearly thirty-one miles to the west and the east.

Although according to Gaudiya pilgrimage manuals such as the 1552 *Vrajabhaktivilāsa*, the oldest extant itinerary for a Braj *parikrama*, a pilgrimage to Braj entailed visiting one hundred and thirty seven forests, Mathura (the site where Krishna was born), Gokul (the site where Krishna spent his childhood), Vrindavan (the site where Krishna spent his youth), Barsana (the site where Radha grew up), Nandgaon (yet another site where Krishna grew up), and Govardhan (the hillock that Krishna raised to protect the pastoral communities of Braj) became the key sites in this pilgrimage route (See Map 1).<sup>44</sup>

Of course, the Gaudiyas were not the only Vaishnava sect active in Braj in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In 1519, Vallabha (1479-1530), a Brahmin from the pilgrimage center of Varanasi in northern India, established a temple in Govardhan in Braj to commemorate the discovery of Srinathji, a self-manifesting icon, a *svarupa murti* of Krishna (See Figure 1.9).<sup>45</sup> While Madhavendra Puri, a Vaishnava ascetic, had purportedly discovered the icon in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it was Vallabha who was responsible for initiating an elaborate ritualistic practice centered on the icon. The subsequent contestations between the Gaudiya followers of Chaitanya and the Pushtimarga (literally the path of grace) followers of Vallabha over the control of Govardhan suggest that, by the mid-16<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See Ibid. for a discussion on the text.

<sup>45</sup> For this history, see Richard Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhacarya* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992); Peter Bennett, *The Path of Grace: Social Organization and Temple Worship in a Vaishnava Sect* (New Delhi: Hindustan Publishing, 1993).

century, Braj had become an important pilgrimage site in north India. As Father Monserrate, a Portuguese Jesuit who visited Vrindavan in 1580, writes: “Temples dedicated to Viznu [Vishnu] are to be found in many places in the neighbourhood [of Mathura and Vrindavan], built in spots where the silly old-wives- fables (of the Hindus) declare that he performed some action. These fanes (or rather ‘profanes’) are elegantly built in the pyramidical style of India. Their doors face east, and the rising sun bathes the face of the idol with his light.”<sup>46</sup>

Monserrate’s 1580 text suggests that “pyramidical style” temples, temples like the four Gaudiya temples in Vrindavan, were a common sight in the region by the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Simultaneously, and perhaps equally importantly, Chaitanya and Vallabha’s attempts at constructing a sacred landscape in Braj, a landscape of the gods, had become increasingly popular. As Monserrate asserted, temples were built in the region based on “silly old-wives-fables,” narratives of Krishna’s continued corporeal presence in the region. Not surprisingly, the significance of these sites for a larger Vaishnava constituency led to contestations between the Gaudiyas and the Pushtimargis over control of the temples. In the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, the Pushtimarga followers of Vallabha physically ousted the Gaudiyas from the temple of Srinathji at Govardhan by setting fire to their huts. The consequent legal battles reached the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar (1542-1605), who finally settled the case in favor of the Pushtimargis.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Antonio Monserrate, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. on his journey to the court of Akbar*, trans. J. S. Hoyland (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1992, Reprint of 1922 edition), 90.

<sup>47</sup> Entwistle, *Braj*, 153-154; Prabhudayal Mital, *Braj ke dharm-sampradāyō kā itihās* (New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1968), 251.

Along with the Gaudiyas and the Pushtimargis, a number of other Vaishnava sects flourished in Braj in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Each of these sects emphasized a particular aspect of intimate devotion as a way to immerse oneself in Krishna. For instance, while the Gaudiyas argued for *achintya bheda abheda*, the inconceivable difference and non-difference between the supreme godhead and his creations, the Pushtimargis based their practice on the philosophy of pure non-dualism or *suddhadvaita*. The Pushtimargis asserted that there was no ontological dualism between the manifest and the unmanifest, between the worldly and the other-worldly. The only way to serve the divine was through service, *seva*, to the icon of Krishna. An elaborate practice of ritualistic icon worship thus developed in the Pushtimarga temples where the deity was worshipped eight times a day. The Nimbarka sect, on the other hand, expounded sole devotion to both Radha and Krishna, who worshipped together constituted the absolute truth. Other contemporaneous Vaishnava sects active in Braj included the Radhavallabhs, the Haridasis, and the Ramanujas.

In this dissertation, however, I primarily focus on the Gaudiya traditions of Braj. Even though I refer substantively to the visual culture of a number of other sects such as the Pushtimargis, the central concerns of the dissertation remain the Gaudiya practices in the region. My decision to limit myself to the Gaudiya tradition is strategic. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the disciples of Chaitanya were responsible for spreading Gaudiya Vaishnavism across much of northern and eastern India. The princely states in modern Rajasthan in western India, especially the Kachhwaha rulers of Jaipur, became devout Gaudiyas and built enormous temples across north India. Even though the Mughal

emperor Akbar initially supported the Pushtimargis in their claim to the temple in Govardhan, over a period of time the Gaudiyas became much closer to the Mughal throne. In the eastern Indian regions of Bengal and Orissa, the Gaudiya theologians developed a strong support base because of their critique of traditional orthodoxy. Thus, unlike the Pushtimargis who had followers mostly within the merchant communities in western India, Gaudiyas theologians were able to create a community of believers that extended from Rajasthan in western India to Bengal in eastern India. Gaudiya critiques of ritualism and the emphasis on libidinous love made this new Vaishnavism accessible across class and caste boundaries. The visual culture of Gaudiya Vaishnavism thus offers me a much larger frame to tease out the modes through which a new religion was created in Vrindavan – one that was inherently political yet distinctive in its regional form.

In the Braj region, each temple, each hillock, each tree has myths that extol its pre-eminence, has histories of contestations, and are embroiled in discursive space-making strategies. A narrative that pays close attention to the rich history of post-16<sup>th</sup>-century Braj cannot perhaps be written by a single author. I, on my part, chose primarily to focus on Vrindavan itself. Although I have included temple architecture, contestations over space, and ritualistic practices from other pilgrimage sites in Braj, Vrindavan emerges in my narrative as symptomatic of the concerns that govern my dissertation. Let me rehearse the central arguments of my dissertation in the next section situating it within a larger historiographic frame.

## The Space in/of Religion

What is the politics of locating the pilgrimage town of Vrindavan within the colonial landscape, within discourses of urbanity, space-making, and the creation of a modern public sphere? But why here and why now? Why speak of space today? An easy answer, perhaps, is the challenge it provides to the frameworks through which Vrindavan is still taught, read, and understood. For scholars, Vrindavan remains a reified, ahistorical world of *bhakti* and *rasa* (emotional sublimation through which devotion is inculcated) – an eternal space where the blue god Krishna still plays the flute. Reiterating notions of rarefied religious values, scholarship on Vrindavan has exclusively focused on philosophical and theological texts. Given the significance of the sacred landscape of Vrindavan in framing the very tenets of Vaishnavism, it is not surprising that the pilgrimage site has attracted much scholarly and popular attention from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

One of the first texts to produce an anthropological understanding of Vrindavan was Frederic Salmon Growse's 1874 *Mathurá A District Memoir*. Growse, the Magistrate of the Mathura District in the 1870s, spent years translating 16<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnava manuscripts that he recovered from temples in the pilgrimage town.<sup>48</sup> The popularity of Growse's memoir led to an enlarged second edition being published in 1880 with a third edition in 1883. *Mathurá A District Memoir* became a key text not only for scholarship

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<sup>48</sup> Frederic S. Growse, *Mathurá: A District Memoir* (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces and Oudh Government Press, 1874). The citations in my notes refer to the 1880 edition.

on Vrindavan but was used by administrators and district authorities as late as the 1960s.<sup>49</sup>

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century, on the other hand, was marked by a series of publications by Christian missionaries who traveled to Braj to convert pilgrims visiting the sacred sites of the region.<sup>50</sup> Published for metropolitan audiences to solicit funds for missionary activities, texts such as J. E. Scott's *Braj, The Vaishnava Holy Land* (1906) and E. Maber F. Major's *On the Wings of a Wish* (1908) introduced European audiences for the first time to these pilgrimage spaces, albeit through an Orientalist lens.<sup>51</sup> Both texts spent a considerable amount of time deriding the Vaishnava practices of Braj, while claiming that their proselytizing activities were indeed immensely successful. Although European travelers from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards had left extraordinarily detailed descriptions of liturgical practices in the temples of Braj, these early 20<sup>th</sup>-century missionary accounts became extremely popular in Europe and the United States leading to a spate of similar publications.<sup>52</sup> Not surprisingly, most early 20<sup>th</sup>-century descriptions of the region were marked by an attempt to utilize Judaeo-Christian paradigms in framing the visceral libidinousness of a *bhakti*-oriented Vaishnavism. I discuss local resistances to such missionary activities in Braj later in the dissertation.

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<sup>49</sup> In the 1960s, the District authorities still referred to Growse's text when resolving legal suits regarding property and temple ownership. For example, see "Payment of a sum of Rs. 2 per month to Gokul Prasad on account of the rent of Jugal Kishore temple," National Archives of India, New Delhi, Education, Health, and Land Department, Education Branch, Proceedings No. 153-154 (B), October 1929 (henceforth NAI).

<sup>50</sup> I discuss the politics of these interventions in Section 7

<sup>51</sup> Jefferson E. Scott, *Braj, The Vaishnava Holy Land. A Jubilee Volume* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1906); E. Mabel F. Major, *On the Wings of a Wish to the Banks of an Indian River* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1908).

<sup>52</sup> Pre-19<sup>th</sup>-century European descriptions of Braj include Monserrate, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate*; Joseph Teiffenthaler, *Des Pater Joseph Tieffenthaler's Historische, Geographische Beschreibung von Hindustan* (Berlin: Bendem Berausgeber, 1785); and Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, AD 1656-1668*, trans. Archibald Constable (London: Oxford University Press, 1914).

By the 1960s, however, a resurging interest in Asian mysticisms led to a number of anthropologists and scholars from within Religious Studies to turn to the pilgrimage sites in Braj. Notable texts including Norvin Hein's 1972 *The Miracle Plays of Mathurā*, John S. Hawley's 1981 *At Play with Krishna: Pilgrimage Dramas from Brindavan*, and David L. Haberman's 1988 *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhana* delineated the modes through which the experience of space in Braj was mediated through 16<sup>th</sup>-century theological texts such as the *Haribhaktivilāsa* and the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*.<sup>53</sup> Alan W. Entwistle's magisterial 1987 *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*, on the other hand, provided a meticulous catalogue of manuscripts, indigenous texts, and European travel accounts that discussed the pilgrimage sites in Braj. Discussing each text in great detail, Entwistle's volume provided, for the first time, a systematic history of the region from its Buddhist origins.

In India, scholarly writings on the pilgrimage sites in Braj have mostly been in the form of local interventions from within the region itself. In 1955, Krishna D. Vajpeyi, the Director of the Mathura Museum, wrote the first history of Braj in Hindi.<sup>54</sup> In the 1960s and the 1970s, Prabhudayal Mital, a local scholar, wrote a series of books on ritualistic and theological practices in Braj. Drawing on lesser known sectarian works and unpublished manuscripts, Mital's texts provided a vivid history of the region.<sup>55</sup> Yet, another important moment in this historiography was the formation of the Vrindavan

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<sup>53</sup> Norvin Hein, *The Miracle Plays of Mathurā* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); John S. Hawley, *At Play with Krishna: Pilgrimage Dramas from Brindavan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), David L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhana* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). For this history, see Part One.

<sup>54</sup> Krishna D. Vajpeyi, *Braj ka Itihas* (Mathura: Akhil Bharatiya Braj Sahitya Mandal, 1955).

<sup>55</sup> Prabhudayal Mital, *Braj ka Samskrtik Itihasa* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakasan, 1966); Prabhudayal Mital, *Braj ke Dharm-sampradayo Ka Itihas* (New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1968); Prabhudayal Mital, *Braj ki Kalao ka Itihasa* (Mathura: Sahitya Samsthan, 1975).



Research Institute in 1968 with support from a group of Indian, European, and American scholars. Over the last forty years, the Institute has actively collected and preserved manuscripts from temples in Braj, effectively creating a valuable archive of theological and ritualistic texts on post-16<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnavism.

This collegial relationship shared between scholars working on Braj from various parts of the world was most visible in a multidisciplinary conference held in Vrindavan itself in 1991. Over a few days, historians (Irfan Habib, Monika Horstmann, and Gopal N. Bahura), art historians (Catherine B. Asher, George Michell, Chandramani Singh, Kapila Vatsayan, John Burton-Page, and R. Nath), architects (Nalini Thakur), and practicing theologians (Srivatsa Goswami and Asimakrishna Dasa) from Europe, the United States, and India discussed the architectural, doctrinal, archaeological, and political significance of the 1590 Govind Dev temple – the key Gaudiya temple in north India (See Figure 1.1 and 1.3). The subsequent publication – an extraordinary text in South Asian Art History because of its unusual focus a single temple – provided a testimony to the immense possibilities that a multidisciplinary frame could bring to debates on sacred spaces in general and the visual cultures of Vrindavan in particular.<sup>56</sup> My dissertation remains indebted to this rich scholarship.

Yet, my dissertation provides another history of Vrindavan's sacred spaces – a history, not just of eternal love for the divine, but of love and desire produced through the

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<sup>56</sup> Margaret H. Case, ed. *Govindadeva: A Dialogue in Stone* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1996). From within the discipline of Art History, Pika Ghosh's *Temple to Love: Architecture and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Bengal* is a key text in understanding the devotional landscape of pre-colonial Gaudiya Vaishnavism outside Braj. Ghosh argues that the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnava rulers of Bengal turned to earlier Sultanate mosque architecture to create a new temple typology that allowed them to participate in larger Islamicate courtly paradigms. Pika Ghosh, *Temple to Love: Architecture and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Bengal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

politics of here and now, through contestations over space, and through a Vaishnava political theology. While the Govind Dev conference and the subsequent publication provide a productive multidisciplinary template to think sacred spaces in pre-colonial India, my dissertation attempts to bring the conversation into the era of colonial modernity. In my dissertation, I argue that the assumption of distinct spheres of the secular (religion-as-ideology) and the sacred (religion-as-faith) has obfuscated a clear understanding of modern Hinduism and its spatial techniques. This dissertation then aims to unsettle the narratives of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan that have now become customary.

Through a close reading of purportedly discrete practices such as temple-building and anti-colonial political movements, cartography and theological texts, photography and road-making projects, I suggest that both imagining and making space became strategic modes through which subjectivities were articulated in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan. For those familiar with the debate on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Hinduisms, this assertion might not seem new. Scholars such as Sandria Freitag, Kama Maclean, Katherine Prior, and Gyanendra Pandey, among others, have already suggested that the urban fabric of colonial north India became the setting, the stage, on which this new Hinduism was acted out.<sup>57</sup> Writing on Hindu-Muslim riots in colonial north India, Freitag thus notes: “Sacredness operated in temporal, as well as spatial, terms.”<sup>58</sup> Yet, much of

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<sup>57</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*; Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Katherine Prior, *The British Administration of Hinduism in North India, 1780-1900* (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Cambridge, 1990); Kama Maclean, *Pilgrimage and Power: The Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, 1765-2001* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>58</sup> Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*, 135.

this discussion on the liminal spaces of social performance and community formation in colonial north India remains surprisingly aspatialized. Little attention has been paid to the actual functioning, the everyday working, of colonial urbanity – the intimate connections between the visual technologies of space-making and this new Hinduism. Even as scholars acknowledge the importance of fairs and processions, the building of religious architecture, and the role of print culture in creating this new Hinduism, the routine practices of making space remain unexplored.

On the other hand, scholars writing on the making of colonial urbanity from within the disciplines of Art and Architecture History have focused on the urban as representative of the scientific rationality that purportedly constituted the contours of colonial modernity.<sup>59</sup> Silent to the intersection of the urban and the religious, the colonial public sphere is thus recalibrated as a product of secular (defined here not as religion-as-ideology but in opposition to the religious) discourses of modern institutionalized governance. Yet another key problematic in this large body of scholarship is the almost unwavering focus on metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Bombay, Madras (now Chennai), Calcutta (now Kolkata), Lucknow, and Jaipur.<sup>60</sup> It is as if the discourses on modern visualities and globalized cosmopolitanisms did not touch the hinterland – the smaller

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<sup>59</sup> For example, see Thomas R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Peter Scriver, *Rationalisation, Standardisation, and Control of Design: A Cognitive Historical Study of Architectural Design and Planning* (PhD dissertation: University of Delft, 1994); Stephen Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi's Urban Governmentalities* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

<sup>60</sup> For example, see Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (London: Routledge, 2005); Jyoti Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism* (New York: Routledge, 2005); William J. Glover, *Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Mariam Dossal, *Imperial Designs and Indian Realities: The Planning of Bombay City, 1855-1875* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991); Norma Evenson, *The Indian Metropolis: A View Towards the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Giles H. R. Tillotson, *The Tradition of Indian Architecture: Continuity, Controversy, and Change since 1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

towns that were embedded in the local fabric of north India's regional economies. Although scholars such as Christopher Bayly have argued for the *qasbah*, the localized urban centers where regional administrators and gentry lived and supported armies of soldiers and artisans, as key to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century north Indian political economy, scant attention has been paid to modern visualities and the forms that it took outside the metropolis.<sup>61</sup> The periphery, the margin, the hinterland remains precariously overlooked in debates on the material culture of colonial India.

A study on space-making as a visual strategy in Vrindavan then allows me to address both these challenging issues in the historiography of modern India. I make an argument for a modern Vaishnavism, a Vaishnavism that operated from within the modern spaces of colonial urbanity, yet was consciously anti-colonial in its political imperative. Modern space created through the visual apparatuses of colonialism – photography, cartography, and neo-classical architecture – became the very sites through which Vaishnava articulations of authority challenged, over and again, imperial and nationalist exercises in making meaning, controlling space, and visioning order. My dissertation suggests that the imperatives of thinking a richer history of space cannot come from a single disciplinary frame. It is only through a close reading of political praxis with philosophical literature, archival evidence with temple architecture, theological ideals with sartorial practices can one even begin to think of the complexity of space as an analytical category. My dissertation thus attempts to argue that the

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<sup>61</sup> See Christopher A. Bayly, "The Small Town and Islamic Gentry in North India: The Case of Kara," in K. Ballhatchet and J. Harrison, eds. *The City in South Asia: Pre-modern and Modern* (London: Curzon Press, 1980), 20-48 for an understanding of the *qasbah*. An exception is Metcalf's *An Imperial Vision*, which pays close attention to F. S. Growse's architecture career in Mathura. Yet, the text remains the story of the colonizer with little attention paid to indigenous articulations.

purported discreteness of disciplinary frames are inadequate in understanding lived practices that are in practice inter-woven in a much richer web of complex meaning-making.

By bringing lived practices, the everyday tactics of making space, into the debates on both modern space and modern religion, I argue for religion as a spatial technique. Michel Foucault, in a text that directly addresses the role of spatial politics in the making of modernity, writes: “It is quite possible that since I was interested in the problems of space, I used quite a number of spatial metaphors in *The Order of Things*, but usually these metaphors were not ones that I advanced, but ones that I was studying as objects. What is striking in the epistemological mutations and transformations of the seventeenth century is to see how the spatialization of knowledge was one of the factors in the constitution of this knowledge as a science.” Discussing Linnaean taxonomy, Foucault goes on to state: “All of these are spatial techniques, not metaphors.”<sup>62</sup> In this 1982 interview with Paul Rabinow, Foucault delineates the development of new technologies, new economic processes, and even new diseases that made spatial techniques a central mode of making modernity. It is a careful sifting through the accumulated debris of modernity – archival documents, temple architecture, photographs, maps, print culture, didactic literature, memories of events, and even stories recounted – that provides me with a frame to make visible the everyday spatial techniques through which a modern religion emerged in Vrindavan.

In process, I also argue for a modern political religion that did not distinguish a *sui generis* from its exterior shell (political action) but located faith and action, religion-

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<sup>62</sup> Foucault, “Space, Knowledge, and Power,” 362-363.

as-faith and religion-as-ideology, within theories of transcendence itself. Most scholars writing on the 19<sup>th</sup>-century creation of the “Timeless, Spaceless, Causeless Entity” called Hinduism argue that this new religion was a product of collusions and conflicts between Orientalist scholarship, nationalist reformers, and the colonial state.<sup>63</sup> Certainly, the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century naturalization of this new “Timeless, Spaceless” Hinduism by nationalist leaders was a powerful anti-colonial strategy to claim sovereignty. This dissertation, on the other hand, attempts to think Hinduism beyond the frames of the national. By arguing for the presence of the modern in this new Hinduism while simultaneously resisting the epistemological duality of (western) modernity and (nationalist) tradition, my dissertation focuses on a Hinduism that was local to Vrindavan. I thus move beyond the dichotomies of the colonial and the national to create space for subjectivities that questioned the homogenizing function of constructs such as “Hindu nationalism.”

The space that emerged through temple-building, public processions, photography, cartography, and painting traditions in Vrindavan was not the deterritorialized space of a colonial economy. Neither was it the reterritorialized space of nationalist desires. Displacing post-Enlightenment dichotomies such as modernity/tradition and secular/sacred, I suggest that the local of Vrindavan was reconfigured through disparate spatial practices, a remarkably dense cluster of fragmentary and contradictory belief systems. If, on the one hand, these localized

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<sup>63</sup> Rai Bahadur Lala Baijnath, *Hinduism, Ancient and Modern, as Taught in Original Sources and Illustrated in Practical Life* (Meerut: Publisher unknown, 1899), 158. For arguments on the nationalist production of a primordial Hinduism, see Maclean, *Pilgrimage and Power*; Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*; and Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron, eds. *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995), among others.

subjectivities drew on the old, Lefebvre's "etymology of locations," to articulate the new in the era of colonial modernity, on the other hand, space-making became key in recalibrating Hinduism as a political religion, a religion of faith and ideology, that resisted both nationalist and colonial demands and exhortations. Perhaps, such an iteration will then allow us to deracinate the idea of a political religion, or even the political theological, from its teleological frames – that of the Enlightenment, colonial modernity, and the subsequent coming of the secular.

My insistence on writing the history of a localized political religion that was often articulated in opposition to both nationalist and colonial demands was, of course, largely influenced by scholars such as Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi.<sup>64</sup> By bringing into the debate, spatio-visual practices that were obdurately cosmopolitan, yet stood outside and/or against nationalist/colonial narratives, this dissertation hopes to illustrate that "[n]ot all histories within a nation are the same."<sup>65</sup> Recuperating disparate spatio-visual practices in Vrindavan, my dissertation then makes visible the space in/of modern religion. How then was a commitment to the sacred articulated as a spatial technique in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan?

As I started writing the dissertation after two years of fieldwork, a crisis arose in terms of my narrative. It became impossible to frame the infinitesimal number of fragmentary practices, non-totalizing and non-teleological, within a cohesive history.

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<sup>64</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things that I Know about it," *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Autumn 1993), 10-35; Giovanni Levi, "On Microhistory," in Peter Burke, ed. *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 93-113.

<sup>65</sup> Vinayak Chaturvedi, *Peasant Pasts: History and Memory in Western India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 21.

Much like postcards, fragmentary vignettes that give us only a certain amount of information, each temple, each archival record, and each narrative that I had painstakingly documented erupted on to the pages of my dissertation pulling my own narrative in different directions. It is precisely this impossibility of a metanarrative that has led me to present my dissertation as a series of “little narratives,” Jean-François Lyotard’s *petits récits*. As Lyotard writes: “The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements – narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on.”<sup>66</sup>

In certain ways, this attempt to write a history of Vrindavan’s visual practices through a set of little narratives arose out of the difficulty of discovering a Period Eye in Vrindavan.<sup>67</sup> Michael Baxandall’s *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, with its focus on the Period Eye in Quattrocento Italy, had persuaded not only Art History but anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz and Pierre Bourdieu to insert the visual into a larger social world, to think of individual acts of seeing and making as mediated through a relationship with larger cultural practices.<sup>68</sup> For Baxandall, a Period Eye was not merely the physical act of seeing or making objects but a larger cultural condition that determined cognitive perception. Writing on the Italian Quattrocento, Baxandall thus suggested: “Some of the mental equipment a man orders his visual experience with is

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<sup>66</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

<sup>67</sup> Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

<sup>68</sup> See Allan Langdale, “Aspects of the Critical Reception and Intellectual History of Baxandall’s Concept of the Period Eye,” *Art History* 21:4 (1998), 17–35.



variable, and much of this variable equipment is culturally relative, in the sense of being determined by the society which has influenced his experience.”<sup>69</sup>

Yet, the profusion of artistic styles in Vrindavan made difficult an easy history of the Period Eye, a metanarrative of visual practices, in this pilgrimage town without reducing fragmentary practices into a totalizing cohesive narrative. This pluralism in artistic styles, for instance the coterminous use of the western neo-classical, pre-Islamic Indic styles, and the Mughalized visuality of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan, was, however, hardly exceptional. Writing on 19<sup>th</sup>-century Istanbul, Zeynep Çelik notes that this period was marked by the proliferation of multiple architecture styles, both western and indigenous.<sup>70</sup> Lyotard’s *petits récits* then provided me with a potential for recuperating radical disruptive forces that in its multiplicity, plurality, and heterogeneity made possible subjectivities, desires, and imperatives that went beyond the tyranny of modernity and its claim to the universal. My dissertation attempts to rethink the terrains of these plural subjectivities – insidious, minute, and fragmentary.

However, it was only in the 1960s and the 1970s that scholars had started associating pluralism to the secularizing project of modernity. For instance, Peter Berger was one of the first scholars to argue for “cognitive contamination,” the possibility of choice as inherent to modernity, as a key force that led to the fragmentation of unitary religious traditions. As Berger writes:

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<sup>69</sup> Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 40.

<sup>70</sup> Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: A Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986).

There is an underlying paradox in all ideologies that seek to control or contain modernity, a paradox closely related to the phenomenon that we have called cognitive contamination: If one wishes to control modernization, one must assume one has an option and the ability to manipulate. Thus one may opt against modernity and seek to manipulate the processes of modernization. These very ideas, however, are modern — indeed, modernizing — in themselves. Nothing could be more modern than the idea that man has a choice between different paths of social development.”<sup>71</sup>

While in subsequent writings Berger distanced himself from his earlier arguments that announced the secular as a product of this pluralistic modernity, his idea of “cognitive contamination” becomes useful in understanding visual practices in Vrindavan. Berger was well aware that this modern pluralism resonated well with earlier “contaminations,” for example in antiquity. Yet, according to Berger, the “contaminations” in/of modernity was marked by a key difference from earlier moments of pluralism. Modernity provided “an option and the ability to manipulate.”

Perhaps, the pre-modern/modern cleavage that Berger draws out is neither as clean nor as systematic as he makes it out to be. Thus, rather than unequivocally associating “cognitive contamination” as a key force that led to the fragmentation of cohesive traditions with the coming of colonial modernity, my dissertation begins with the 16<sup>th</sup>-century history of Vrindavan in an attempt to problematize the idea of modernity as emblematic of an emergent sensibility of newness.

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<sup>71</sup> Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Keller, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Random House, 1973), 177.

## Plan of Dissertation

Part One begins with the 16<sup>th</sup>-century discovery of the pilgrimage sites in Braj. Arguing against normative understandings of Vaishnavism as an introvert practice of libidinous love, the three sections in Part One suggest that the body of the Mughal emperor, that is the body of the king, offered a possible form for the visualization of a political religion in pre-colonial Vrindavan. It was through a language of power, a mutual imbrication of piety and politics, that Krishna was re-visualized within a 16<sup>th</sup>-century context. While a number of scholars have argued that syncretic cultural practices in pre-colonial India provide models of political engagements that constructed complex cosmopolitan subjectivities, the question of religion itself remains absent in this discussion.<sup>72</sup> How did the theological frameworks of Gaudiya Vaishnavism allow such transgressions? How did this 16<sup>th</sup>-century religion authorize its own visual culture – a visual culture that substantially drew from the court of an Islamicate king, a *mleccha* (outcaste) Other? This is the central question that I take up in Part One. Part One concludes with transformations in Vaishnava temple-building practices in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a period marked by the political decline of the Mughal empire.

In Part Two, *The Tactics of the Everyday: Making Space in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan*, I turn to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In each section, I focus on a specific object: a 19<sup>th</sup>-century temple, a lithograph depicting the modern *parikrama* route of Braj, a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century photograph of a stone plaque erected by the British government, a watercolor

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<sup>72</sup> A number of essays in a seminal volume edited by David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence address the issue of syncretic cultures in pre-colonial India. David Gilmartin and Bruce Lawrence, eds. *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000). Also see Ghosh, *Temple to Love*.

depicting Vrindavan, a *carte de visite* printed by a Mathura-based photographer, and a tree on the river Yamuna at Vrindavan from where Krishna purportedly stole the clothes of bathing cow-herd girls. These objects allow me to unravel processes through which minute everyday techniques of making space became foundational in conceptualizing the sacred in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan.

Section 4, the first section in Part Two, focuses on the Krishna Chandrama (1810), the first temple to be built in Vrindavan after over one hundred and eight years that returned to a typology that had, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, been replaced by flat-roofed temples in most Vaishnava centers across north India (See Figure 4.2). The Krishna Chandrama temple in Vrindavan makes visible the importance of pre-Islamicate architecture practices in creating a language of modernity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet this new visual language was not merely a repetition, a replication of the old. The old was incorporated within the new. The pre-Islamicate was incorporated within a 19<sup>th</sup>-century structure that was marked by a triple-arched entrance with European-style pillars. The act of remaking the old was to be paradigmatically modern.

This reinvention of pre-Islamicate temple architecture has to be located within a new political Hindu consciousness that was being formulated in Vrindavan in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the very moment that the Krishna Chandrama was being built in the town. In the next section, I turn to an anti-British coalition formed by Jaswant Rao Holkar (1776-1811), the ruler of the princely state of Indore, who had captured Mathura and Vrindavan in 1804, sites that the British had gained only in 1803. In Section 5, I suggest that Holkar's agitation of 1805-1806 was a moment that made Vaishnavism

into a political imperative in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is precisely through moments such as these that a political Hinduism was invented in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. This new political religion was ideological, yet not necessarily anti-minority, a political Hinduism that came into being much before the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century emergence of the vitriolic forces of the Hindutva.

The following section, Section 6, engages with the architecture of the Shahji temple (1868), a temple that consciously cited the *imambaras* (Shia Muslim shrines used during Muharram) of the city of Lucknow to create a moment of incredible syncretism in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (See Figure 6.2). Yet, by also incorporating forms used in European Catholic churches and imagery that alluded to the ideals of a libidinous Krishna worship, the architecture of the Shahji temple resisted 19<sup>th</sup>-century colonial and national imaginaries that produced an expurgated form of a modern Hinduism. The Shahji temple thus provides us with a paradigm to recuperate a Hinduism, resolutely modern, yet operating beyond middle class epistemologies that were, at that very moment, being framed by Vaishnava reformers in urban centers such as Calcutta and Bombay.

Section 7 further develops this theme of a localized Vaishnava spatial practice through a close scrutiny of pilgrimage maps. I read these maps alongside late 19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> road-making projects in Braj. I argue that local interventions in both the making of modern roadways and imagining this new space through pilgrimage maps acknowledged, engaged with, and remade the neutralizing geometricized space of the Empire. These interventions were moments of fissure that operated both within and beyond the dominant cartographies of the “state space” produced by the British Empire.

Through strategic tactics, the local elite of Braj transformed “state space” for counter-hegemonic purposes, re-enchanting and re-inscribing a modern cartographic space into a space appropriate for the habitation of their beloved Krishna.

Sections 8 and 9 moves me into the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Section 8, I take as my “object” the judicio-legal framework in colonial Vrindavan. I examine a series of legal proceedings over land ownership and the right to religious procession to argue that the symbolic authority of *seva*, serving the space of Vrindavan, became a mode to display a commitment to the sacred in terms of a spatial technique. Discussing religious processions in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century north India, Sandria Freitag writes: “The urban environment carried with it the sense that sacred time and sacred space had to be reckoned as limited commodities. Any move by one group to expand its share of them constituted an effort to subtract from the share of another group. Thus, in the very process of fostering a sense of shared identity lay the potential for conflict. Given certain circumstances, the integrative nature of public ceremonials could work, instead, to exclude those considered outsiders.”<sup>73</sup> Yet, as Section 8 makes visible, contestations over space in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan as an exercise in power never did “exclude” Muslims as “outsiders.” Unlike much of north India where severe riots occurred between Hindus and Muslims in this period over control of space, contestations in Vrindavan were limited to competing Vaishnava groups.

On the other hand, princely religious patronage in Vrindavan was met with severe resistance from the local community. One of the incidents that I discuss in this section revolves around a series of public petitions and legal battles between the Vaishnava

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<sup>73</sup>Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*, 138.

community of Barsana, a town twenty-five miles northwest of Vrindavan, and the princely state of Jaipur. Thus, in this case, it was the Kachhwaha monarch of Jaipur – a devout Vaishnava and important patron in Vrindavan – who was considered an “outsider.” Section 8 asks: What then was the politics of this new Hinduism in Vrindavan’s public sphere?

Section 9 focuses on a *carte de visite* depicting a cow standing in an expansive field printed by a Mathura-based photographer. Produced during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century anti-Muslim cow protection riots in north India, the *carte de visite* made possible a visualization of the inherent potency, both political and religious, of the body of the cow and the sacred landscape of Vrindavan (See Figure 9.4). Although as early as 1805, Jaswant Rao Holkar had used cow protection as a strategy to unite a number of north Indian Hindu rulers against the British (a moment I discuss in Section 5), the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century incarnation of this movement became a powerful ideology in north India to create a “Hindu community” in opposition to its Muslim Other. Yet, in Braj, the local cow protection agitation was very careful in demarcating a political that distinguished itself from the Hindu nationalist insinuations of the movement elsewhere. How then do we read the image of the sacred cow on the *carte de visite* produced in conjunction with the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century cow protection movement?

Petitions for the banning of cow slaughter in Braj consistently criticized “movements of an extreme nature” that were being led by “sadhus [monks]” in other north Indian towns and cities.<sup>74</sup> Local politicians categorically stated that their criticism

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<sup>74</sup> “Memorial and resolution from Hindus praying for protection of cow slaughter,” NAI Home Department, Political Branch, Proceedings No. 5 (10), 1938.

was not of the Muslim community but of the British army stationed in Braj. Section 9 concludes by suggesting that the cow protection agitation in Braj from 1805 to the 1940s was never directed against the Muslim community. It remained a contestation between the British and Jaswant Rao Holkar, between the British and the local communities in Braj, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, between the British and Hindu pressure groups over the sovereignty and sacredness of Vrindavan's spaces.

How did those considered “outsiders” in Braj – Hindus who did not live in the region – see Vrindavan? Was I erecting yet another romanticized space of authenticity in this figure of the “insider,” the *Brijbasi*, the one who resides in Braj? The Coda moves away from the space of Vrindavan itself to think of this pilgrimage town as a concept, a metaphor, and an idea. If Part Two makes an argument for a distinctive localized practice of space-making that was articulated in opposition to both the national and the colonial, Section 10 attempts to engage with the national through 1930s film advertisements and popular devotional lithographs. The Coda thus allows me to make visible, albeit synoptically, the registers through which Vrindavan emerged as a key locus within a larger north Indian imaginary.

Although my dissertation does not suggest that the local in Vrindavan was articulated as an autonomous sphere far removed from the worlds of nationalist Hinduism or colonial Orientalist knowledge, Section 10 deliberately focuses on the disjunctures in notions of sacrality and sacred space that were articulated between an “insider” and “outsider” understanding of Braj. And, it is in this contradiction, in the slippage of meaning, that the fragmentary – the everyday tactics of resistance in colonial India –



becomes discernable, I argue. My dissertation then is an attempt to think of a new history of the local in hope of recuperating “the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment ?” in Paul Rabinow, ed. *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32-50, 46.

## **Part I**

### **The Body Politic in a North Indian Pilgrimage Town: Pre-colonial Vrindavan**

Social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space. *Their underpinning is spatial.*

- Henri Lefebvre, 1974.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 404. Emphasis mine.

## 1. The Two Bodies of Krishna

The idea that Vishnu could be imagined as a king – a worldly monarch – might come as no surprise to scholars working on pre-colonial South Asia. Frequently represented as Varaha, the boar who saved the earth, the figure of this monarchical divinity reached its anthropomorphic culmination in Krishna by the time of the *Mahābhārata*, approximately between the mid-first millennium BCE and the mid-first millennium CE. It was in the *Mahābhārata* that, for the first time, a human yet divine Krishna was created – “a hero who is born, grows up, fights, marries, loves, and finally dies.”<sup>77</sup> Krishna in the *Mahābhārata* then represented the divine embodiment of a warrior-king, a *kshatriya*. As Sukumari Bhattacharji writes: “As a solar hero, Viṣṇu had to be king. [...] This kingship of Viṣṇu becomes apparent through his relation with the earth. The earth in Indian mythology is not the mere expanse of land, but its vegetation, wealth and prosperity.”<sup>78</sup> Yet, scholars, for instance David Haberman, W. G. Archer, and Joseph T. O’Connell, among others, have argued that by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this hero-king, the warrior Krishna who fought his evil uncle and ruled from Dwarka, was transformed into a cowherd lover.<sup>79</sup> By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Gaudiyas and the Pushtimargis made the playful amorous Krishna, the Krishna of Vrindavan, the central figure of Vaishnava practices in north India. Scholars have thus argued that this transformation of the hero-king into a cowherd-lover arose out of a radical transformation in the larger north India polity.

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<sup>77</sup> Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony: A Comparative Study of Indian Mythology from the Vedas to the Purāṇas* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1978), 301.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>79</sup> Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*; Archer, *The Loves of Krishna in Indian Painting*; O’Connell, *Social Implications of the Gauḍiṃya Vaiṣṇava Movement*.

Although much of north India had come under Islamic rule by the 13<sup>th</sup> century, scholars such as Haberman and O’Connell see the establishment of the Mughal empire in 1526 as a moment of epistemological rupture, a moment that rendered obsolete preexisting Brahmanical models of divine kingship. The articulation of a Vaishnava political suzerainty, one that was premised on a close association between the worldly monarch and the divine lord, now became impossible under the new political order. The monarch and the divine could no longer reside in the same body politic; political and religious sovereignty could no longer be coterminous in a system where the irrevocable sovereign, the Mughal emperor, was outside Brahmanical cosmology. As O’Connell writes, the Gaudiyas in the 16<sup>th</sup> century “systematically shifted the notion of dharma for the age out of the realm of public order and into the realm of *prema-bhakti* [devotion through love].”<sup>80</sup> The Gaudiya reformer Chaitanya himself acknowledged the loss of a Vaishnava political self in north India and a Vaishnava retreat from the political realm when he had to seek permission from a local Muslim magistrate to perform communal chanting (*kirtan*) in Nabadwip, Bengal.<sup>81</sup>

It was with Chaitanya’s 1514 (re)discovery of the lost sites associated with Krishna’s youth in Braj that the playful amorous Krishna was made preeminent. Very soon, Chaitanya’s devotees, especially from Bengal, settled down at these sites, creating a strong Gaudiya center in Braj. Not only did they build temples in Vrindavan to consolidate their sectarian presence in the region but also wrote elaborate manuals on ritualistic and pilgrimage practices that would become the foundational texts of Gaudiya

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<sup>80</sup> O’Connell, *Social Implications*, 206.

<sup>81</sup> Dimock, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, 326.

Vaishnavism.<sup>82</sup> Reading these very texts, scholars have suggested that with the coming of the Mughals in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Vaishnavism moved away from the political, turning instead towards devotion as an introvert emotive category.

Yet, material culture provides an entirely different understanding of Vaishnava engagements with the larger north Indian polity. It was with the 1590 consecration of the Govind Dev, a Mughal-style red sandstone temple, that this process of topophilic space-making, the Gaudiya Vaishnavization of Vrindavan, which begun with Chaitanya came to fruition (Figure 1.1). In this section, I argue that the 16<sup>th</sup>-century architecture of Vrindavan had become symptomatic, even representative, of a certain political language – a visual language of power that was produced through allusions to contemporaneous Mughal architecture.

Even as temples in Vrindavan were built on sites that were made sacred through Krishna's primordial inhabitation, the discursive framework that structured an imagining, perhaps even an experience, of this space was the Mughal monarch Akbar's royal fort-palaces at Agra (1565-1571) and Fatehpur Sikri (1570-1585). Land grants ascertain that the project of temple-building in Vrindavan had begun by 1565, at the very moment when Akbar's palace complex was being built at Agra.<sup>83</sup> The resemblance between Akbar's palaces and the Vaishnava temples in Vrindavan was then a strategy to associate Vrindavan, the locus of Vaishnava spiritual power, to Agra and Fatehpur Sikri, the locus of Mughal political power. The question of imagining space was a question of imagining

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<sup>82</sup> See Sushil K. De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta: General Printers and Publishers Limited, 1942) for Gaudiya textual practices.

<sup>83</sup> For land grants to the Gaudiya temples in Vrindavan, see Tarapada Mukherjee and Irfan Habib, "Akbar and the Temples of Mathura and its Environs," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 48 (1987), 234-50.

power and conversely the question of imagining power was a question of imagining space. As Henri Lefebvre reminds us: “Social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space. Their underpinning is spatial.”<sup>84</sup>

The persistent evocation of the red Sikri sandstone quarried in the ridges near Fatehpur Sikri, the very stone used to build Akbar’s fort-palaces, within the soteriological space of 16<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan suggests that practices of imagining the pilgrimage town involved an understanding of space, not only through a metaphysical order, but also as construed through contemporaneous expressions of political power. Only thirty miles south of Vrindavan, Fatehpur Sikri’s red sandstone palaces had become a key stylistic source for most of Vrindavan’s temples. For example, the use of Sikri sandstone on the Govind Dev, an austere exterior with largely aniconic carvings, vaulted and domed interiors, and the Mughal-style bracketed pillars suggests that a new temple typology was produced in Vrindavan in this period (Figure 1.2, Figure 1.3). This typology was in conversation with contemporaneous Mughal architecture. Reiterating further associations between the Mughals and the Gaudiyas, a 1618 Govind Dev inscription eulogized Akbar as a ruler under whom Vrindavan flourished:

When Akbar naturally ruled all the world, the group of good people engaged in [performing] their own dharma [proper actions] obtained happiness in the highest degree. The virtuous Vaiṣṇavas always gave him blessings joyfully because they considered that very place [Vṛndāvana to be] the place of Śrī Govinda [and therefore] worth residing in [...].<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 404.

<sup>85</sup> Inscription cited in Gopal N. Bahura, “Śrī Govinda Gāthā Service rendered to Govinda by the rulers of Āmera and Jayapura,” in Case, ed. *Govindadeva*, 195-213, 201.

Of course, the Govind Dev was not the only temple to reiterate this new Mughalized style. The Madanmohan (ca. 1580), Gopinath (ca. 1580-1585), Radhavallabh (ca. 1580-1590), and Jugal Kishore (1627) – equally important 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup>-century Gaudiya temples in Vrindavan – transformed this style into a visual form that became representative of the town’s Vaishnava architecture (Figure 1.4, Figure 1.5, Figure 1.6).

Certainly, the role of Akbar in authorizing the production of this Vaishnava landscape was considerable. In 1565, the Govind Dev temple, which was being built under Gaudiya supervision, received a large grant from Akbar.<sup>86</sup> In 1577, the Mughal monarch had also given Vitthalnatha (1516-1586), the son of Vallabhacharya, the founder of the Pushtimarga sect, use of tax-free land in Braj and a share in the local commerce so that the Pushtimarga priests would pray “for the good of the eternally-allied kingdom” of Akbar.<sup>87</sup> However, by 1589 the Gaudiyas had become the principal beneficiaries of Mughal patronage in the region. While Akbar intermittently gave land grants to both the Gaudiyas and the Pushtimargis from 1565 onwards, it was after a 1589 imperial survey of the important temples in the region that Akbar selected thirty-five temples that would continue receiving royal benefaction.<sup>88</sup> Most of the selected temples belonged to the Gaudiyas. The fact that two of Akbar’s most important courtiers, Man Singh I (1550-1614), the Kachhwaha ruler of the western Indian kingdom of Amber, and Todar Mal (d. 1589), a minister in Akbar’s court, were key patrons of Gaudiya temples in Vrindavan might provide a reason for this transformation in Akbar’s attitude.

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<sup>86</sup> Mukherjee and Habib, “Akbar and the Temples of Mathura.”

<sup>87</sup> Krishnalal M. Jhaveri, “Firman IV,” *Imperial Farmans (A.D. 1577 to A.D. 1805) granted to the Ancestors of His Holiness the Tikayat Maharaj* (Bombay: News Printing Press, 1928), unpaginated.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

Man Singh sponsored the temple of Govind Dev. Man Singh's father, Bihar Mal (1548-1574), had been initiated into Gaudiya Vaishnavism and personally facilitated Akbar's 1565 grant to Govind Dev. Similarly, in 1584, the Madanmohan temple received a land grant from Todar Mal after his initiation into Gaudiya Vaishnavism (See Figure 1.4). Akbar's personal interest in the Gaudiya community in Vrindavan arose from his proximity to these two courtiers. In fact, nobility, who had served under Akbar, sponsored all four of the key 16<sup>th</sup>-century Gaudiya temples in Vrindavan – the Govind Dev, Madanmohan, Gopinath, and Jugal Kishore.<sup>89</sup>

Akbar's removal of the tax on non-Muslims, the *jizya*, in Mathura and Vrindavan, his alleged encounters with Gaudiya saints in Vrindavan, a general strategy of toleration towards non-Muslims, along with his patronage of Gaudiya temples, then becomes symptomatic of Akbar's religious policy in the later years of his reign. This policy remained more or less unchanged during the reign of his son Jahangir (1569-1627). Jahangir added two new temples to his father's original list of thirty-five temples that received Mughal benefaction.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps it is this close and indelible relation between Akbar and the patrons of these temples that had also led to a conscious citation of Akbar's architecture in creating the vocabulary of a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Gaudiya style in Vrindavan.

Even at the risk of a political reductionism that has already been critiqued for subsuming “everything under a hegemonic agenda” at the cost of a “rich history of extra-

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<sup>89</sup> The Gopinath temple was built by Raysal Darbari, an officer in Akbar's court, while the Jugal Kishore was sponsored by Darbari's elder brother, Naunkaran, who too served under Akbar. Entwistle, *Braj*, 160.

<sup>90</sup> Tarapada Mukherjee and Irfan Habib, “The Mughal Administration and the Temples of Vrindavan during the Reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 49 (1989), 288-289.



political motivations,” I suggest that we insert religion within struggles of political subjectivities, strategic affiliations within a larger Islamicate world of Mughal north India.<sup>91</sup> Much has been written on the impossibility of such sociologies. Robert Bellah and Talal Asad, among others, have critiqued the academy for this very “irreligious dogmatism of secular reductionism.”<sup>92</sup> Yet, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century Gaudiya Vaishnavism provides us with a model to rethink political subjectivities within a social praxis, within a system of signs not hostile to the cultural world that it inhabited. I want to suggest that the citation of Mughal visual culture in Vrindavan went beyond architecture practices. Not only temple architecture, but ritualistic practices, pictorial traditions, and even the clothing of temple deities were mobilized to render visible a language of power. Delineating a history of this material culture in Vrindavan, Part One concludes with transformations in Vaishnava temple-building practices in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a period marked by the political decline of the Mughal empire.

Although the subsequent sections of my dissertation focus on space-making in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan, I use Part One to make visible the political imperatives that governed the making of a pre-colonial Vrindavan. In later sections of the dissertation, I will argue that the pre-colonial history of Vrindavan was inscribed in its colonial and postcolonial re-imaginings. Any understanding of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century has to begin with the pre-colonial, with foundational moments of meaning-making. As Henri Lefebvre writes: “The historical and its consequences, the ‘diachronic’,

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<sup>91</sup> Dorothy M. Figueira, “Oriental Despotism and Despotism,” in Katherine M. Faull, ed. *Anthropology and the German Enlightenment: Perspectives on Humanity* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995), 182-199, 195.

<sup>92</sup> King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 49.

the ‘etymology’ of locations in the sense of what happened at a particular spot or place and thereby changed it - all of this becomes inscribed in space.”<sup>93</sup> Part One then synoptically lays out the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>-century history of the town – a history that disturbs, challenges, and convolutes the ongoing processes of telling and retelling, of meaning making, narrativizing, and revising.

How then did the theological frameworks of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, which by the 16<sup>th</sup> century had purportedly turned inward, authorize the production of material culture that articulated subjectivities in conversation with dominant structures of power? In this section, I read the *Haribhaktivilāsa*, a ca. 1541 manual for Gaudiya practices, to situate the textual creation of an image of Krishna. I then discuss temple architecture and liturgical paintings to better understand the systems of material practices that produced this imagining. In this section, I suggest that it was the body of the Mughal emperor, the body of the king, which offered a possible form for the visualization of a new 16<sup>th</sup>-century Krishna. It was through a language of power, a mutual imbrication of piety and politics, that Krishna was re-visualized within the world of 16<sup>th</sup>-century Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Over and again, Gaudiya theologians reiterated the significance of the political in experiencing this divine body. This body politic, simultaneously human and divine, then became the matrix of spatial formulations – a concept that I will turn to later in the dissertation.<sup>94</sup>

But let me here return to the two bodies of the divine monarch, Krishna. The mutual imbrication of piety and politics in Gaudiya theology is perhaps best envisioned

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<sup>93</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 37.

<sup>94</sup> See Section 7.

in the idea of *seva*, service to this divine body. The idea of *seva* was not merely construed through a mutual dependence of worldly politics and divine piety but the presence of one necessitated the presence of the other. As the *Haribhaktivilāsa*, the central text of Gaudiya practice, reminds its reader: “Because effulgence, ornaments, and mood are clearly visible in the picture [*citra*] of Janardana [epithet of Krishna], it should be understood that the Lord remains present in that form. Therefore, learned authorities consider the worship of the Supreme Lord in a picture as being extremely beneficial.”<sup>95</sup> This imagining of Krishna through his manifest form makes apparent the mutual imbrication of piety and politics, text and image.

The claim of an intersection between text and image, between an outward performative politics and an interiorizing private piety, has received much criticism in recent times. For instance, scholars such as Samuel K. Parker and Adalbert J. Gail have suggested that image-making and temple-building practices should be read as autonomous acts of originality removed from the world of textual traditions and religious injunctions.<sup>96</sup> As Parker writes: “Textual abstractions and concrete practices are not related deterministically in either direction.”<sup>97</sup> In rejecting even a possibility of seeing the production of material culture through a conversation with textual cultures, Parker recuperates the heroic artist as a creative figure resisting hegemonic structures of traditionalism and religious injunctions. Working against Ananda Coomaraswamy’s model of the Indian “craftsman” immersed in art-making as a mystic experience of

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<sup>95</sup> *Haribhaktivilāsa* Vol. V, trans. Bhumipata Das (Vrindavan: Rasbihari Lal & Sons, 2006), 165.

<sup>96</sup> Samuel K. Parker, “Text and Practice in South Asian Art: An Ethnographic Perspective,” *Artibus Asiae* 63:1 (2003), 5-34; Adalbert J. Gail, “Iconography or Icononomy? Sanskrit Texts on Indian Art,” in Anna L. Dallapiccola, ed. *Shastric Traditions in Indian Arts* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1989), 109-114.

<sup>97</sup> Parker, “Text and Practice in South Asian Art,” 25.

serving the divine, scholars inevitably invoke the troubled specter of the western artist—the radical figure of creativity, the expressive individual who resists the conformism of tradition.<sup>98</sup> Much has already been written on the problem of this artist-figure, an invention of western modernity, from within (western) art history itself.<sup>99</sup> The easy insertion of the “artist genius” within an Indic pre-colonial context without any attention to the repressive functions of this epistemological hegemony merely reiterates Eurocentric models of artistic practice, now challenged from within Europe itself, as a universal schema.

In contrast, I suggest that we return to the text but not as an artifact frozen in time, abstracted from the sphere of concrete practices. The fact that texts were read (or heard) over and again and with each reading new insights accrued, and meaning enhanced, is hardly surprising today. The *Haribhaktivilāsa* itself gives a clue to the rich textual culture of 16<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan. Attributed to Gopala Bhatta (1503-1578) and Sanatana Goswami (1488-1558), both direct disciple of Chaitanya, the text was written in Vrindavan in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, at the same time when Rupa Goswami (1489-1564), Sanantana’s brother, was building the Govind Dev in Vrindavan. Considered to be the most authoritative source for Gaudiya ritualistic practices, the text supports its innumerable injunctions and rules by referring to a number of earlier Sanskrit texts, including the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, the *Padma*, *Skanda*, and the *Matsya Purāṇa*. This attempt at legitimization through a citation of canonical texts was matched with the

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<sup>98</sup> See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman* (London: Probsthain, 1909) for an articulation of this artist-craftsman figure.

<sup>99</sup> For example, see Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

conservatism of caste-based rigidity inherent in much of earlier Brahmanical ritualism.

As S. K. De writes:

Although the highest form of Caitanyaism dispenses with mere Śāstric [textual] rule and outward ceremony, and lays stress upon an inner and more esoteric way of realization, the faith does not at the same time ignore the impulse to devotional acts which comes from the injunction of Vaiṣṇava Śāstra [texts] and outward forms of piety. The comparatively mechanical process of the Vaidhī Sādhana-bhakti [devotion through ritualistic practice], which depends upon Vidhi or injunctions of the Śāstra, is an important step to the highest type of spontaneous Prema-bhakti [devotion through love]; and as such it demanded the attention and careful treatment of the professed theologians of the sect.<sup>100</sup>

Indeed, devotion through ritualistic practice, *vaidhi sadhana bhakti*, played a central role in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Chaitanya's direct disciple and key Vrindavan-based theologian Rupa Goswami's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, *The Ocean of Devotional Rasa*, explains this well. A major 16<sup>th</sup>-century Gaudiya text, the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* emphasizes ritualistic service, *seva*, through scriptural injunctions, *vaidhi bhakti sadhana*, as the first move towards an ideal devotional practice, a practice of devotion through emotional sublimation, *raganuga bhakti sadhana*.<sup>101</sup> Everyday rituals of worship were part of this *vaidhi bhakti*. It was only through injunctions, *vidhi*, that a devotee developed proficiency in understanding the esoteric elements of *raganuga*. As Krsnadasa Kaviraja, the early 17<sup>th</sup>-century biographer of Chaitanya, states in the

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<sup>100</sup> De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith*, 340.

<sup>101</sup> Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*.

*Caitanya Caritāmṛta*: “People without *rāga* worship according to the injunctions of the *śāstras* [texts]; this is called *vaidhī-bhakti*.”<sup>102</sup>

Service to the icon of Krishna, *murti seva*, was a key element of this practice. If *raganuga bhakti* operated within an esoteric realm of imaginary sublimation, *vaidhī bhakti* required sensorial participation – a physical image, music, rituals, food, clothes – the paraphernalia of temple worship. Serving Krishna through scriptural ritualism, *vaidhī*, then entailed elaborate bodily practices – acts of dressing, feeding, bathing, clothing, and even singing to the icon of Krishna. If *vaidhī bhakti* necessitated the image of Krishna, what were the paradigms available to the Gaudiya theologians of Vrindavan to create this image? While the *Haribhaktivilāsa* and the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* provide an understanding of a ritualistic, tradition-oriented piety far removed from prevalent perceptions of Vaishnavism as transgressive libidinous love, *prema*, the last three chapters of the *Haribhaktivilāsa* specifically focus on the making and consecration of images and temples. It is perhaps no coincidence that the longest chapters of the *Haribhaktivilāsa* focus on elaborate rituals of temple-building and image consecration. After all, the text was being written in Vrindavan itself at the time when the Gaudiyas were building enormous sandstone structures to commemorate their presence in the town. One could then argue that the simultaneous production of ritualistic injunctions through texts and ritualized space through temples was a project of formalizing Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Braj.

The Krishna of the *Haribhaktivilāsa* was, however, hardly a cowherd-lover adorned with wild flowers. The importance of opulent silk robes, jewelry made of pearls,

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<sup>102</sup> Dimock, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, 696.

precious stones, and gold in decorating the image of Krishna is reiterated, over and again, in the text. As the *Haribhaktivilāsa* states: “O brāhmaṇas, the more expensive the clothes are, the more pure they are to be considered. According to the quality of the garments offered, the merit is awarded proportionately.”<sup>103</sup> Both the *Haribhaktivilāsa* and the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* reiterate the importance of clothes and jewelry in Gaudiya ritualistic practices by asserting embellishment through dress and ornament, *prasadhana*, as among the fourteen attributes of Krishna that stimulate the devotees’ love or *rati* for the lord. Wearing a crown usually worn by earthly or heavenly kings (the *kirita mukuta*), silk garments, and precious jewelry, Krishna then emerges in these texts as a powerful monarch – a sovereign whose “appearance is like the rising sun.”<sup>104</sup> The resurrection of this older Vishnu, the monarchical figure of a supreme godhead, within the Islamicate world of 16<sup>th</sup>-century north India contradicts much of today’s paradigms of understanding Gaudiya Vaishnavism as an introvert practice of devotional love.

It is in this anomaly, the slip between a monarchical Krishna and the cowherd-lover, that I see two bodies of Krishna emerging.<sup>105</sup> This dissertation, however, does not make a plea for the recuperation of a syncretic moment in India’s long history, the invention of a romanticized pluralist past untarnished by the crisis of colonial modernity, Sudipta Kaviraj’s argument for a “fuzzy,” “unmapped,” “unenumerated world” marked by a “sense of community.”<sup>106</sup> Indeed, the two bodies of Krishna implied a separation as

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<sup>103</sup> *Haribhaktivilāsa* Vol. II, 61.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. I, 351.

<sup>105</sup> In articulating an understanding of the two bodies of Krishna, I remain indebted to Ernst Kantorowicz’s seminal arguments on the divine authority of kingship in medieval Europe. See Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

<sup>106</sup> Kaviraj, “The Imaginary Institution of India,” 26. See more on Kaviraj in Section 5.

much as it marked a conjoining between two distinct notions of piety – the piety of love, *prema*, and the piety of devotion, *bhakti*. I suggest that it is precisely in this conceptual separation between love and devotion, between the cowherd-lover and a monarchical Krishna, that the space was created for a political religion – a religion that engaged with the ordinary, the world of the Mughal court. By moving away from much of today’s nostalgic arguments that situate cosmopolitan cultures in Islamicate India within the paradigms of fuzzy community formations, I propose to delineate a religious practice that engaged with the possibility of the secular, the non-religious, and the political within the theological. Indeed, much of the dissertation focuses on demarcating a genealogy of this religion – the political theological – in Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Vrindavan.

The ritualism of the *Haribhaktivilāsa*, with its bejeweled monarchical Krishna was, however, not for Gaudiya devotees who, renouncing the world, had immersed themselves in *prema*, love. “What is the use for them to observe stringent vows that impede their devotional love?” the *Haribhaktivilāsa* rhetorically asks.<sup>107</sup> Rather, the text was intended for “householder devotees,” devotees with wealth and worldly attachment, devotees who had to discipline themselves into devotion through ritualism. Once disciplined, the devotee could forsake this ritualism to leap into uninhibited love. Devotion through ritualism necessitated a relationship of power between an omnipotent god and his devotee. As Ranajit Guha writes: “Bhakti, in other words, is an ideology of subordination par excellence.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *Haribhaktivilāsa* Vol. V, 573.

<sup>108</sup> Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 49.



Scholars, for example D. D. Kosambi and R. S. Sharma, have argued that this 16<sup>th</sup>-century devotion was an appropriate metaphor for contemporaneous political systems that bound the devotee to the divine, the courtier to the monarch, in “a powerful chain” of unflinching loyalty.<sup>109</sup> As Kosambi writes: “This [Vaishnavism] suited the feudal society perfectly. Loyalty links together in a powerful chain the serf and retainer to feudal lord, baron to duke to king.”<sup>110</sup> This metaphor of submission then required an appropriately powerful image of the monarchical divine, a persuasive political body to be venerated and worshipped. And, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, who but the Mughal emperor Akbar, divine light in human form, could provide an exemplary body, an archetype, for this new Krishna, the monarchical divinity? It was silken robes, precious jewelry, everyday rituals, and the courtly space of the temple itself that allowed the divine’s metamorphosis, his imitation of the earthly king, to become, or act as, the image of man.

The *Haribhaktivilāsa* provides meticulous descriptions of the clothes that should be offered to this monarchical Krishna. Acknowledging regional variations in clothing styles, the text suggests that Krishna be dressed in the *kanchukosnisa*, a compound of the words *kanchuka* (dress covering upper torso) and *usnisa* (turban), by devotees in the Madhya Desa, the territory between Rajasthan on the west and Yamuna on the east.<sup>111</sup> While the *usnisa* was the characteristic turban worn by the north Indian elite in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the *kanchuka*, a generic term for stitched tunics, had traditionally been

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<sup>109</sup> Damodar D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (New Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1970); Ram S. Sharma, “Problem of Transition from Ancient to Medieval in Indian History,” *The Indian Historical Review* 1:1 (March 1974), 1-9.

<sup>110</sup> Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization*, 208.

<sup>111</sup> According to the 6<sup>th</sup>-century astrologer Varaha Mihira, Madhya Desa extended as far west as Marwar in west India while the banks around Yamuna were partly in Madhya Desa and partly in the northern country (Uttara Desa). *Imperial Gazetteer of India Provincial Series: United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* Vol. I (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1908), 221.

distinguished as a dress worn by foreigners.<sup>112</sup> Unlike south Indian images of Krishna which always show a bare-chested god wearing an unstitched lower garment, the Indic *dhoti*, a number of post-16<sup>th</sup>-century north Indian images of Krishna show him wearing the *kanchukosnisa*, the turban and a tunic.

For instance, a ca.1680 painting from Bilaspur shows a devotee, perhaps a courtier or a rich merchant, worshipping the icon of Krishna (Figure 1.7). This representation of a private act of faith, of a devotee worshipping his personal deity, is indeed uncommon. Most extant paintings of post-16<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnava devotion depict important icons, for example Govind Dev or Srinathji, in public temples or worship by royalty as performative acts for a larger audience. In this somewhat atypical painting, the icon of Krishna is surrounded by implements of ritual worship – metal containers heaped with flowers, small vases with holy water, a conch, and offerings of food. The icon of Krishna, however, is dressed in attire typical of Mughal clothing introduced by Akbar at his court. Not only did Akbar create a whole new vocabulary for clothing and textiles but also restyled the north Indian tunic or *jama* as a Mughal royal dress.<sup>113</sup> The icon in this painting wears Akbar's *jama* – tight-fitting around the chest and tied to the side with tasseled lappets with a rounded transparent muslin skirt.<sup>114</sup> Akbar's *jama*, renamed the *sarbgati* by the monarch, was adopted by subsequent Mughal emperors and remained the authorized court dress until as late as the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The tight *izar*, the lower garment,

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<sup>112</sup> B. N. Goswamy and Kalyan Krishna, *Indian Costumes in the Collection of the Calico Museum of Textiles* (Ahmedabad: Calico Museum of Textiles, 1993).

<sup>113</sup> Abu al-Fazl, Akbar's biographer, writes about the monarch's pre-occupation with clothing. Abu al-Fazl, *The A'in-i Akbari* Vol. I, trans. Henry Blochmann (Calcutta: Baptist Mission press, 1873), 88.

<sup>114</sup> Goswamy and Krishna, *Indian Costumes*, 15-16.

visible from under the skirt, and the cloth turban further affirms the Akbari origin of the icon's dress.

The fact that an icon of Krishna in 1680s Bilaspur, a small kingdom in north India, was dressed, following the *Haribhaktivilāsa's* injunctions, in a non-Indic tunic and turban reiterates the importance of Mughal clothing in Vaishnava ritualism beyond the temple town of Vrindavan. Mughal clothes thus reconfigured the Vaishnava divine body into an Islamicate political body. The Bilaspur painting is hardly exceptional in its citation of Mughal material culture. Yet another example from 1770s Guler, a kingdom in north India, shows Krishna dallying with his consort Radha (Figure 1.8). Once again, Krishna is dressed in a *jama* designed by Akbar himself while the carpet bears Mughal textile motifs, attesting to a Guler attempt at reproducing the luxurious material culture of the Mughal court.

A closer attention to Krishna's dress in the Guler painting reveals that the tunic is tied to the right. Scholars, from B. N. Goswamy to Bernard Cohn, have argued that it was under Akbar that a strict order was passed which forced Muslims to tie the *jama* to the right while Hindus continued to tie it to the left, as had been traditionally done.<sup>115</sup>

Describing Muslim attire authorized under Akbar, Abu al-Fazl thus writes in the *A'in-i Akbari*: "Formerly it [the *jama*] had slits in the skirt, and was tied on the left side; his Majesty has ordered it to be made with a round skirt, and to be tied on the right side."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> As B. N. Goswamy writes: "He [Akbar] was conscious of the fact that it was socially important for the Hindus and the Muslims to be told at sight (since in many other respects it was now difficult to tell them apart), so that no awkwardnesses of any kind arise, no social *faux pas* are made." Goswamy and Krishna, *Indian Costumes in the Collection*, 15-16. Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 131.

<sup>116</sup> Abu al-Fazl, *The A'in-i Akbari* Vol. I, 87.

If indeed clothes became a framing device, a discourse to make the body socially visible, why did the artist/patron of the Guler painting transgress such sartorial codes? Why was Krishna dressed in a Mughal *jama* tied to the right?

In Vrindavan itself, enormous amounts of money were spent on the clothes of Gaudiya images. For example, in 1660, Kirat Singh, the son of the Kachhwaha monarch Jai Singh I (1611-1667), gave a large annual grant to the Govind Dev temple to buy clothes for the deity.<sup>117</sup> The detailed grant deed not only gives instructions on where the textiles should be procured from but also the types of clothes that should be offered to the deity. The insistence on silk fabrics, gold trimmings, and a *jama* with the turban and *izzar* for Govind Dev suggests that the two paintings that I discussed earlier were not arbitrary examples but part of a much larger sartorial culture to dress Gaudiya icons in the image of the Mughal ruler of India. As Vidya Dehejia writes: “The easy insertion of gods into the world of men, and the easy acceptance of such insertion by the patrons, reflected the permeability of the boundaries between the sacred and the worldly.”<sup>118</sup>

This movement of Krishna into the “world of men” was, however, not merely representational. From the 1540s onwards, the Gaudiya priests of Vrindavan had been purchasing large tracts of land in Braj with economic support from the Mughals and the Kachhwahas. By 1601, the priests of the Govind Dev temple owned over twelve gardens in Vrindavan itself.<sup>119</sup> However, the temple priests were not the owners of this enormous

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<sup>117</sup> Monika Thiel-Horstmann, *In Favor of Govinddevjī: Historical Documents Relating to a Deity of Vrindaban and Eastern Rajasthan* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1999), 127.

<sup>118</sup> Vidya Dehejia, *The Body Adorned: Dissolving Boundaries between Sacred and Profane in Indian Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 199.

<sup>119</sup> Irfan Habib, “A Documentary History of the Gosā’ins (Gosvāmīs) of the Caitanya Sect of Vṛndāvana,” in Case, ed. *Govindadeva*, 131-159, 144.

wealth but merely custodians or *adhikaris*. It was the deity, the specific icon, who had jurisdictional rights and was thus the recipient of all grants, the owner of property. The idea that icons, stone images, could operate as legal entities was hardly a new phenomenon within the Indic context. Gregory Schopen writes that by the 5<sup>th</sup> century Buddha images housed in monastic settings “were cognitively classified with the living Buddha, [as] if such stone Buddhas were actually thought to live in these establishments.”<sup>120</sup> Further, inscriptions and textual sources “contain explicit rules concerning the property and real wealth owned by this ‘person,’” the Buddha.<sup>121</sup> The corporeality and juristic personhood of the icon of Govind Dev, then, was hardly inconsistent with this tradition of embodied divinities. But what was inconsistent with earlier traditions was the fact that a monarch who could easily be integrated into Brahmanical cosmological systems no longer held worldly power. The Muslim monarch stood both outside the caste system and the complex structure of power hierarchies that framed a Vaishnava universe. The monarch no longer ruled in the name of Vishnu. Vishnu, to continue inhabiting the world of worldly governance, then had to become the *mleccha* (outcaste) monarch, an Islamicate king.

While the production of this Islamicate Krishna in the 16<sup>th</sup> century arose out of the transformations in the symbolic landscape of a north Indian polity, the Gaudiya impulse to associative themselves closely with the Mughals was further driven by sheer necessity. The huge wealth – gold, land, cash grants – that the Vrindavan temples had attracted led to innumerable disputes and convoluted legal battles over the control of

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<sup>120</sup> Gregory Schopen, “The Buddha as an Owner of Property and Permanent Resident in Medieval Indian Monasteries,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 18:3 (September 1990), 181-217, 203.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

resources. In most instances, it was the Mughal emperor who was called upon to arbitrate.<sup>122</sup> Conflicts over ritualistic practices were brought before the Mughal emperor as well. In 1634, the emperor Shah Jahan (1592-1666) personally intervened in a local conflict to allow the Madanmohan temple priests to reinstitute the practice of sounding the temple bell to mark the correct time for worship.<sup>123</sup> However, the Mughal emperors went beyond their role as adjudicators in case of conflict to intervene in the everyday management of temple properties in Vrindavan. Given that the Mughals provided the Gaudiya temples in the town with huge land grants, change in custodial temple ownership required royal authorization from the emperor.<sup>124</sup> Thus, rehearsing Mughal practices of kingship had become imperative for the Gaudiyas to survive in a context where contending Vaishnava sects constructed myths of pre-eminence centered on claims of familiarity with the Mughal throne.

If Gaudiyas mythologized their familiarity with the emperor through sartorial markings, architecture, and temple inscriptions, the Pushtimargis used hagiography as a strategy to invent this politics of the familiar. According to sectarian literature, Muralidhar, the great-grandson of Vallabha, once offered water to Akbar when the emperor was lost during a hunt. In gratitude, the emperor gave a number of land grants to the Pushtimarga temple of Srinathji in Govardhan, a small town twenty-one miles west of Vrindavan (See Map 1). Yet, other mythologies asserted the intimacy between Vitthalnatha, son of Vallabha, and Akbar. Not only did Akbar meet Vitthalnatha

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<sup>122</sup> Habib, "A Documentary History of the Gosā'ins (Gosvāmīs)," list a number of such conflicts in Vrindavan that were taken to the Mughal court.

<sup>123</sup> Mukherjee and Habib, "The Mughal Administration and the Temples of Vrindavan during the Reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan," 299.

<sup>124</sup> Thiel-Horstmann, *In Favor of Govinddevjī*, 6.

frequently but the priest had also purportedly given theological counsel to the monarch. In return, Akbar presented a large diamond to the icon of Srinathji in Govardhan, which was from then on used as a nose-ring for the icon (Figure 1.9).<sup>125</sup> Even if much of these, and similar, narratives were inserted into sectarian literature much later, Vitthalnatha's attempts to become close to the monarch certainly resulted in Akbar's proclamation that led to the eviction of the Gaudiyas from the temple of Srinathji at Govardhan in the 1540s.

Vitthalnatha was also responsible for introducing Mughal courtly rituals at the temple of Srinathji. These rituals became vital components of the everyday practices surrounding the body of the deity. For instance, a tunic offered to Srinathji by the priest was purportedly modeled on a robe of honor, a *khilat*, given to Vitthalnatha by Akbar himself (See Figure 1.9).<sup>126</sup> As Cohn notes: "By the sixteenth century in India, the term *khilat* came to involve the idea that a king, as a special honor, would take off his robe and put it on a subject."<sup>127</sup> Citing Francis William Buckler, Cohn further emphasizes: "Robes of Honour are symbols of some idea of continuity or succession [...] which rests on a physical basis, depending on the contact of the body of the recipient with the body of the donor through the medium of the clothing. Or, to put it rather differently, the donor includes the recipient within his own person through the medium of his wardrobe."<sup>128</sup>

The mustard *jama* with a saffron sash and a tight red lower garment worn by Srinathji

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<sup>125</sup> See Amit Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrinathji: Rajasthani Paintings from Nathdvara* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 1987) for a discussion on these myths.

<sup>126</sup> Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrinathji*, 46; Krishna, Talwar, and Goswamy, *In Adoration of Krishna*, 87.

<sup>127</sup> Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, 114.

<sup>128</sup> Francis William Buckler, "The Oriental Despot," *Anglican Theological Review* 10:3 (1927-1928), 238-249. Cited in Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, 114-115.

every year on the priest's birthday in December is depicted in innumerable *pichhwais*, paintings on textile hung behind the icon.<sup>129</sup> It was as if Srinathji was ceremoniously transformed from divinity to a divine political being, Akbar himself, through wearing the monarch's clothes, a corporeal embodiment of the monarch himself. The transformation of a Vaishnava deity into a Mughal monarch through an imagined act of touch, the transfer of worldly power through clothes, effaced, at least symbolically, the difference between the Vaishnava self and its *mleccha* outcaste Other. Srinathji then became Akbar.

In fact, the very idea of the *pichhwai* – a key element in the ritualistic worship of Srinathji – was derived from the Mughal court. The first mention of a painted *pichhwai* appears in Pushtimarga literature in 1739 when the priests of the Srinathji temple (by then the icon had moved to Nathadwara, Rajasthan) offered the deity a *pichhwai*.<sup>130</sup> By 1779, sectarian texts mention that *pichhwais* were used on at least twenty-five different occasions at the temple of Srinathji suggesting that the practice had already been made an integral part of temple service.<sup>131</sup> Textile banners usually painted with images of the deity, *pichhwais* were changed according to the particular day, season, and occasion. Hung behind the icon, the *pichhwai* was meant to mirror the actual clothes worn by the deity himself, making a representation of the icon visible to devotees who thronged the temple. The *pichhwai*, with its explicit iconographic programs, thus played an important role in aiding the devotee during the ritualistic beholding, the *darshan*, of the icon, by suggesting the specific mood or emotion of the viewing. For example, the *pichhwai* used

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<sup>129</sup> For the history of *pichhwais*, see Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrinathji* and Krishna, Talwar, and Goswamy, *In Adoration of Krishna*.

<sup>130</sup> Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrinathji*, 79.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.



on Vitthalnatha's birthday every year at the Srinathji temple presents the deity in a mustard *jama* with a necklace of stringed pearls and a peacock-feather crown, set against a blue background (See Figure 1.9).

Scholars writing on the origin of this practice have suggested that while the use of textiles within a temple space might have its source in the Mughal court, the painted figural *pichhwai* was a development from much older traditions, the backdrop used in Indian theatre.<sup>132</sup> Paintings from as early as ca. 600 CE depict the use of painted banners in ritualistic service.<sup>133</sup> As the 7<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese monk, scholar, and traveler Xuanzang reported, painted fabric banners were used on a regular basis in ceremonial processions in India. In Mathura itself, "jewelled banners" were used in Buddhist rituals during important festivities.<sup>134</sup> Perhaps, the *pichhwai* had its source in this early Indic tradition. But certainly a more plausible source for the *pichhwai* was the court of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. Representations of Shah Jahan's court in the 1657-1658 Windsor Castle *Pādshāhnāma*, the *Chronicle of the Emperor*, considered by scholars as an important visual document of Shah Jahan's courtly culture, provides us with a glimpse of the textiles used in the Mughal court.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Krishna, Talwar, and Goswamy, *In Adoration of Krishna*, 25.

<sup>133</sup> See John Guy and Jorrit Britschgi, *Wonder of the Age: Master Painters of India 1100-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), Figure 7. The illustration depicts a mural from the ca. 600 CE Buddhist cave complex at Kyzil in central Asia showing a painted textile banner being used in Buddhist liturgical practices.

<sup>134</sup> Beal, *Si-yu-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, 181.

<sup>135</sup> Milo C. Beach, Ebba Koch, and Wheeler Thackston, eds. *King of the World: The Padshahnama: An Imperial Mughal Manuscript from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle* (London: Azimuth Editions; Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 1997); Peter A. Andrews, "The Generous Heart or the Mass of Clouds: The Court Tents of Shah Jahan," *Muqarnas* 4 (1987), 149-65; Milo C. Beach, *The Grand Mogul: Imperial Painting in India 1600-1660* (Williamstown, Mass.: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1978).

A folio depicting Shah Jahan receiving his three sons during his accession ceremony shows the monarch enthroned at the Diwan-i ‘Amm, the public audience hall at the Agra Fort, a structure built during the first year of the monarch’s reign (Figure 1.10, Figure 1.11). The painting schematized through a pyramidal arrangement into distinct sections marks out the realm of the imperial family, the higher nobility, and beyond the gold railing, the less important dignitaries at the court. In front of Shah Jahan’s *jharoka*, an overhanging balcony used as a royal throne by the emperor, hangs a life-size painting of two *shaykhs* or religious figures attending a pole from which hangs the emperor’s bell of justice. The lions and the lamb further emphasize the idea that even animals lived peacefully during the reign of Shah Jahan – a visual allegory of Islamic kingship.<sup>136</sup>

Indeed, this image of Shah Jahan’s court was a visual expression of the monarch’s ideological program – a centralized system of governance where power was invested in the body of the king, Shah Jahan himself. As Ebba Koch notes: “The Shah-Jahani *jharoka* image differs from the earlier Jahangiri representation in that it organizes the figures into a composition of strict bilateral symmetry within the architecture. The same is true of the real court session, whose architectural setting was repeated by Shah-Jahan soon after his accession in 1628.”<sup>137</sup> Unlike his predecessors, Shah Jahan thus appears in strict imperial profile presiding over his nobility – an image of an absolute god-like power ruling from the *jharoka*, a throne set in an architectural device traditionally used

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<sup>136</sup> See Beach, Koch, and Thackston, eds. *King of the World* for a discussion on the image. My reading is greatly indebted to this text.

<sup>137</sup> Ebba Koch, “The Hierarchical Principles of Shah-Jahani Paintings,” in Beach, Koch, and Thackston, eds. *King of the World*, 131-143, 134.

for Hindu deities.<sup>138</sup> The *Pādshāhnāma*, the *Chronicle of the Emperor*, contains a number of folios that depict textile banners eulogizing the emperor placed on the wall below the throne chamber.

I suggest that perhaps it is this practice of using painted banners in the court of Shah Jahan as a visual tool to announce the monarch's idealized kingship that provided the model for *pichhwais* in Pushtimarga temples. Although the worship of paintings, *citra seva*, was introduced in Pushtimarga temples by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was only in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century that texts start discussing the use of large-scale *pichhwais* as part of everyday ritual service. One would then assume that the introduction of this practice in Pushtimarga temples occurred in the late 17<sup>th</sup> or the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, well after Shah Jahan made painted banners an integral part of his courtly visual culture, in fact well after Shah Jahan's death in 1666. This direct citation of Shah Jahan's courtly practices in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnava material culture, however, went beyond the *pichhwai*.

By the 1700s, innumerable paintings produced at the various regional courts of north India invariably posited Krishna wearing Mughal clothes in pavilions that emulated the distinctive architecture introduced by Shah Jahan in Agra, Lahore, and Delhi. Earlier in this section, I had discussed a 1770s Guler painting depicting Krishna with Radha (See Figure 1.8). Not only was Krishna dressed in a Mughal *jama* in the painting but the pillars of the pavilion were also based on Shah Jahan's architecture. Moving away from the now traditional Akbari style of red sandstone temples, Vaishnava architecture began to emulate Shah Jahan's pavilions, palaces, and audience halls. It was as if the association

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<sup>138</sup> See Catherine B. Asher, "Sub-Imperial Palaces: Power and Authority in Mughal India," *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993), 281-295 for a discussion on Mughal appropriations of the *jharoka*.

between the Mughals and the Vaishnava god had to be made deeper, more concrete. The urgency with which both the Gaudiyas and the Pushtimargis re-imagined Krishna in the 18<sup>th</sup> century suggests that something had radically changed in the larger north Indian polity. Perhaps it was Shah Jahan's death in 1666 and the subsequent political instability in north India that led to this transformation. By the 1680s, the important icons in Vrindavan had already left the town, allegedly escaping the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's (1618-1707) iconoclasm. I discuss this moment of upheaval, migrating icons, temple desecration, and an imagining of loss in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnavism in Section 2.

## 2. Imagining Loss: The Govind Dev temple (1590)

One of the most widely circulated images of the 1590 Govind Dev in Hindutva websites and blogs today is an 1857 photograph of the temple by the British photographer John Murray (1809-1898). Dr. Murray, a medical officer in the East India Company, had been introduced to photography around 1849, while stationed in Agra.<sup>139</sup> He then became one of the first photographers in India to systematically document Mughal monuments at Agra, Mathura, and Fatehpur Sikri. Murray's 1857 photograph of the Govind Dev presents a derelict temple with wild grass growing on the parapets and the roof (Figure 2.1). The temple was yet to be restored to its present condition by F. S. Growse, the Magistrate of the Mathura District. But what is striking about the photograph is the presence of a rather incongruous plain masonry wall on the roof of the *mandapa* – the pavilion in front of the sanctum. Not surprisingly, this peculiar wall, obviously a much later addition, has attracted both popular and scholarly attention from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

Growse, writing about the Govind Dev in 1873, was one of the first scholars to foreground local narratives that held the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb responsible for building the masonry wall. According to local legends, Aurangzeb had built the wall as a *qibla* wall, the structure that marks the direction of Mecca during prayer, to desecrate the sanctity of the temple. Growse also cited contradictory narratives – narratives that

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<sup>139</sup> For a brief biography of John Murray, see Sotheby's, *Early Photographs of India: The Archive of Dr. John Murray*, Auction Catalog Sale LO9311 (London: Sotheby's, June 18, 1999).

claimed that the masonry wall was in fact “put up by the Hindus themselves to assist in some grand illuminations.”<sup>140</sup>

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, colonial histories of the region had made the narrative of Aurangzeb desecrating the red sandstone temple central to an understanding of the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup>-century “decline” of Vrindavan. As an 1879 report by Richard S. Whiteway, an officer in the Mathura District, states: “He [Aurangzeb], bigotted Muhammadan as he was, was scandalized by the growth and impunity of the Hindu religion. He endeavoured to crush it by the destruction of the Kesava Rae temple (1669), and by defiling the great Gobind Deo [Dev] temple of Brindaban [Vrindavan] by building a prayer wall on its top.”<sup>141</sup> Published only six years after Growse’s *Mathurá, A District Memoir*, Whiteway’s text thus completely erased the ambiguity that Growse had so delicately woven together in his narrative. The wall on the roof of the Govind Dev was, according to Whiteway, only symptomatic of the Mughal emperor’s bigotry and intolerance.

While the origin of this narrative of Aurangzeb desecrating the Govind Dev and building a *qibla* wall on its roof can thus be traced to colonial history writing, the narrative continues to remain entrenched in scholarly texts, popular literature, guidebooks, and oral histories today. The priests at Govind Dev routinely direct the visitor’s attention to the havoc wreaked on the temple by Aurangzeb while almost all writings on Vrindavan, without fail, mark Aurangzeb’s religious policies as directly

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<sup>140</sup> Growse, *Mathurá*, 243.

<sup>141</sup> Richard S. Whiteway, *Report on the Settlement of the Muttra District, North-Western Provinces* (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces and Oudh Government Press, 1879), 10.

responsible for the “loss” in the town’s cultural efflorescence. Jadunath Sarkar, one of the first historians to address the reign of the emperor, writes:

Meantime Aurangzib [Aurnagzeb] had begun to give free play to his religious bigotry. In April, 1669 he ordered the provincial governors earliest ‘destroy the temples and schools of the Brahmans [...] and to utterly put down the teachings and religious practices of the infidels.’[...] The Vishwanath temple at Benares was pulled down in September 1669. The grandest shrine of Mathura, Kesav Rai’s temple [...] was razed to the ground in January, 1670, and a mosque built on its site. ‘The idols were brought to Agra and buried under the steps of Jahanara’s mosque that they might be constantly trodden on’ by the Muslims going in to pray. The smaller religious buildings that suffered havoc were beyond count. [...] On 2nd April, 1679, the jazia or poll-tax on non-Muslims was revived. The poor people who appealed to the Emperor and blocked a road abjectly crying for its remission, were trampled down by elephants at his order and dispersed. [...] A rebellion broke out among the peasants in Rewari (December, 1669), another near Mathura under Gokla Jat (January, 1670), and the Satnamis or Mundias rose near Narnol (March and April, 1672), and it taxed the Imperial power seriously to exterminate these 5000 stubborn peasants, fighting for church and home.<sup>142</sup>

This image of Aurangzeb was hardly Sarkar’s construction. In innumerable 19<sup>th</sup>-century texts by British Orientalists (for example Horace H. Wilson), Christian missionaries (for example Matthew A. Sherring), and archaeologists (for example Alexander Cunningham), Aurangzeb had been repeatedly portrayed as a temple-desecrating Muslim ruler who, because of his religious conservatism, had affronted large

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<sup>142</sup>Jadunath Sarkar, *Anecdotes of Aurangzib and Historical Essays* (Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar & Sons, 1917), 11-13.

sections of India's Hindu population.<sup>143</sup> And it was this affront that led to innumerable rebellions, finally culminating in the decline of the Mughal empire. If the 19<sup>th</sup>-century imperial project of demonizing Aurangzeb facilitated an argument for the British liberation of India from Muslim despotism, early 20<sup>th</sup>-century (Hindu) nationalism reiterated this argument to consolidate a narrative of pre-Islamic civilizational values. This trajectory, along with the political implications of its manifestations today, is a project well beyond this dissertation.

In a post-1992, 9/11 context, more virulent Hindu claims on the temples of Vrindavan have situated Aurangzeb's purported temple desecration in Vrindavan within a larger field of global Islamic "terror." In a text published within one year of 9/11, Prafull Goradia, a former member of the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian Parliament, claimed: "As a pious Muslim would have done his ultimate duty to Allah if he could get every human being to *tasleem* or accept His will. In the process, he might have to desecrate, fight or even kill."<sup>144</sup> Goradia's *Hindu Masjids*, a 2002 text "documenting" Muslim desecration of temples in India, is merely symptomatic of innumerable such books, pamphlets, and websites that consistently create a genealogy of the "bad Muslim" in contemporary India through Aurangzeb's wanton destruction of temples in Vrindavan and elsewhere.<sup>145</sup> Writing on the Govind Dev, Goradia thus notes: "The temple today is 55 feet tall. Before its upper part was destroyed on Aurangzeb's orders in anticipation of

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<sup>143</sup> Alexander Cunningham, *An Essay on the Arian Order of Architecture as Exhibited in the Temples of Kashmir* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1848); Horace H. Wilson, *A Manual of Universal History and Chronology* (London: Whittaker and Company, 1835); Matthew A. Sherring, *The Sacred City of the Hindus: An Account of Benares in Ancient and Modern Times* (London: Trübner and Company, 1868).

<sup>144</sup> Prafull Goradia, *Hindu Masjids* (New Delhi: Contemporary Targett Prafull, 2002), 7.

<sup>145</sup> For a theorization on the figure of the "bad Muslim," see Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2004).



his visit to Vrindavan in 1670 AD, the *mandir* [temple] was reputed to be twice that height. On its roof, after the destruction, a *mehrab* [sic] or prayer wall was erected and the iconoclastic emperor offered *namaaz* [prayers].”<sup>146</sup>

Of course, scholars have noted that this insidious argument, born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and still circulating today through popular literature, the Internet, and pilgrimage narratives recounted at Vrindavan itself, remains indefensible on empirical grounds. The wall on the roof of the Govind Dev photographed by John Murray ran east to west. Given this orientation, it could not have marked the direction towards Mecca. As George Michell suggests, perhaps the wall was built as a watchtower in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, a time of immense conflict in the region.<sup>147</sup> Writing on Aurangzeb’s purported bigotry, scholars, for instance Richard Eaton and Catherine Asher, have also suggested that we read Aurangzeb’s temple destruction in Mathura and Varanasi as a political strategy of punitive action to suppress rebellions against the Mughal throne.<sup>148</sup>

Take, for instance, Aurangzeb’s 1666 removal of a stone railing at the Keshavdev temple, Mathura, a railing sponsored by his brother Dara Shukoh. The removal of the railing may well be read as an attempt by the emperor to assert his pre-eminence in the region. Only a few years earlier, Aurangzeb had executed Dara during a struggle for the Mughal throne. In 1670, the Keshavdev temple was destroyed and a mosque built in its place. In the very same year, the icon of Srinathji was removed from Govardhan. By 1671, Govind Dev too left Vrindavan. Indeed, by the 1680s, almost all the important

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<sup>146</sup> Goradia, *Hindu Masjids*, 11.

<sup>147</sup> George Michell “The Missing Sanctuary,” in Case, ed. *Govindadeva*, 116.

<sup>148</sup> Catherine B. Asher, *The New Cambridge History of India, I: 4 The Architecture of Mughal India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Richard M. Eaton, “Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States,” in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, eds. *Beyond Turk and Hindu*, 246-281.

Gaudiya icons in Vrindavan, including Madanmohan, Gopinath, and Jugal Kishore, migrated to Rajasthan. Not surprisingly, Aurangzeb's purported temple desecration in Vrindavan is considered to provide the impetus for this migration. As R. Nath writes:

In consequence of this [April 1669] decree, the destruction of Hindu temples began and the Kṛṣṇa temples of the Vraja [Braj] region were among the first targets. The priests had no alternative but to leave their respective temples in each case, and save their deity. [...] The great temple of Govindadeva fell victim to iconoclastic vandalism within a year of the decree. Its inner sanctum — which contained the deity and was, therefore, its most important part — and its superstructure were almost entirely destroyed.<sup>149</sup>

I, on the other hand, suggest that Aurangzeb was not responsible for the desecration of even one single temple in Vrindavan. While the monarch's biographer, Muhammad Saqi Musta'idd Khan, explicitly mentions Aurangzeb's orders to destroy temples in Mathura, Varanasi, Udaipur, and Bijapur, no Mughal texts mention temple desecration in Vrindavan.<sup>150</sup> On the contrary, not only did Aurangzeb endorse land grants given by his predecessors to Gaudiya temples in the town but personally intervened in resolving property disputes between priests of the Govind Dev, the very temple he purportedly destroyed in the 1670s.<sup>151</sup> Further, in 1706 the priests of the Radharaman temple complained to the Mughal throne that the Govind Dev priests had illegally

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<sup>149</sup> R. Nath, "Śrī Govindadeva's Itinerary: From Vṛndāvana to Jayapura, c. 1534-1727," in Case, ed. *Govindadeva*, 160-183, 163-164.

<sup>150</sup> Muhammad Saqi Musta'idd Khan, *Maāsir-i-Ālamgiri: A History of The Emperor Aurangzib-Ālamgir (reign 1658-1707 A.D.) of Sāqi Must'ad Khan*, trans. Jadunath Sarkar (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1947).

<sup>151</sup> Translations of these grants are reproduced in R. A. Alavi, "The Temples of Vrindavan and their priests during the reign of Aurangzeb," (1988) Unpublished essay archived at Center of Advanced Study Research Library, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University.

occupied land belonging to their temple.<sup>152</sup> Subsequently, the Mughal emperor offered to send his officers to Vrindavan to resolve the issue. Similarly, Entwistle discusses Aurangzeb's involvement in custodial conflicts over a number of Pushtimarga icons in Braj. In a particular 1662 conflict, Aurangzeb provided military support to a priest to reclaim an icon that had been smuggled out of Braj to Ahmedabad, Gujarat.<sup>153</sup> These acts of intercessions in the management of temple properties in Braj contradicts late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century contentions that Aurangzeb's April 1669 decree "to demolish the schools and temples of the infidels" so as to "put down the teaching and the public practice of the religion of these misbelievers" led to the systematic destruction of Hindu temples in India.<sup>154</sup>

A number of other imperial grants issued by Aurangzeb himself also suggest that the emperor continued to take an active interest in temple management in Vrindavan even after issuing the now infamous April 1669 decree.<sup>155</sup> The decree censoring "public practice" of Hinduism then had no correlation to the everyday practices of the Mughal court. Even as Aurangzeb forbade the "public practice" of Hinduism in north India, he continued to intervene in temple disputes in Vrindavan while making endowments to temples in Arail, Varanasi, Ujjain, and Chitrakut. The erasure of this history, Aurangzeb's participation in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century world of Vaishnavism, is then part of a systematic suppression that reconstitutes the figure of the Muslim, the "bad Muslim," through foundational acts of violence. Spivak, writing on the making of the colonial

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<sup>152</sup>Habib, "A Documentary History of the Gosā'ins," 142.

<sup>153</sup> Entwistle, *Braj*, 183.

<sup>154</sup> Khan, *Maāsir-i-Ālamgiri*, 52.

<sup>155</sup> Mathura Documents (1598-1889), Private Papers, NAI. A few of these grants are reproduced in Alavi, "The Temples of Vrindavan."

subject as the Other of Europe, asserts: “This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity.”<sup>156</sup> One could very easily talk today of the Muslim as “that Other” of (Indian) history: the “obliteration of the trace” of the Muslim Other in India’s “precarious Subject-ivity.”

Yet, if Aurangzeb was not responsible for the desecration of the Vrindavan temples, why did so many icons migrate westward in the 1670s, immediately after the monarch’s order to destroy the Keshavdev temple in Mathura as an act of punitive action? A 1695 land dispute document informs us that the divinities of Vrindavan “disturbed due the Jat uprising, had fled from that area and had gone into Rajput territory.”<sup>157</sup> Yet, another land deed from 1721 informs us that “the tumult raised by the wretched Jāṭas [Jats],” “*khilā-i jāṭ-i-bad-zāt*,” led to disturbances in Vrindavan.<sup>158</sup> Both Irfan Habib and R. A. Alavi have reproduced a number of documents from the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that demonstrate that a series of rebellions by the Jat agricultural community settled around the river Yamuna to protest increasing Mughal taxation led to landowners migrating from Vrindavan.<sup>159</sup> In January 1670, a Jat rebellion in Mathura significantly disrupted the economies of the region. In the same year, Aurangzeb destroyed the Keshavdev temple in Mathura.

However, the 1670 Jat uprising was hardly the only instance of rebellion in the region. From 1685 onwards, the Jats had become a power to reckon with in Braj. Given that Aurangzeb was occupied with his south Indian campaigns from the 1680s, Jat

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<sup>156</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 266.

<sup>157</sup> Alavi, “The Temples of Vrindavan,” 320.

<sup>158</sup> Habib, “A Documentary History of the Gosā’ins,” 140.

<sup>159</sup> Alavi, “The Temples of Vrindavan” and Habib, “A Documentary History of the Gosā’ins.”

landowners in Braj, for example Rajaram, a landlord from Sinsini, an estate close to Vrindavan, took the opportunity to gain control of large tracts of land. Looting imperial convoys, attacking villages under Mughal control, and extorting travelers, the Jat uprisings resulted in a collapse of law and order in the region.

In 1688, Aurangzeb made the Kachhwaha monarch Bishan Singh (r. 1688-1699) the military commander of Mathura in order to reinstate peace in Braj. The consequent 1690 battle between the Mughal army led by Bishan Singh and Rajaram led to the defeat of the Jats. A few years later, the Jats, this time under Rajaram's younger brother Churaram, began yet another campaign to resist the Mughal-Kachhwaha domination of Braj. By 1713, Churaram was acknowledged as the ruler of the region by the Mughal emperor Farrukh Siyar (r. 1713-1719). It was under Churaram that the Jat kingdom of Bharatpur was established – a kingdom that subsequently became an important presence in the regional politics of Braj. The movement of the icons to western Indian kingdoms in today's Rajasthan and the desecration of the Govind Dev, then, have to be situated within this Mughal-Kachhwaha-Jat contestation over the control of Braj.

Although the priests of the Govind Dev, along with the icons of the temple, “fled” from Vrindavan in 1670 to escape the Jats, a few priests did return to the town in 1675 to reclaim land that had been illegally usurped when the temple was abandoned.<sup>160</sup> By then, the icon of Govind Dev had safely moved into Kachhwaha territory and was, by 1713, in the royal capital of Amber. Yet, by 1700, worship at the Govind Dev in Vrindavan was

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<sup>160</sup> Habib, “A Documentary History of the Gosā'ins,” 157.

reinstated with a substitute image in the sanctum.<sup>161</sup> Not only was the temple in use by 1700, but land deeds also reveal that the Govind Dev in Vrindavan had started receiving large endowments, once again, in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. And if Aurangzeb had desecrated the Govind Dev, why did he not level the temple to the ground like the Keshavdev in Mathura and the Kashi Vishwanath in Varanasi and build a mosque in its place? Given that the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were marked by bitter contestations between the Jats and the Kachhwahas over control of Braj, it is more likely that it was the Jat landlords of the region who were responsible for the desecration of the temple at a later date. Govind Dev continued to receive land grants until the 1730s, after which the temple seems to have been abandoned.<sup>162</sup> This makes the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century a more probable date for the desecration of the temple.

George Michell further corroborates a mid-18<sup>th</sup>-century date for the desecration of the Govind Dev. Michell writes:

Almost all scholars who have commented on the damage caused to Govindadeva have assumed that the sanctuary was dismantled at the orders of Aurangzeb. But we must be careful to distinguish what happened at Vṛndāvana from the catastrophies at Mathurā and Vārāṇasī, where shrines were totally demolished. We can be confident that if Aurangzeb had wished to pull down Govindadeva he had the means to do so, and virtually nothing would now remain for us to observe. Indeed, other than the missing sanctuary and the relatively small amount of

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<sup>161</sup> Both Habib, “A Documentary History of the Gosā’ins” and Thiel-Horstmann, *In Favor of Govinddevjī* reproduce grants to the temple from 1700 onwards. By the 1720s, along with Govind Dev, Madanmohan, and Gopinath, other important Gaudiya icons from Vrindavan including Gokulnath and Gokulchandrama also moved into Kachhwaha territory (the only exception being Jugal Kishore which moved to the kingdom of Panna in today’s Madhya Pradesh).

<sup>162</sup> Thiel-Horstmann, *In Favor of Govinddevjī*.

vandalism detected in the jagmohana [*mandapa*, hall in front of sanctum] doorway, Govindadeva is relatively intact.”<sup>163</sup>

The strategic destruction of only the sanctum with its superstructure and the defacing of architectural sculpture adorning the temple walls then perhaps suggest a deliberate Jat attempt at defiling the sacrality of the temple (Figure 2.2).

Quoting from Varahamihira’s 6<sup>th</sup>-century CE *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, scholars such as Finbarr B. Flood and Richard Eaton have argued that the destruction of temples in pre-Islamic India was synonymous with the symbolic demise of the patron king.<sup>164</sup> As the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* asserts: “If a Śiva linga, image, or temple breaks apart, moves, sweats, cries, speaks, or otherwise acts with no apparent cause, this warns of destruction of the king and his territory.”<sup>165</sup> By 1633, the Govind Dev had become an exemplary Kachhwaha royal shrine with Shah Jahan transferring the ownership of the temple to the Kachhwaha monarch Jai Singh I.<sup>166</sup> Given the intimate association between the Kachhwahas, the icon of Govind Dev, and the Vrindavan temple, the desecration of the Govind Dev can then be read as a conscious Jat strategy to humiliate the Kachhwahas. By destroying the sanctum, Jat landlords thus challenged the political and cultural suzerainty of the Kachhwahas in Braj. This act of violence was embedded in a larger pre-Islamic culture of temple desecration as a performance of political power. As Eaton writes:

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<sup>163</sup> George Michell “The Missing Sanctuary,” in Case, ed. *Govindadeva*, 115-122, 120-121.

<sup>164</sup> Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu- Muslim” Encounter* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009); Eaton, “Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim State.”

<sup>165</sup> *The Bṛhatsaṃhitā of Varaha Mihira*, trans. N. Chidambaram Iyer (Madurai: South Indian Press, 1884), 190. As cited in Eaton, “Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim State,” 255.

<sup>166</sup> Mukherjee and Habib, “The Mughal Administration and the Temples of Vrindavan during the Reigns of Jahangir,” 290.

In short, from about the sixth century on, images and temples associated with dynastic authority were considered politically vulnerable. Given these perceived connections between temples, images, and their royal patrons, it is hardly surprising that early medieval Indian history abounds in instances of temple desecration that occurred amidst inter-dynastic conflicts.<sup>167</sup>

On the other hand, the defacing of Govind Dev's figural sculptures was a more complex political move. In pre-Islamic India, the predominant paradigm of political confrontation through acts of desecration was the looting of an opponent's temple. However, along with the desecration of temples, one also finds instances of sculptures looted in war, which were then displayed in the conqueror's capital city. Given that these sculptures were imbued with life, it was only natural for looted images to be re-sacralized and worshipped in palaces and royal temples.<sup>168</sup> Scholars thus see the act of defacing anthropomorphic images of Hindu deities in conquered territories as indicative of a post-12<sup>th</sup>-century Islamic practice of iconoclasm in India.

Finbarr Flood argues that even as Islamic practices of image desecration drew from an earlier Indic language of violence to produce a system of royal legitimization, the defacing of anthropomorphic sculpture on temple walls was a moment of rupture from these earlier practices. He suggests that the selective defacement of deities by Muslim rulers has to be situated within a "historiographic tradition in which iconoclasm was a defining act of a newly emergent religion."<sup>169</sup> Flood further writes:

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<sup>167</sup> Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim State," 255.

<sup>168</sup> See Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) for this history.

<sup>169</sup> Flood, *Objects of Translation*, 156.



The alteration of anthropomorphic imagery is the closest one gets to a monolithic iconoclasm. Invariably concentrated on the most affective aspects of the images — their face and eyes — these alterations conform to the spirit and letter of proscriptions on figuration in Islam and to iconoclastic practice in other areas of the medieval Islamic world.<sup>170</sup>

If indeed image desecration in post-12<sup>th</sup>-century India has to be contextualized within this new “historiographic tradition” of Islamic textual injunctions, how then does one discuss the desecration of images of Krishna by the Vaishnava Jat landlords of Braj? How does one explain the Jat desecration of the primary temple dedicated to their own tutelary deity, Govind Dev? While representations of humans, perhaps devotees, on the exterior walls of the temple were untouched; it was the face of Krishna and his consort Radha within the temple sanctum that was meticulously chiseled out (Figure 2.3, Figure 2.4). The precision with which the faces of the deities were dismembered suggests that this was hardly an act of wanton destruction. To understand better the logic behind the desecration of the sculpture of Krishna and Radha on the Govind Dev, I suggest that we return to the image as a living force, an animate being.

Much has been written on the elaborate ceremony of the establishment of life, *prana pratishtha*, through which sculptures were, and still are, brought to life.<sup>171</sup> A key element in the ceremony was the opening of the deity’s eye. It was through the ritual of the marking of the pupils of the eyes on the image (*netronmilanam*) that the deity was brought alive. And, if stone sculptures could be brought alive through a ritualized

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>171</sup> For example, see Diana L. Eck, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg: Anima Books, 1981).

opening of the eye, the life-imbued sculpture could also be put to a ritualized death through a careful obliteration of the face. A plethora of texts including the 6<sup>th</sup>-century *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* assert that the damaging of an icon leads to the life force, the *prana*, of the deity leaving the stone body. Acts of desecration within the Indic context then have to be situated within indigenous conceptualizations of the mortality of the divine body and its intimate connection with the patron's well-being. As the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* states: "If the image be wounded the master will die by weapons. If the left side of the image be bent, the master's wife will suffer, and if the right side be bent, the master will meet with early death."<sup>172</sup>

Let me cite two arbitrary examples from pre-Islamic India merely to hint at the long genealogy of this language of violence. A number of 10<sup>th</sup>-century Buddhist images from eastern India show Buddhist gods trampling on Brahmanical and Jain deities. For example, a 10<sup>th</sup>-century sculpture of the Buddhist god Trailokyavijaya, the conqueror of the three worlds, from Bodh Gaya shows the god trampling on Siva and his consort Uma.<sup>173</sup> It is no coincidence that Trailokyavijaya's foot strategically obliterates Siva's face as a symbolic gesture of taking Siva's life (Figure 2.5).<sup>174</sup> In other narratives, it was Saivas, the worshippers of Siva, who beheaded Jain images. In a ca. 1200 CE inscription from Ablur, a town in Karnataka, one reads of Ekantada Rama, a Saiva ascetic,

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<sup>172</sup>*The Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, 85.

<sup>173</sup> See Robert N. Linrothe, *Ruthless Compassion: Wrathful Deities in Early Indo-Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist Art* (London: Serindia, 1999) for a discussion on the image.

<sup>174</sup> Scholars, for example Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, have situated the development of this particular eastern Indian Buddhist iconography of defacing Hindu deities within a Brahmanical-Buddhist conflict in the region. Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India: Archaeology, Texts, and Historical Issues* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003).

beheading a Jain sculpture as an act of vengeance.<sup>175</sup> By 1000 CE, acts of defacing images had become part of a ubiquitous language of political confrontation, albeit rhetorical, that transcended sectarian and religious boundaries, as the two examples – one textual and one visual – make obvious. The desecration of the Govind Dev by the Vaishnava Jat landlords of Braj then has to be situated within this larger system of violence that went beyond religious allegiances.

In 18<sup>th</sup>-century north India, however, the Mughal desecration of Hindu icons provided a more immediate and powerful paradigm, a consummate model of political action, for the Jats landlords in Braj. Jahangir had no hesitation in desecrating a sculpture of Varaha, the boar-headed incarnation of Vishnu, in a temple at the pilgrimage site of Pushkar, which had been patronized by the uncle of the monarch of Mewar, an enemy of the Mughal throne.<sup>176</sup> The Jats' direct adversary Aurangzeb had destroyed the Keshavdev in Mathura and allegedly destroyed the images in the sanctum.<sup>177</sup> While certainly such acts of image desecration by the Mughals had its sanctions from within Islamic textual traditions, these acts could be rendered legible, made comprehensible for non-Muslim audiences in the subcontinent, only because of a larger indigenous history of image desecration.

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<sup>175</sup> As the inscription states: "He [Ekantada Rama] fell on it [the Jain image] like a thunderbolt from a clear sky, and broke the head of the Jina. Just as a wild elephant in rut plunges into a grove of plantain-trees, and, though alone, sweeps everything away before him, so he, putting forth his strength, scattered the heroes who guarded it, and the horses, and the chieftains, and, while the opposing ranks of the Jains, crying out that Mari (the goddess of plague or death) had come upon them, were running away in flight, he beat the Jina till it fell; and there he made them accept the holy Vira-Somesa." John F. Fleet, "Inscriptions at Ablur," *Epigraphia Indica* Vol. V (1898-1899), 213-265, 256.

<sup>176</sup> *The Tūzuk-i-Jahāngīrī; or, Memoirs of Jahangir*, trans. Alexander Rogers Vol. I (London: London Royal Asiatic Society, 1909), 254.

<sup>177</sup> As Muhammad Saqī Mustā'idd Khan's *Maāsir-i-Ālamgiri* states: "The idols, large and small, set with costly jewels, which had been set up in the temple, were brought to Agra, and buried under the steps of the mosque of the Begam Sahib, in order to be continually trodden upon." Khan, *Maāsir-i-Ālamgiri*, 60.

Given that the Jat landlords of Braj rehearsed practices of Mughal kingship, not only within a conceptual framework, but in vocabulary as well to produce, rather paradoxically, an anti-Mughal political force in the region; it was not surprising that their desecration of the Govind Dev drew on this very language of violence embedded in Mughal politics. This is not to suggest that the Jat desecration of the Govind Dev is reducible to a language of Mughal iconoclasm but rather that both Mughal iconoclasm in India and the Jat desecration of the Govind Dev were singular instances of violence that aimed to participate in a larger subcontinental language of violence. The fact that the Jats desecrated a temple dedicated to their own tutelary deity bears testimony to the fact that image desecration in pre-colonial India remained ingrained within political practices – practices of the ideological within the religious. Given that the Govind Dev had been built under Mughal-Kachhwaha patronage, it was not surprising that the Jats chose to desecrate that specific temple, in effect challenging the suzerainty of the Mughals in the region. Image desecration was thus embedded, over and again, in a language of political confrontation in contestations between Hindus and Muslims, Hindus and Jains, Muslims and Jains.

The violation of the Govind Dev was just one of many instances of late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup>- century desecration carried out by the Jats. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the rulers of Bharatpur, the Jat kingdom established by Churaram, defiled the tomb of Akbar at Sikandra. Much like the desecration of the Govind Dev, the act of damaging the monarch's tomb was a challenge to Mughal political suzerainty through defiling the sacrality of the tomb. Robert Hillenbrand writes: "The notion that the tomb of a saint, a

descendant of an *imam* (*imamzada*), a martyr or a *mujahid* was a source of sanctity had wide repercussions.”<sup>178</sup> Within the Indic context, tombs of Mughal emperors were also considered to be a source of sanctity. Not only did inscriptions on the façade of Akbar’s tomb compare the space to “the garden of Eden,” but several members of the royal family had also asked to be buried in the tomb.<sup>179</sup> It was as if through proximity to the monarch’s sarcophagus, one could obtain divine blessings or *baraka*. It was this sacrality, the *baraka* of Akbar’s tomb, that the Jats attempted to violate, reiterating further that ritualized desecration was not restricted to Hindu temples alone. Rather, it was part of a language of violence rooted in Indic notions of embodiment that transcended sectarian boundaries.

Yet, even as much of the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were marked by relentless political conflict not only in Vrindavan, but also in much of north India, Vrindavan remained an important pilgrimage town for larger Vaishnava constituencies. Even though important Gaudiya icons had left Vrindavan by the 1700s, temples continued to be built in the town through the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, by the 1750s, a new vocabulary of temple architecture was invented in the region. Moving away from the 16<sup>th</sup>-century vocabulary of Vrindavan, Vaishnava architecture in the 18<sup>th</sup> century began to emulate Shah Jahan’s pavilions, palaces, and audience halls. I turn to this new temple typology in the next section to argue that the 18<sup>th</sup> century political flux necessitated a new model of architecture practice. It was as if the association between the Mughals and the

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<sup>178</sup> Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function, and Meaning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 266.

<sup>179</sup> Asher, *The Architecture of Mughal India*, 109-110.

Vaishnava god needed to be made deeper, more concrete after Aurangzeb's death in 1707.

### 3. Towards an 18<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnava architecture

“Disturbed” by the Jat uprising of 1670, the icon of the Govind Dev temple in Vrindavan had fled from the town in 1671.<sup>180</sup> After a long peripatetic journey, the icon reached the Kachhwaha capital of Amber in 1713. A new temple complex was built for the icon in a valley below Amber. Named Kanak (golden) Vrindavan, the new temple complex with Mughal-style four-part garden (*chahar bagh*), water channels, and a temple to Govind Dev, was seen by contemporaneous Kachhwaha court biographers as “even more beautiful than the original Vrindavan” (Figure 3.1).<sup>181</sup> However, by 1735, the icon moved yet again – this time to Jaipur, the Kachhwaha capital built by Jai Singh I in 1727 (Figure 3.2). As scholars have noted, the Govind Dev temple in Jaipur was distinctively different from earlier Gaudiya temples built in the style of Akbar’s capital at Sikri.<sup>182</sup> Modeled on the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan’s public audience halls in Delhi, Agra, and Lahore, the new temple in Jaipur was a flat-roofed single-storied structure with a façade constituted through repeating arched colonnades (Figure 3.3). The sanctum, with its cusped arches, was strikingly similar to Shah Jahan’s *jharokas*, for example the royal throne in the Diwan-i ‘Amm, the public audience hall at the Agra Fort (See Figure 1.11).

While the citation of Mughal architecture in creating a Vaishnava architecture had become common practice by the 1590s, the Jaipur Govind Dev was exceptional in its lack of a *sikhara*, the towering superstructure over the temple sanctum symbolizing

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<sup>180</sup> See Section 2 for a discussion on the Jat uprisings of the 1670s and the 1680s.

<sup>181</sup> Atmaram, in his 1770 biography of Jai Singh I, writes “*kinhāū vṛndāvana tāī sarasa vam, dāvana tāī.*” Cited in Monika Thiel-Horstmann, “Govinddevji of Vrindaban and Jaipur and its Kachvāhā Patrons from the Mid-Seventeenth to the Mid-Eighteenth Century,” in Alan W. Entwistle and Françoise Malleson, eds. *Studies in South Asian Devotional Literatures: Research Papers 1989-91* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994), 82-93, 86. Translation mine.

<sup>182</sup> Catherine B. Asher, “Amber and Jaipur: Temples in a Changing State,” in Giles Tillotson, ed. *Stones in the Sand: The Architecture of Rajasthan* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2001), 68-77.

Mount Meru, the divine residence of the gods. Yet, it was common knowledge that temples were supposed to have *sikharas*, a fact ascertained by innumerable religious and architecture treatises and uninterrupted building practices that could be traced back to as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. As Ernest B. Havell writes: “The form of the *sikhara* lent itself well for enshrining the image of Vishnu in his especial character as the Upholder of the Heavens, for then he is always standing rigidly upright, his body forming the mystic Mount Meru round which the universe revolves. He is armed with the weapons of an Aryan chieftain, and on his high-peaked crown, the form of which is repeated by the *sikhara*, flash the three sun jewels, marking sunrise, noon, and sunset.”<sup>183</sup>

Even as Havell, and much of later scholarship on Hindu temple architecture, associate the *sikhara* with the image of a monarchical Vishnu holding up the heavens, Catherine B. Asher suggests that the lack of a *sikhara* on the Jaipur Govind Dev has to be explained through the Kachhwaha assertion of Govind Dev being the rightful ruler of Jaipur.<sup>184</sup> Jai Singh’s royal seal further reiterated the political suzerainty of the icon by stating that the Kachhwahas had taken shelter at the feet of the icon. By housing Govind Dev in a Mughal-style colonnaded pavilion, a *baradari*, the Kachhwahas emphasized their allegiance to the Mughal throne through an architectural metaphor that made the Mughals a source of symbolic legitimacy and, ultimately, power. This new architectural metaphor was then in keeping with much of contemporaneous Vaishnava practices that drew on Mughal cultural forms to create a new visual language of power – a history that I delineate in the earlier sections of the dissertation.

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<sup>183</sup> Ernest B. Havell, *A Handbook of Indian Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1920), 61.

<sup>184</sup> Asher, “Amber and Jaipur: Temples in a Changing State,” 76-77.



Yet, equally important was the attempt to transform Jaipur into a new Vrindavan, “even more beautiful than the original Vrindavan.” In Section 2, I suggested that, by the 1730s, the Kachhwaha domination of Braj was challenged by local Jat landlords, eventually leading to the Jat desecration of the Govind Dev in Vrindavan. The consecration of Govind Dev in Jaipur was simultaneous to the Kachhwaha loss of political and moral authority in Braj. By the 1720s, four other key Gaudiya icons from Vrindavan, including Gopinath and Madanmohan (later moved to Karauli, Rajasthan), had made Jaipur their new home. It was as if through the icons’ inhabitation of Jaipur that the newly built Kachhwaha capital would become as sacred as Vrindavan itself. Atmaram, a Kachhwaha court biographer, describes the city in 1770 as a beautiful garden where Krishna roamed “ever-blissful.”

There there were the bowers of *karīl* which were covered by creepers,  
Here there were the lush *maulisirī* creepers.  
There there roamed, his body wrapped in a blanket,  
Solitary by himself the Ever-blissful with the cattle.<sup>185</sup>

The suggestion that even in Jaipur Krishna roamed in gardens resplendent with *karil* (wild capers, *capparis aphyll*) and *maulisiri* creepers (commonly known as *bakul*, *mimusops elengi*), plants associated with Vrindavan and Krishna worship, rendered Jaipur legible within a familiar language of Vaishnava poetic metaphors. The creation of this new Vrindavan in the Kachhwaha capital of Jaipur was simultaneous to the loss of Kachhwaha suzerainty in the original Vrindavan. The presence of a number of Gaudiya icons in the city thus marked Jaipur’s topos as this new Vrindavan.

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<sup>185</sup> Cited in Thiel-Horstmann, “Govinddevji of Vrindaban and Jaipur,” 86.

The architecture of these new temples was, however, far removed from the red sandstone temples of Vrindavan with their octagonal *sikharas*. For instance, inspired by Shah Jahan's palaces, the new Gopinath temple in Jaipur, much like the new Govind Dev, was flat-roofed (Figure 3.4). Both the Govind Dev and the Gopinath, a temple built in the 1730s, shared a visual language that included a recessed sanctum set within an enclosed circumambulatory path.<sup>186</sup> While the triple-arched façade of the Gopinath had its inspiration in Shah Jahan's structures at the Agra fort, for example the Nagina mosque, the embellishments including the *bangla* roof, a distinctive Mughal roof typology derived from Bengal's vernacular architecture, and intricate floral patterns was a direct citation of the monarch's ca. 1648 imperial throne in the Diwan-i 'Amm, the public audience hall of the Shahjahanabad palace in Delhi (Figure 3.5, Figure 3.6).

Further, the walls of the *mandapa*, the pavilion in front of the sanctum, were decorated with Mughal-style niches with cusped arches while bulbous baluster columns introduced by Shah Jahan and used exclusively for royal architecture marked the circumambulatory passage.<sup>187</sup> Within a Mughal context, these columns served as a reference to the monarch's "imperial might."<sup>188</sup> The façades of the new Govind Dev and the Gopinath in Jaipur thus shared this visual language of imperial power, citing both the bulbous columns and *bangla* roofs.

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<sup>186</sup> Asim Kumar Roy dates the temple to the 1730s on the basis of a 1739 document at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune that mentions the Govind Dev and the Gopinath as key Gaudiya temples in Jaipur. Asim K. Roy, *Brindaban thekhe Jaipur* (Calcutta: Jigyasa, 1985), 53.

<sup>187</sup> See Asher, *The Architecture of Mughal India* for Shah Jahan's architecture patronage.

<sup>188</sup> As Ebba Koch writes: "In choosing the baluster columns as frame for his appearance, he [Shah Jahan] was showing that he wanted to belong to those Christian princes whom he had seen represented in this way. He may even, in a kind of creative misunderstanding, have taken the baluster column for a symbol of imperial might." Ebba Koch, "The Baluster Column – A European Motif," in Monica Juneja, ed. *Architecture in Medieval India: Forms, Contexts, Histories* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 328-361, 339.

In effect, the divine was framed through architectural devices customarily used to frame the emperor himself. The devotee was thus presented with a vision of the icon, dressed in Mughal clothes and framed through Shah Jahan's hieratic royal architecture.<sup>189</sup> This act of seeing the divine was then constitutive of a reworking of the theological, the political, and the cultural in terms of a conceptual framework of political kingship. The transcendental was resignified within a language of kingship. The flat-roofed temple along with objects used in ritualistic worship, for example the Mughal *jamas*, *pichhwais*, and jewelry, became apparatuses of this new reconfiguring.

However, this new architecture was not limited to the temples in the Kachhwaha capital of Jaipur. 18<sup>th</sup>-century paintings from the state of Kishangarh routinely showed Krishna within a Shah Jahani architectural setting, marked by bulbous columns with intricate *pietra dura* floral motifs. For example, a 1740s painting of Krishna by the Kishangarh court artist Nihal Chand shows the village cowherd transformed into a monarch, set in regal setting with Mughal-style water fountains, women attendants, and a pavilion decorated with luxurious textiles (Figure 3.7). While the dense forest behind the pavilion serves as a reminder of the pastoral groves of Vrindavan, the pavilion is reminiscent of Shah Jahan's architectural repertoire. In Vrindavan itself, a number of 18<sup>th</sup>-century flat-roofed temples were based on the architecture of the royal palaces of Shah Jahan. Certainly, the style was not limited to the confines of Braj and its immediate vicinity, for example the Kachhwaha territories. In Bengal, for instance, the first

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<sup>189</sup> See Section 1 for a discussion on the use of Mughal clothes in Vaishnava liturgical practices.

Vaishnava flat-roofed temple was built in 1714, preceding the Jaipur Govind Dev by almost a decade.<sup>190</sup>

Rather than seeing flat-roofed temples as a Kachhwaha intervention in the 1730s with the construction of the Jaipur Govind Dev, I suggest that we see the making of this temple typology as a larger 18<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnava attempt to engage with Shah Jahan's architecture. In Vrindavan, a number of flat-roofed temples were built in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. For example, in the 1750s, Ganga Rani, the wife of Suraj Mal (1707-1763), the ruler of Bharatpur and grandnephew of Churaram, the Jat ruler who defeated the Kachhwahas in Braj in the 1710s, built a large flat-roofed temple near Chir Ghat, an important pilgrimage site in the town (Figure 3.8, See Map 2). Much like contemporaneous Gaudiya temples in Jaipur, the mid-18<sup>th</sup>-century Gangamohan Kunj in Vrindavan is adorned with delicate floral motifs made popular by Shah Jahan. Yet, the temple form had become more complex. In comparison to the Jaipur Gopinath, the increasing number of arches on the Gangamohan Kunj's façade corresponded with a proliferation of floral motifs on the walls.

When employed in a Vaishnava context, the symbology of Shah Jahan's floral decoration takes on added valence. Ebba Koch argues that Shah Jahan introduced a new vocabulary in Mughal architecture that included baluster columns, *bangla* roofs, and an emphasis on floral design.<sup>191</sup> This transformation in Mughal architecture was a result of a conscious attempt by the emperor to articulate a kingship through material practices.

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<sup>190</sup> David J. McCutcheon, *Late Medieval Temples of Bengal: Origins and Classification* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1972), 12.

<sup>191</sup> Ebba Koch, *Mughal Architecture: An Outline of Its History and Development* (Munich: Prestel, 1991), 95.

While baluster columns with their European origins posited the emperor as a universal monarch, the use of the *bangla* roof, derived from the vernacular architecture of Bengal, situated the emperor as a legitimate inheritor to the subcontinent's culture. The use of floral decoration, on the other hand, emphasized the emperor's buildings as "paradise on earth."<sup>192</sup> This Qur'anic symbology asserted through the use of vegetative motifs may have resonated well with Vaishnava imaginings of Vrindavan as a bejeweled forest where Krishna dallied with his consort Radha.

Literally translated as the forest, the *vana*, of the goddess Brinda, the tutelary deity of the site, Vrindavan was routinely extolled in texts as a beautiful forest, abounding with sweet-smelling flowers, birds, and wild animals.<sup>193</sup> The 18<sup>th</sup>-century temples of Vrindavan then drew on these discrete symbolisms –Shah Jahan's royal allegories and Vaishnava imaginings of Vrindavan as a lush forest – to articulate an architecture that inextricably linked Mughal architecture to the Vaishnava temples of Vrindavan. It is thus not surprising that the temple, even in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was known as the Gangamohan Kunj – the *kunja* (a bower or grove) of Gangamohan (a conjoining of Ganga Rani, the patron of the temple, and Mohan, a popular epithet of Krishna).

In Jaipur, on the other hand, a city approximately one hundred and forty miles west of Vrindavan, the remembering of the forests and groves of Braj required more creative re-inscriptions of space. While Mughal baluster columns and floral imagery

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<sup>192</sup> Writing on Shah Jahan's use of flower motifs, Koch states: "At the same time, the flower and plant forms underlined the poets' assertion that the emperor's buildings were a paradise on earth, surpassing even the Qur'anic, mythical and natural models." *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>193</sup> For example, the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* describes Vrindavan as lush with grass, plants, and creepers while the *Mathurā Māhātmya* (*The Greatness of Mathura*), attributed to Rupa Goswami, describes the site as overflowing with the creatures and flowers of the forest. *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam: Tenth Canto*, trans. A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1980), 241; *Śrī Mathurā Māhātmya*, trans. Bhumipata Dasa (Vrindavan: Rasbihari Lal & Sons, not dated), 125.

allowed for the making of an architectural language that drew from two purportedly discrete cultures – Vaishnava poetic metaphors and Mughal suzerainty – in rendering legible the urban topos of the city, the space of the temple itself was mobilized to create an affective relationship with space. Take, for instance, the Chandramanohar, a late 18<sup>th</sup>-century temple dedicated to Krishna, in Jaipur's Tripolia bazaar – a thriving market minutes away from the Kachhwaha royal palace and the Govind Dev temple (Figure 3.9).<sup>194</sup> Built by the family of priests that maintained the Govind Dev in Jaipur, the spatial and architectural configuration of the Chandramanohar is representative of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnava architecture in Jaipur.

Entering the temple through a large gateway that leads to a central courtyard, one immediately encounters the inner sanctum – a flat-roofed structure framed by a triple-arched colonnade. Like most temples of this period, delicate Mughal-style floral imagery carved on the pillars and the façade reiterates the temple as a beautiful grove where Krishna dallies eternally with his devotees. Yet, as Figure 3.9 makes apparent, the icon of Krishna is not visible from the courtyard. Rather, the devotee's view is blocked by a mass of wild creepers. Unlike the planned Mughal gardens that provided a clear vision of mapped space, land ordered into a complex system of well-arranged water channels and flower beds symptomatic of Mughal governance, the garden in the courtyard of the Chandramanohar signaled towards the wild, secretive bowers of Vrindavan where

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<sup>194</sup> For a brief history of the Chandramanohar temple, see Catherine Clémentin-Ojha, *Le trident sur le palais: Une Cabale anti-vishnouite dans un royaume hindou à l'époque coloniale* (Paris: Presses de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1999).

Krishna joined his devotee in amorous love.<sup>195</sup> Even today, one has to approach the sanctum through this wild mass of sweet-smelling creepers, brushing aside unruly stems or bending low in places where the creepers have grown too close to the ground.

Indeed, Vaishnava poetry from as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century repeatedly describes the devotee's traveling through the dark secretive groves of Braj in quest of the beloved Krishna as an act of amorous devotion. Discussing the Vaishnava literature of this period, Rupert Snell suggests that the groves, the *kunjās*, in Vrindavan were enchanted spaces, a transcendental realm where Radha and Krishna joined each other in ecstatic love.<sup>196</sup> As Snell writes: "The commentators' lexicon is replete with images of a divine majesty, the grove taking on the character of shrine and throne-room."<sup>197</sup> The emphasis on the sensuous topography of the enchanted grove in Vaishnava poetry had a striking parallel in post-16<sup>th</sup>-century pictorial traditions where Krishna and Radha were often depicted in a pastoral setting framed by a canopy of flowering vines.<sup>198</sup>

In an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript from Jaipur itself, Krishna and Radha are shown enamored, gazing into each other's eyes (Figure 3.10).<sup>199</sup> Illustrating the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnava poet Shribhatta's description of Krishna and Radha's tender affection, the painting depicts the two divine lovers framed by a canopy of blossoming creepers. The bower creates a frame for the devotee to focus on Krishna and Radha in their

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<sup>195</sup> For a history of Mughal gardens, see D. Fairchild Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

<sup>196</sup> Rupert Snell, "The *Nikunja* as Sacred Space in the Poetry of the Radhavallabhi Tradition," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 7:1 (Fall 1998), 63-84.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>198</sup> For a discussion on the changing representations of the *kunja* or the bower, see Molly Emma Aitken, "The Heroine's Bower: Framing the Stages of Love," in Harsha V. Dehejia, ed. *A Celebration of Love: The Romantic Heroine in the Indian Arts* (New Delhi: Lustre Press/Roli books, 2004), 105-119.

<sup>199</sup> My reading of the painting is greatly indebted to Aitken's essay cited earlier.

amorous act reiterating the role of this framing device as a technique of “concentration of the mind on a single point.”<sup>200</sup>

Both the 19<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript and the Chandramanohar temple then present a striking similarity in their engagement with space. This new space that was being created through a creative interplay of poetry from Braj, Mughal architecture, and Vaishnava imaginaries of space was distinctly different from the customary spatial arrangement in pre-17<sup>th</sup>-century *sikhara* temples where an uninterrupted view of the icon was imperative for effective *darshan*, the act of beholding the divine (See Figure 1.3). The icon in this temple was not easily visible. Rather, the devotee, becoming Krishna’s lover, had to replay Radha’s amorous journey through the forests of Braj in quest of her beloved. Like Radha, the devotee would make his/her way through a dense cluster of sweet-smelling vines, the *kunjās* of Vrindavan, to finally encounter Krishna, seated on a throne framed by a Mughal-style cusped arch. Exceeding both poetic and pictorial imaginaries, the grove in the courtyard of the Chandramanohar then allowed for a spatial practice to emerge in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that transformed acts of reading/hearing and seeing into an embodied spatial practice – a direct corporal engagement with the space of the temple itself.

However, the Kachhwaha court biographer Atmaram’s 1770 description of Jaipur as a beautiful garden where Krishna roamed “ever-blissful” suggests that the architectural organization of the Chandramanohar was not an exceptional moment where a new spatial orientation was created through infusing Mughal architecture with Vaishnava poetry. Rather, the Chandramanohar was part of a larger 18<sup>th</sup>-century imperative of re-imagining

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<sup>200</sup> Snell, “The *Nikunja* as Sacred Space,” 79.



space through creatively bringing together these two alleged discrete arenas of social and cultural production. But why in the 18<sup>th</sup> century? Shah Jahan had died in 1658, almost seventy years before the development of this temple typology. In 1739, Nadir Shah looted Delhi. And, by the 1740s, the Mughal empire was reduced merely to the lands adjoining Delhi. Yet, it is precisely in this period of Mughal political decline that flat-roofed Vaishnava temples replete with floral imagery emulating Shah Jahan's royal architecture were built not only in Jaipur but across north India.

Scholars have suggested that the origins of this flat-roofed temple type lay in indigenous pre-Islamic residential architecture.<sup>201</sup> The lack of a *sikhara*, on the other hand, is explained in few scholarly texts and much of sectarian literature through Aurangzeb's alleged desecration of the Govind Dev in Vrindavan. Even today, popular narratives claim that Aurangzeb destroyed the *sikhara* of the Govind Dev in Vrindavan after seeing a lamp burning on the temple from his palace at the Agra fort. As a recent guidebook asserts:

At Govindji's temple, Vrindavan a bright light of incense and Ghee [clarified butter] used to be lit every day as is done in every Hindu household daily. [...] The light so lit at the summit must have been a bright one visible from the harem of Agra fort of Aurangzeb. His vanity was wounded in the sense that can there be a building of higher altitude of the Hindus than the Moghul Emperor's mansion of luxury? He arrogantly took it to be a great affrontation which must be cut to size, hence pulled down. His great-grand-father's tolerance was not there, in its place arrogance and vanity prevailed.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> See, for instance, V.S. Pramar, *Haveli: Wooden Houses and Mansions of Gujarat* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 1989).

<sup>202</sup> R. K. Das, *Temples of Vrindaban* (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1990), 74.

Popular narratives assert that it is this desecration of the Govind Dev's *sikhara* that consequently led to Vaishnava temples being built without superstructures. R. Nath thus writes: "Sacred architecture in India had hitherto been guided by traditional theory for the purpose of creating harmonious beauty and auspiciousness. In this adverse time, however, the protection of the deities called for greater flexibility, even if it meant surrendering some ancient forms of construction."<sup>203</sup>

In these narratives, flat-roofed temples are then situated within a paradigm of cultural loss. The "surrendering" of Vaishnava suzerainty as it adapted to Islamic systems of cultural production is situated within a framework of Aurangzeb's temple desecration. In scholarly accounts, the "loss" is read through Vaishnavism's "retreat" from the political – an argument that I challenge, over and over again, in Section 1 and 2. I see the persistent citation of Shah Jahan's architecture in Vaishnava temples even after the Mughals had been reduced to a puppet state with territories limited to the city of Delhi through the lens of a claim to political legitimacy. Thus, even as the Jat rulers of Bharatpur raided Delhi and were largely responsible for weakening of the Mughal throne, they had no hesitation in emulating Mughal architecture when building temples in Vrindavan, or for that matter, their palace complexes in Dig, Rajasthan.

A 1740s flat-roofed temple in Vrindavan built by Prakash Kunwari, the sister of Raja Indrajit (1734-1762) of Datia, a kingdom in central India, illustrates the extent to which Shah Jahan's architectural language informed 18<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnava architecture in Braj (Figure 3.10). Like the 1750s Gangamohan Kunj, a temple that I discuss earlier in this section, cusped arches and baluster columns mark the façade of the Datia temple (See

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<sup>203</sup> Nath, "Śrī Govindadeva's Itinerary," 168.

Figure 3.8). However, it is the two projecting terraces, capped by sloping *bangla* roofs, flanking the façade of the temple that were conspicuously modeled on Shah Jahan's royal throne at the Shahjahanabad palace complex (See Figure 3.6).

Thus, even in Vrindavan, which by the early 18<sup>th</sup> century had come under Jat rule, temple architecture remained embedded in the visual practices of the Mughal court. This peculiar conundrum where political antagonism did not necessarily translate into a language of visual confrontation was not, however, restricted to Braj. Much like in Braj, 18<sup>th</sup>-century architecture in the northern states of today's Punjab remained indebted to the Mughal cusped arches and baluster columns even as intense strife marked Mughal-Sikh relationship in this period. The architecture and material practices of the Mughal court then provided a template, an exemplary model, of kingship in the fragmented world of 18<sup>th</sup>-century north India. In fact, as Part Two will suggest, even as late as the 1850s, Mughal material culture still continued to be cited, appropriated, and remade into a language of power in Vrindavan that resisted the totalizing regimes of colonial modernity.

However, by mapping the history of Vaishnava architecture from its 16<sup>th</sup>-century Akbari origins to the flat-roofed temples of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, I have perhaps, even unwillingly, produced a narrative of the development of architecture and stylistic morphology in pre-colonial Vrindavan. Yet, even as flat-roofed temples became the more normative temple typology in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, temples with *sikharas* continued to be built in Vrindavan well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, what marks the dense topos of

Vrindavan was the myriad architecture styles initiated by diverse Vaishnava constituencies in the town.

Yet, scholars, in various fields and across disciplines, have insistently argued that colonial modernity brought with it the disintegration of cohesive pre-colonial cultural practices. This narrative of loss, the collapse of tradition during the era of colonial modernity, is by now an old argument – an argument that I will, nonetheless, revisit in Part Two. In Part Two, I argue that the pre-modern/modern cleavage is neither as clean nor as systematic as scholars have made it out to be.

Rather than unequivocally associating Peter Berger’s “cognitive contamination” as a key force that led to the fragmentation of cohesive traditions with the coming of colonial modernity, Part Two traces the citations, references, and rememberings of pre-colonial material culture in colonial Vrindavan. It is precisely this pluralism, the possibility of choice, which makes difficult a teleological history of visual culture in colonial Vrindavan. The following sections of my dissertation then focus on a series of “little narratives” in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan – moments of “cognitive contamination” that resist easy narratives of space-making. Let me begin Part Two with the *sikhara* temple in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan.

**Part II**

**The Tactics of the Everyday:**

**Making Space in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan**

I call a ‘tactic,’ on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a ‘proper’ (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance.

- Michel de Certeau, 1988.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendell (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1988), xix.

#### 4. Claiming the *Nagara*: The Krishna Chandrama temple (1810)

In 1880, the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam acquired an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century painting of Vrindavan (Figure 4.1). Like innumerable other 19<sup>th</sup>-century representations of the pilgrimage town, the watercolor on paper depicted Krishna, cowherd girls (*gopis*), and devotees bathing in the river Yamuna at Vrindavan. However, rather than emphasizing the pastoral groves usually used to depict Vrindavan, the background of the painting was dominated by a series of temple *sikharas* or superstructures rising imposingly over the dense forests that marked the sacred groves of the town. The *sikharas*, distinctive in their architectural form, allow us to identify the temples very easily. From left to right, one sees the Govind Dev, the Gopinath, the Madanmohan, the Jugal Kishore, the Krishna Chandrama, and the Radhavallabh. Of all six temples represented, the Krishna Chandrama was the only temple built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 4.2). The other five temples, structures that I have discussed in Part One, were emblematic of a 16<sup>th</sup>-century moment when the Vaishnava community in Vrindavan turned to Akbar's royal architecture to render visible a language of power through allusions to Mughal material culture. Yet, by the 1700s the red sandstone *sikhara* temples of Vrindavan had been superseded by a new temple typology marked by flat roofs, repeating colonnades, and cusped arches.

The first *sikhara* temple to be built in Vrindavan after over one hundred and eight years, the Krishna Chandrama (1810) then returned to a temple typology that had, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, been superseded by flat-roofed temple in most Vaishnava pilgrimage centers across north India. One of the last *sikhara* temples in Vrindavan had been the Jugal

Kishore, a 1627 structure with a red sandstone exterior, niches with cusped arches, and geometric bands adorning the exterior (See Figure 1.6). Stylistically the Krishna Chandrama was, however, very different from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century red sandstone temples of the town. The visual language of the temple was constituted through a careful amalgamation of diverse architectural forms: the pre-Islamic north Indian *sikhara*, pillars with ornate Corinthian capitals, and an iconographic program that was derived from 12<sup>th</sup>-century eastern Indian temple architecture.

In Part One, I synoptically rehearsed the history of pre-colonial visual culture in Vrindavan to argue for a political theology – a Vaishnava praxis that cited Mughal material culture in producing a soteriological landscape of politicized piety. By moving away from commonly held perceptions of post-16<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnavism as an introvert emotive religiosity removed from the political, Part One provides a genealogy, a historical antecedent, to frame the dissertation. Yet, as the painting from the Rijksmuseum makes obvious, Vrindavan's *sikhara* temples had not been forgotten, erased from memory, with the coming of colonial modernity. If Part One argued for a pre-colonial construction of Vaishnavism through Mughal technologies of space-making, how did colonial modernity produce 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnavism? How does the visual language of the Krishna Chandrama temple help us understand the architectural practices of modernity in colonial Vrindavan?

In the *Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin's archeology of the emergence of high capitalist modernity in Paris, an entry written sometime between 1927 and 1930 states: "Definition of the 'modern' as the new in the context of what has always already been

there.”<sup>205</sup> In “Painting, Jugendstil, Novelty,” Benjamin further elaborated on the statement using Titorelli’s ‘heathscapes’ as a metaphor. Benjamin wrote: “The always new, always identical ‘heathscape’ in Kafka (*Der Prozeß*) is not a bad expression of this state of affairs.”<sup>206</sup> Although Benjamin’s 19<sup>th</sup>-century Paris – “always new, always identical” – was a world away from colonial Vrindavan, his suggestion that modernity bears within it traces of pre-modern practices is helpful in recuperating political subjectivities in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan.

The visual repertoire of the Krishna Chandrama makes visible the importance of pre-colonial architecture practices in creating a language of modernity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet like Titorelli’s heathscapes, this new architectural language was not merely a repetition, a replication of the old. The old was incorporated within the new. The pre-Islamic north Indian *sikhara* and 12<sup>th</sup>-century temple iconographies were incorporated within a 19<sup>th</sup>-century structure that was marked by a triple-arched entrance with Corinthian pillars. The act of remaking the old was to be paradigmatically modern.

The Krishna Chandrama becomes symptomatic of 19<sup>th</sup>-century building projects in Vrindavan, projects where myriad architecture styles were initiated by diverse Vaishnava constituencies in the town. While the patron of the Krishna Chandrama drew on pre-Islamic temple typologies to create a language of political architecture in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Shahji temple (1868) referenced the

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<sup>205</sup> Walter Benjamin, “First Sketches: Paris Arcades <I>,” 1927-1930. Published in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 842.

<sup>206</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Painting, Jugendstil, Novelty.” Published in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 544.



Islamicate styles of Lucknow, the capital of the erstwhile kingdom of Awadh. The Rangji temple (1851) was based on south Indian temple styles. Sponsored by the Kachhwahas, the Madho Bilas temple (1900), on the other hand, was built on the distinctive architectural language of Jaipur. Indeed, even a cursory survey of temples in this pilgrimage town present an art historical conundrum – an impossibility of a coherent narrative constructed through stylistic affinities, historical contextualization, and even iconographical analyses. It is here then that Peter Berger’s idea of “cognitive contamination” becomes a useful strategy to locate the pluralisms of architecture styles in colonial Vrindavan.<sup>207</sup>

One of the first temples to be built in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan, the Krishna Chandrama was patronized by Krishna Chandra Sinha (1776-1822), a landowner from Bengal in eastern India. The Sinha family had come into prominence during the reign of the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II (1728-1806). Earning their fortunes through trade in silk, Harekrishna Sinha set up a family seat in Kandi near Murshidabad, Bengal by purchasing large tracts of land in the region.<sup>208</sup> In 1765, Gouranga Sinha, the grandson of Harekrishna, obtained a land grant from Shah Alam granting him Kandi in perpetuity. Gouranga Sinha was also responsible for building the first Vaishnava temple in Kandi. Like most contemporaneous Vaishnava temples, the ca. 1750 Radhaballav in Kandi was built in a Mughalized style with a flat roof, cusped arches, and repeating colonnades marking the façade (Figure 4.3). Stylistically similar to the 1730s Gopinath temple in

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<sup>207</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>208</sup> For the history of the Sinha family, see H.W. B. Moreno, *The Paikpara and Kandi Raj* (Calcutta: Central Press, 1918); Hari Mohan Banerji, *A Brief History of the Kandi and Paikpara Raj Family* (Calcutta: Bata Krishna Das, 1907); Soroshimohon Mukhopadhyay, *Mahatma Lala Babu o Tadiya Gurupater Itibritta* (Kharga, Murshidabad: Saidabad Barabari, 1941).

Jaipur, the Radhaballav makes evident the popularity of the new Mughalized style across large parts of north India (See Figure 3.4). The ritualistic service to the icon at the Kandi temple reiterated further the political imperative that made it necessary to associate Krishna, the locus of spiritual power, to the Mughal emperor, the locus of temporal power – a theme that I discuss in detail in Part One. Even in the 1850s, the overt emphasis on Mughal courtly rituals at the temple continued to be meticulously maintained. Bholanath Chunder, visiting the Kandi temple in 1845, thus writes:

Of all the shrines, the one at Kundee [Kandi] is maintained with the greatest liberty. The god here seems to live in the style of the Great Mogul. His musnud and pillows are of the best velvet and damask richly embroidered. Before him are placed gold and silver salvers, cups, tumblers, pawn-dans, and jugs all of various size and pattern. He is fed every morning with fifty kinds of curries, and ten kinds of pudding. His breakfast over, gold *hookas* are brought to him to smoke the most aromatic tobacco. He then retires to his noonday *siesta*. In the afternoon he tiffs and lunches, and at night sups upon the choicest and richest viands with new names in the vocabulary of Hindoo confectionery. The daily expense at this shrine is said to be 500 rupees, inclusive of alms and charity to the poor.<sup>209</sup>

Why then did Krishna Chandra Sinha return to pre-Mughal architecture typologies in Vrindavan at a moment when Vrindavan had just come under British power? 19<sup>th</sup>-century chronicles of the Sinha family provide a clue to this rather abrupt transformation in Vrindavan's architecture. Gouranga Sinha, the founder of the Radhaballav temple in Kandi, had begun his career as a revenue officer under the Murshidabad monarch Siraj-ud-daula (1733-1757). However, during the intrigues of

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<sup>209</sup> Bholanath Chunder, *Travels of a Hindoo to various parts of Bengal and Upper India* Vol. I (London: Trübner & Company, 1869), 66.

1757, he, along with a group of merchants, joined Mir Jafar, an officer in Siraj-ud-daula's court, in a rebellion that finally led to the collapse of the Murshidabad monarchy. The family was well rewarded for their support of the British during 1757. By 1776, Ganga Govinda Sinha, a nephew of Gouranga, was appointed as the Diwan to the Committee of Revenue, a committee that was responsible for restructuring British administration and taxation in Bengal, by Warren Hastings, the Governor-General of India. In effect, Ganga Govinda Sinha became one of the most powerful men in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Bengal.

Colonial histories of Bengal suggest that the conflict between Gouranga Sinha and Siraj-ud-daula led to the monarch destroying the Mughalized Kandi temple. These histories further reiterate that the Kandi temple “with cornices [projecting eaves, the Mughal *chajja*] after the fashion of Siráj-ud-Daulah's residence” that had “exasperated the haughty Nawab that he immediately ordered the cornices to be pulled down and the builder to be arrested.”<sup>210</sup> Of course, there is no evidence to support this purported desecration of the Kandi temple. But what can be ascertained from these narratives is that, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, flat-roofed temples were unequivocally associated with the Islamicate culture of Mughal India.

The British artist Charles D'oyly's 1820 watercolor of the Radhaballav temple depicts a double-storied structure with a dome, minarets, and a verandah with arched colonnades (Figure 4.4). Drawing from the picturesque tradition, D'oyly represented the temple as surrounded by dense foliage, broken columns, and dilapidated structures. Yet the temple itself was imagined as a mosque capped with a dome and a copper finial.

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<sup>210</sup> Anonymous, “The Territorial Aristocracy of Bengal: The Kánda Family,” *Calcutta Review* 58: 116 (January 1894), 95-120, 96.

Although architecturally incorrect, D'oyle's painting is, however, significant in providing a perspective on the modes through which the British perceived the temple in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As the painting makes obvious, the flat-roofed temple, symptomatic of the close associations between the Mughals and Vaishnava constituencies in north India, was, in the eyes of the British, no different from a mosque. It is thus not surprising that colonial architecture historians such as James Fergusson saw in the Mughalized styles of post-17<sup>th</sup>-century architecture in north Indian princely capitals such as Dig an extension of the Mughal spirit.<sup>211</sup>

By the 1780s, the Mughal empire, however, had become a mere shadow of its former glory with Shah Alam as its titular head. This transformation in India's political order had immense implications in the remaking of Vaishnava architecture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. If the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century connections between Mughal and Vaishnava material culture arose from a Vaishnava imperative to associate with the Mughal throne, by the early 1800s this vocabulary had become redundant as a visual language of power. Given that imperial discourses – pictorial, architectural, and archaeological – inevitably associated flat-roofed Vaishnava temples with Mughal architecture practices, it was all the more crucial for Sinha to move away from a style that was now associated with the empires of old. Krishna Chandra Sinha thus turned to pre-Islamicate *nagara* temple architecture to create a style appropriate for colonial Vrindavan.

This citation of the pre-Islamicate *nagara* temple – a temple with a *sikhara* – in colonial Vrindavan was an exceptional moment of reclaiming a political Hinduism in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The word *nagara*, derived from the word *nagar*, a city, had been

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<sup>211</sup> James Fergusson, *The History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (London: John Murray, 1876).

associated with north Indian architecture typologies in texts such as the *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra* from as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>212</sup> In western and central India it was the *shekhari* temple, a *nagara* temple type with multi-spired *sikharas*, which became the normative temple form. Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, innumerable *shekhari* temples were patronized by dynasties such as the Solankis, the Yadavas, and the later Chalukyans with miniaturized *sikharas* embellished on the central spire to create an effect of upward movement.<sup>213</sup> Nonetheless, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, along with the *shekhari* temples which, by then, had become characteristic of north Indian temple architecture, a new Mughalized idiom of flat-roofed temples with projecting eaves (*chajjas*), cusped arches, and repeating colonnades had come into equal prominence.

However, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Maratha states of western India reengaged with this earlier *shekhari* architecture to posit a distinct self removed from the Islamicate cultures of north India. Although 17<sup>th</sup>-century Maratha temples still remained indebted to Mughal architecture, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Marathas attempted to articulate an architectural language that made pre-Islamic motifs and typologies the governing principle of temple design. This transformation in Maratha architecture has to be situated within the political context of 18<sup>th</sup>-century north India. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Maratha states such as the Peshwas of Pune, the Holkars of Indore, and the Shindes of Gwalior had asserted their independence from the Mughal empire. Establishing formidable armies, the Maratha rulers regularly raided and pillaged Mughal tracts along the northern frontier, finally reaching towards Delhi itself. Yet, their courtly rituals, modes of self-

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<sup>212</sup> Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* Vol. I (Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1946), 286.

<sup>213</sup> Adam Hardy, *The Temple Architecture of India* (London: John Wiley, 2007), 182-191.

imagination, and even artistic patronage were framed through a conscious amalgamation of Mughal as well as pre-Mughal forms. In terms of patronage, a paradigmatic shift occurred in temple-building practices. Even as Mughal domes, baluster columns, and projecting eaves (*chajjas*) continued to appear in the new Maratha architecture of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the *shekhari* with its tiers of miniaturized superstructures became the new marker of Maratha temple architecture.

The ruler of Indore, Ahilyabai Holkar's (1725-1795) *shekhari* temples at the pilgrimage site of Varanasi, Ellora, and Gaya, among others, marks a key moment in this transition. Ahilyabai's 1787 Vishnupad temple at Gaya, a Vaishnava pilgrimage center in eastern India, is an exemplary moment in the emergence of this new temple typology (Figure 4.5). While the *sikhara* of the Vishnupad temple, with its tiers of miniaturized superstructures, drew its source from the pre-Mughal *shekhari* temple type, the *mandapa* was capped with a Mughalized dome. Of course, Mughal elements – domes, projecting eaves, and baluster columns – was never completely erased from this new architecture but was incorporated within the *shekhari* temple. Yet in its citation of 11<sup>th</sup>-century typologies, these new *shekhari* temples marked a break from the flat-roofed temples that had become synonymous with north Indian Vaishnava architecture. Unlike most Maratha rulers who restricted their temple-building projects to western India, Ahilyabai patronized large-scale temples across India.<sup>214</sup> In Vrindavan itself, Ahilyabai had patronized a stepwell, a *baoli*, in the 1780s.

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<sup>214</sup> For Ahilyabai's temple patronage, see George Michell and Mark Zebrowski, *The New Cambridge History of India, I: 7 Architecture and Art of the Deccan Sultanates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Ahilyabai's marking of a geo-political space through extensive religious patronage across India allowed for the creation of an imaginative geography of piety that was embedded within discourses of political governance. It showed an acute awareness of the spatial frames through which political subjectivities were articulated in pre-colonial India.<sup>215</sup> Needless to say, the Marathas were not the only patrons to utilize the *shekhari* temple form in 18<sup>th</sup>-century India. A contemporary of Ahalya Bai, Rani Bhavani (1716-1795) of Natore, a landowning family from Bengal, built one of the largest *shekhari* temples in the pilgrimage site of Varanasi in 1760. The temple, dedicated to the goddess Durga, is perhaps closer to the 11<sup>th</sup>-century spirit of the *shekhari* than contemporaneous Maratha architecture. While the *sikhara* crowning the sanctum recreated the 11<sup>th</sup>-century stepped diamond plan of the *shekhari* temple, the generic Mughal dome that capped contemporaneous Maratha temple *mandapas* was replaced with a *sikhara* (Figure 4.6). The Durga temple at Varanasi then makes visible the popularity of the *shekhari* temple across wide constituencies in north India.

Built approximately forty years after the Durga temple, Krishna Chandra Sinha's temple in Vrindavan was based on this 18<sup>th</sup>-century visual language. Given that Natore was one of the key landowning families in Bengal, it would not be surprising that Sinha was aware of Rani Bhavani's Durga temple in Varanasi. He would also have encountered Ahilyabai's Vishnupad temple during his pilgrimage to Gaya. Like most *shekhari* temples, the Krishna Chandrama too is an east-facing structure with a sanctum

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<sup>215</sup> Scholars such as David Lorenzen have argued that the idea of a "Hindu" self, defined in opposition to the *mleccha* (foreigner, barbarian, non-Aryan), was already in place by the 17<sup>th</sup> century. See Introduction. The ramification of this consciousness in context to 18<sup>th</sup>-century spatial imaginaries is yet to be explored.

(*garbagriha*), an antechamber (*antarala*), and a rectangular pavilion (*mandapa*) leading to the antechamber.

I want to suggest that Sinha's decision to introduce a temple typology in Vrindavan that had been made popular by the Holkars in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was strategic. Jaswant Rao Holkar, the illegitimate son of Tukoji Holkar who had ruled Indore briefly after Ahilyabai's death, had captured Vrindavan in 1804, a site that the British gained only in 1803. Holkar then went on to attack Delhi, but was pushed back by David Ochterlony, the Resident of Delhi. In 1805, after an unsuccessful attempt at creating an anti-British coalition using cow slaughter in Vrindavan as a strategy to bring together the Hindu states of north India, Holkar was, however, forced to make peace and surrender Vrindavan to the British. I propose that we read the anti-British political intrigues in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan alongside Sinha's multi-spired *sikhara* temple. Architectural form was mobilized as a strategy of resistance, I suggest.

Indeed, by the 1810s, Krishna Chandra Sinha had become a key player in anti-British political intrigues in north India. In 1812, Sinha had supported the ruler of Alwar, a princely state in Rajasthan, against a British attack on their capital. Although Alwar was one of the first Rajput states to conclude a treaty of alliance with the East India Company in 1803, Rao Raja Bakhtawar Singh (1790-1815), the ruler of the state, continued to assert his independence in the region. In 1812, Bakhtawar Singh annexed two forts belonging to the Jaipur monarchs. Not surprisingly, the Jaipur state protested to Charles T. Metcalfe, the Resident at Delhi. Metcalfe's remonstrance with the Alwar court did not have much effect and Bakhtawar Singh continued to occupy the two forts.



Letters from Metcalfe to John Adam, the Chief Secretary to the Government of India, reveal that Krishna Chandra Sinha played an important role in convincing Bakhtawar Singh not to yield to British pressure.<sup>216</sup> In the messy world of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century north India, the Alwar state's refusal to attend to Metcalfe's demands was seen as an act of insubordination that was summarily met with military action. Metcalfe had Sinha arrested and brought to trial in Delhi. Although Sinha was subsequently released because of political pressure from important Bengali landowning families, the court trial brought to the forefront the role of Krishna Chandra Sinha in fomenting anti-British sentiments in north India. A few years later, Sinha appealed to the Mughal emperor Akbar Shah II (1760-1837) to grant him the title of Maharaja, the great monarch. Metcalf interfered, yet again, to prevent the issuing of the title.

While Sinha's political intrigues can be read as a part of the larger anti-British sentiment in Braj, the Krishna Chandrama temple allowed Sinha to further reiterate his political ambitions in the region as a spatial strategy.<sup>217</sup> Buying huge tracts of land in Braj, Krishna Chandra Sinha attempted to instate himself as an important landowner in the region. It is in this context that the *sikhara* temple allowed Sinha to claim political sovereignty, at least metaphorically, in Braj. The act of building a temple was then a conscious attempt by Sinha to spatially, indeed visually, assert his obdurate presence in

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<sup>216</sup> Letter from Charles T. Metcalfe, Resident at Delhi to John Adams, John Adam, the Chief Secretary to the Government of India, Fort William, dated April 11, 1813. Published in *Bengal Past and Present* 35:1-2 (January-June 1928), 56-59.

<sup>217</sup> By 1805, the British had brought Vrindavan under its control by suppressing Holkar's cow protection movement. However, sporadic protests against British occupation of the region continued through the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1808, local priests attacked two British army officers for killing monkeys in Vrindavan. In 1816, priests in Vrindavan started a series of public demonstrations on the streets to protest against a police system imposed by the British government. Although I discuss these moments of popular anti-British protests in the following sections, I bring them up here to situate Sinha's resistance within a larger political context.

the town. The citation of a pre-Islamic architecture form that had been further popularized by the Marathas in the 18<sup>th</sup> century thus allowed Sinha to reinforce his claim of sovereignty through making visible an architectural language of political Hinduism in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Although Sinha drew on 18<sup>th</sup>-century Maratha architecture to create a visual language of resistance, it would be erroneous to read this new visual form as a moment of “revivalism” signifying continuities unmarked by the colonial rupture. Indeed, most scholars writing on 18<sup>th</sup>-century *sikhara* temple architecture see this moment as signaling a Hindu revivalism. As Ashutosh Sohoni writes: “Maratha temples are another manifestation of a cultural phenomenon typical of India, where strands of survival and revival of the past traditions co-exist within the layers of India’s cultural identity.”<sup>218</sup> Yet, other scholars see this visual language as “debased” – a pallid form of an 11<sup>th</sup>-century articulation.<sup>219</sup> On the other hand, I argue that Krishna Chandra Sinha’s temple was a moment when the “‘etymology’ of locations,” a memory of architectural space, provided the impetus to recreate the present as “as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality.”<sup>220</sup> The neo-classical entrance to the temple can perhaps be translated through the lexicon of architecture to Lefebvre’s assertion that “space is always, now or former, a present space”<sup>221</sup> (Figure 4.7).

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<sup>218</sup> Ashutosh Sohoni, *Temple Architecture of the Marathas in Maharashtra* (Ph.D. dissertation: PRASADA, De Montfort University, 1998), 4.

<sup>219</sup> As Adam Hardy writes: “During the eighteenth century, Sekhari temples were also erected by the Marathas, both in their Maharashtrian homeland and along the ghats of Varanasi (Benares), in dozens of ‘debased’ versions.” Adam Hardy, “Śekharī Temples,” *Artibus Asiae* 62:1 (2002), 81- 137, 82.

<sup>220</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 37.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

It is this assertion of the “present” in temples such as the Krishna Chandrama that have led scholars to argue for the Indian neo-classical as a mere derivative discourse – a “debased” form which was neither modern nor traditional. While I turn to the re-articulation of the neo-classical in Section 5, let me conclude my discussion of the Krishna Chandrama through synoptically rehearsing the contours of the new Hinduism that was articulated through this temple. Subsequent discussions on photography, cartography, and even the cow protection movement in Vrindavan will give me the opportunity to further engage with 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnava political imperatives.

How then does the Krishna Chandrama allow us to think of a new early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hinduism? The use of pre-Islamic architecture in articulating a political Hinduism was not limited to the superstructure of the Krishna Chandrama temple. The iconographic program of the temple drew its source from the Vaishnava temples of the eastern state of Orissa. By the 9<sup>th</sup> century, a distinctive temple type had been established in Orissa under the Kalinga dynasty. The early experiments in iconography in Orissan temples had led to a standardization of temple iconography by the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Most post-11<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnava temples in Orissa thus had sculpted images of three incarnations of Vishnu, Varaha, Narasimha, and Trivikrama, adorning the exterior walls of the sanctum. Placed in niches, the images acted as minor divinities, *parsva devatas*, in innumerable Vaishnava temples such as the Jagannatha (ca. 1135) in Puri and the Ananta Vasudeva (1278) in Bhubaneswar. Circumambulating the temple clockwise, the devotee would thus encounter the sculpture of Varaha on the south wall, Narasimha on the west wall, and Trivikrama on the north wall. In the Krishna Chandrama temple, this very

iconographic program was recreated. The largely undecorated surface of the temple walls led to an overt emphasis on the representations of the *parsva devatas* (Figure 4.8). Why then did Krishna Chandra Sinha look towards Orissan temples to design the iconographic program of his temple in Vrindavan?

This specific configuration of the *parsva devatas*, the tradition of placing images of Varaha, Narasimha, and Trivikrama on exterior walls, was limited to temples in Orissa and had no signification for Vaishnava constituencies in north India. Even as the *sikhara* of the Krishna Chandrama with its tiers of miniaturized superstructures could be located within larger north India Vaishnava discourses, the iconographic program of the temple would become comprehensible to only those who were intimately familiar with the Vaishnava architecture of Orissa. Perhaps this citation of Orissan iconographies in Vrindavan was strategic. After returning from Braj, Chaitanya, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century founder of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, had spent his last days at the pilgrimage site of Puri in Orissa. From then on, Puri, along with the Gaudiya sites in Braj, had become key pilgrimage centers for the Gaudiya community.

Even after Chaitanya's death, the intellectual exchange between the Gaudiya community in Vrindavan and the devotees who had followed the theologian to Puri led to a constant circulation of philosophical discourses, texts, and images between the two key Gaudiya centers. Krishna Chandra Sinha's simultaneous citation of Maratha temple architecture and Orissan Vaishnava iconographic programs in his temple's design can then be read as an attempt to make the temple legible to diverse audiences. If the temple's *sikhara* signaled towards a north Indian anti-British political Hinduism, the iconographic

program made visible a cogent engagement with the theological imperatives of the Gaudiya Vaishnavism of Orissa.

Yet, in a post-1992 India, scholars writing on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century temple architecture inevitably associate the *sikhara* temple with 20<sup>th</sup>-century political Hinduisms. As Shikha Jain writes: “The twentieth century showed a sudden change in the temple architecture of the region under the patronage of industrialist groups such as the Birlas. The post-independence period has resulted in the revival of earlier *sikhara* styles of temple, as seen in the Birla temple of New Delhi and Jaipur.”<sup>222</sup> In such narratives, the *sikhara* allegedly reemerges only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, now as a visual marker of Hindutva politics. Scholars thus see the citation of pre-Islamic architecture in 20<sup>th</sup>-century *sikhara* temples as a visual manifestation of Hindutva claims to a “pure” Hindu architecture untarnished both by colonial modernity and the “Islamic invasion.”

The trajectories of the *sikhara* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is, on the other hand, much more complex. Certainly, Hindutva groups, from the 1960s onwards, have recuperated the *sikhara* to imagine this “pure” Hindu architecture. The 1960s Krishna Janmasthan (literally birthplace of Krishna) temple in Mathura, built adjacent to Aurangzeb’s 1670 mosque that replaced the Keshavdev temple, is an appropriate example of the Hindutva appropriations of the *sikhara* (Figure 4.9).<sup>223</sup> With a *shekhari* superstructure, not very different from Krishna Chandra Sinha’s 1810 temple, the Janmasthan temple was built

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<sup>222</sup> Shikha Jain, “Vaishnava Havelis in Rajasthan: Origins and Continuity of a Temple Type,” in Adam Hardy, ed. *The Temple in South Asia* (London: British Association for the South Asian Studies, 2007), 191-200, 198.

<sup>223</sup> The International Association of the Vrindaban Research Institute’s photograph of the Krishna Janmasthan temple from 1967-1968 shows the *sikhara* being built. This collection of photographs is currently housed at the Fine Arts Library, Harvard University. International Association of the Vrindaban Research Institute, Braj Area Slide Collection 1976-1978, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Acc. No. TB 4.135.

adjacent to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's 1670 mosque with support from national industrial corporations such as the Dalmias and the Birlas to reclaim the space for a Hindu nationalist constituency. Texts published by the Janmasthan authorities have repeatedly asserted that the "exquisite temple built in *purely* Hindu styles" was emblematic of "India's tenacity and vitality" to survive the "religious bigotry" of the "invading" Muslims.<sup>224</sup> The conflation between Hindutva politics and a national consciousness was, of course, an older late 19<sup>th</sup>-century strategy that continued to inform the 20<sup>th</sup>-century paradigms of the movement. Not surprisingly, contestations over the temple-mosque complex at Mathura had led to a number of Hindu-Muslim riots from the 1950s onwards in the town.<sup>225</sup>

Yet, the *sikhara* had other lives beyond such Hindutva appropriations. In 1948, the very year after Independence, the modernist architect Habib Rahman (1915-1995) designed a memorial to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) in Barrackpore, West Bengal. Built with a *sikhara*, the memorial very deftly appropriated Hindu architecture typologies into constructing secular mythologies for the nation-state and its Bapu, the "Father of the Nation" (Figure 4.10). Built within twenty years of each other, the Gandhi memorial and the Krishna Janmasthan temple exemplify the peculiar political signification, religious and secular, that the *sikhara* embodied in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But the 20<sup>th</sup>-century lives of the *sikhara* is not a concern of this project. I merely bring it up to complicate easy narratives that unequivocally associate the *sikhara* with virulent

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<sup>224</sup> Sri Krishna Janmasthan Sewa Sangh, *Sri Krishna Janmasthan: A Brief History and Scheme for its Renovation* (Mathura: Sri Krishna Janmasthan Sewa Sangh, not dated), unpaginated. Emphasis mine.

<sup>225</sup> *The Times of India*, August 23, 1954.

Hindutva politics. The career of the *sikhara* in the era of colonial and postcolonial modernity is far more complex for such reductive readings.

It is crucial for my narrative that the Krishna Chandrama was built in 1810 – precisely at a time when Holkar’s anti-British cow protection movement had challenged the might of the East India Company in Vrindavan. Yet, the cow protection movement along with the *sikhara* temple has today become synonymous with late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century virulent Hindutva politics. How does one address this moment of an anti-colonial Hindu political in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century? The usual narratives of Hinduism as a post-1890s secularized form of modern political action does not allow for an understanding of this earlier history. By convoluting such teleological narratives, this section then attempts to argue for a Vaishnava political theology situated within the here and now of colonial time-space. I turn to this here and now in Section 5.

I see the citation of pre-Islamic architecture forms in colonial Vrindavan as an exceptional moment of reclaiming a political Hinduism in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, in Vrindavan itself, the Krishna Chandrama temple’s clustered *sikhara* provided a model for a number of subsequent temples. By the 1870s, structures such as the Tikari temple made the characteristic multi-spired *sikhara* of Krishna Chandrama representative of a new political consciousness that was expressed through a citation of 11<sup>th</sup>-century architecture forms. Of course, the flat-roofed temple was not rejected in Vrindavan but both the flat-roofed temple and the *shekhari* co-existed, along with other stylistic formulations such as the south Indian temple type. It is precisely this eclecticism, this manipulation of style and iconography, that Peter Berger would describe as the

“cognitive contamination” of modernity. But, before I turn to the visual language of “cognitive contamination” as a 19<sup>th</sup>-century strategy of anti-colonial politics, let me return to the political Vaishnavism of colonial Vrindavan. This politicized religion, I will suggest in the next section, was not necessarily embedded within the discourses of the Hindutva. My discussion on the Maratha king Jaswant Rao Holkar’s anti-British intrigues in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century will allow me to situate Sinha’s *sikhara* temple within a larger frame that brings together architecture and military rebellions, visual culture and political theologies.



## 5. Of Renegade Kings and Cows in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century

On August 18, 1804, T. Mercer, the Officer in Charge of the Police at Mathura, arrested Nurunjen (Niranjan) Lall, a spy of the Maratha king Jaswant Rao Holkar of Indore. On him were discovered a number of incriminating documents including letters written by Holkar to Ranjit Singh (1780-1839), the ruler of Punjab, intelligence reports on British military presence in north India, as well as evidence of the formation of an anti-British coalition between a number of north Indian princely states.<sup>226</sup> While translations of these letters and documents, published in the House of Commons' 1806 *Parliamentary Papers*, have frequently been used by historians to discuss the "Second Anglo-Maratha War," a nomenclature made famous through early nationalist histories, these early 19<sup>th</sup>-century testimonies of the "hostile and treacherous conduct"<sup>227</sup> of native princes, rather anachronistically, have equally significant bearing on an understanding of the modes through which Vaishnavism was re-articulated as a political theology in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. What were the terrains of this Vaishnavism? How was it conceived and articulated? And how was it located within the here and now of a post-1800 Vrindavan? What then is a Vaishnava political theology?

"All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts."<sup>228</sup> Thus begins Carl Schmitt's famous essay on political theology. While Schmitt and Claude Lefort, among other scholars, draw the genealogies of a European political theology – "the historical disentanglement of the religious and the

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<sup>226</sup> "Papers relating to Bharatpur state," *Parliamentary Papers 1806*, Vol. XVI, Paper 176 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1806), 12- 32 (henceforth PP).

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>228</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George D. Schwab (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 36.

political”<sup>229</sup> – from 18<sup>th</sup>-century thought, scholars working on the Indian context argue that this “disentanglement” occurred only with the coming of colonial modernity. The binary of religion-as-faith and religion-as-ideology then becomes a key paradigm through which political theologies in India is discussed. As Ashis Nandy writes:

The idea of secularism, an import from nineteenth-century Europe into South Asia, has acquired immense potency in the middle-class cultures and state sectors of South Asia, thanks to its connection with and response to religion-as-ideology. Secularism has little to say about cultures – it is definitely ethnophobic and frequently ethnocidal, unless of course cultures and those living by cultures are willing to show total subservience to the modern nation-state and become ornaments or adjuncts to modern living – and the orthodox secularists have no clue to the way religion can link up different faiths or ways of life according to its own configurative principles.<sup>230</sup>

Scholars have emphatically located both secularism and a modern religion-as-ideology within the praxis of the nation state: “religion as a subnational, national, or cross-national identifier of population contesting for or protecting non-religious, usually political or socio-economic, interests.”<sup>231</sup> It is this understanding of religion-as-ideology and political theologies as a modern form of governance that allows Gyanendra Pandey to argue for the British construction of Indian communalism. Further, it was a new “secular nationalism” – a nationalism that privatized religion in the 1920s – that

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<sup>229</sup> Claude Lefort, “The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?” in Hent de Vries, ed. *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 148-188, 155.

<sup>230</sup> Nandy, “The Politics of Secularism,” 324.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

“contributed substantially to the counter-construction of the Indian past in more dogmatically community (specifically, *religious* community) terms,” Pandey asserts.<sup>232</sup>

Scholars thus see religion, in a peculiarly secularized, irreligious, and modernized form, as the crucial location for the struggle of nationalized collective identity in post-1890s India. As Christian Lee Novetzke puts it: “At times, religion is the expression of insurgency, whether for the subaltern Santal [indigenous people] or the nonsubaltern Bengali *bhadralok* (“refined people” or landed and administrative middle classes in Bengal from nineteenth century to the present). [...] At other times, religion is a tool of dominance, either by the colonial state or by elites exercising control over subaltern subjects.”<sup>233</sup>

In Section 4, I suggested that early 19<sup>th</sup>-century temple architecture in Vrindavan allowed for a reinvention of the north Indian superstructure that had been visualized as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century to make possible a political Hinduism in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century India. This new early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hinduism constructed its genealogy through pre-Islamic architectural form. Going against scholarly readings that associate modern articulations of the 11<sup>th</sup>-century *nagara* style as a product of virulent anti-minority Hindutva politics, I suggested that early 19<sup>th</sup>-century architectural interventions allow for a recuperation of a political Hinduism that was not necessarily embedded within the hate politics of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, this new political Hinduism was not necessarily limited to architecture practices. In this section, I wish to demonstrate that the history of political Hinduisms is far too complex and fragmented for such easy narratives. Hinduism as a

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<sup>232</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*, 261.

<sup>233</sup> Christian Lee Novetzke, “The Subaltern Numen: Making History in the Name of God,” *History of Religions* 46:2 (2006), 99-126, 125.

category constructed from within post-Enlightenment disciplinaries with its faith/ideology binaries does not suffice to make legible its 19<sup>th</sup>-century political contours, I suggest.

Jaswant Rao Holkar's political religion, political theology in Schmitt's terms, allowed him to make Hinduism into an anti-British imperative in 1805. Yet, this political religion was perhaps never without faith, as I will argue in this section. Holkar's 1805 cow protection agitations in Braj then makes difficult a simplistic reading of the trajectories of a politicized Hinduism backwards from 1992 as is usually done – a historiographic maneuver that I discuss in greater detail in my Introduction. As Charles T. Metcalfe's 1806 *Memorandum of Hindostan west of the Jumna*, a report submitted to the House of Commons, categorically stated:

The enemies of the British Government make use of arguments which are supposed to have a great effect on the minds of the Hindoos. The atrocious crime of beef-eating and peacock-hunting have been sounded against the British character at every court of Hindustan. His Excellency the Commander in Chief, in the month of June, issued a proclamation prohibiting the slaughter of any of the cow species in the neighborhood of the Hindoo holy spaces of Muttra [Mathura] and Bindraband [Vrindavan]. This proclamation appears to have been attended with beneficial effects on the minds of the Hindoos, and has silenced the clamors of the adversaries of the British government.<sup>234</sup>

Indeed, unimpeded cow slaughter in British-occupied India had become a crucial concern for most princely rulers who ceded territories to the East India Company in this

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<sup>234</sup> Charles T. Metcalfe, "Memorandum of Hindostan west of the Jumna. British Possessions," *PP 1806*, Vol. XVI Paper 257, 497-505, 504.

period. In 1803, Daulat Rao Sindhia (1794-1827), the ruler of Gwalior, had offered additional land to the Company in exchange of prohibition of cow slaughter in surrendered territories including Mathura and Vrindavan.<sup>235</sup> Although the Mughal emperor Shah Alam had already issued a royal order in 1790 prohibiting cow slaughter in Braj, Sindhia's request in 1803 suggests that the Mughal order remained, to a certain extent, unheeded.<sup>236</sup> British army officers were reputed for their hunting sprees in the forests surrounding the two towns and it was this defilement of the sacrality of Braj that provided the premise for Holkar's anti-British agitations. Thus along with the number of Company battalions in Delhi, Agra, and Mathura, Niranjan Lall's intelligence report asserted: "The practice of killing cattle is continued."<sup>237</sup>

Much has been written on the significance of the cow mother, the Go Mata, in Brahmanical epics and theological texts. The *R̥g Veda* portrays Rudra, the god of storm, as cow slaying, *go ghnām*, while the *Vanaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* describes the distribution of beef to Brahmins by the king Rantideva as an act of piety.<sup>238</sup> Yet, it is in the very same text that Skanda, the god of war, requests Sakra, the king of the gods, to be appointed as the leader of the celestial forces for killing demons, "for the advancement of the cause of the Gods, [and] for the protection of cows and Brahmins."<sup>239</sup> Scholars have

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<sup>235</sup> William Crooke, *Things Indian; being discursive notes on various subjects connected with India* (London: John Murray, 1906), 90.

<sup>236</sup> Entwistle, *Braj*, 205.

<sup>237</sup> "No. 12. Paper of Intelligence supposed to be written by Nurunjeen Lall, from the hand-written being the same as his Letters," *PP 1806*, Vol. XVI, Paper 176, 22.

<sup>238</sup> John Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts, on the Origin and History of the People of India, their Religion and Institutions. Collected, Translated, and Illustrated* Vol. IV (London: Trübner & Company, 1873), 303 discusses the descriptions of Rudra. See Dwijendra N. Jha, *The Myth of the Holy Cow* (London: Verso, 2002) for a discussion on beef eating in early texts.

<sup>239</sup> *The Mahābhārata: The Book of Virāṭa and the Book of Effort*, trans. J. A. Van Buitenen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 655.

read the contradictions in these, and similar texts, to argue persuasively that cow slaughter was not necessarily forbidden in early India.<sup>240</sup> However, by ca. 300 CE the cow had become a central symbol of Brahmanical rituals and mythologies. In spite of stray references to cow sacrifice as late as the 12<sup>th</sup> century, most texts, from this period onwards, categorically prohibited the killing of cows.<sup>241</sup>

Given the preponderance of textual sanctions on cow slaughter, it is surprising that very little is known about the ritualistic and sociological practices centered on the body of the cow. Most Mughal emperors including Babar, Jahangir, Akbar, and even Aurangzeb, had banned cow slaughter at certain points in their careers.<sup>242</sup> And in the 1660s, Shivaji Bhosle (1627-1680), the Maratha monarch and self-proclaimed protector of Brahmins and cows, a *gobrahmana pratipalaka*, had declared war on Aurangzeb in the name of cow protection.<sup>243</sup> The contestation between Shivaji and Aurangzeb suggests that by the 1600s, cow protection, both symbolic and real, had become a powerful sign for the articulation of a Hindu self in north India. Yet again, in 1713, violence broke out between Hindus and Muslims in Ahmedabad over the slaughter of a cow and Ranjit Singh, the ruler of Punjab and a confidant of Jaswant Rao Holkar, banned the killing of cows throughout his kingdom.<sup>244</sup> Only five years after Holkar's attempt to utilize cow slaughter

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<sup>240</sup> Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009); Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Jha, *The Myth of the Holy Cow*.

<sup>241</sup> See Jha, *The Myth of the Holy Cow* for later references to cow slaughter.

<sup>242</sup> Sri Ram Sharma, *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988); Jha, *The Myth of the Holy Cow*.

<sup>243</sup> For controversies on Shivaji's supposed Hindu kingship, see Catherine B. Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India before Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>244</sup> Bayly, "The Pre-History of Communalism?" For a description of the Ahmedabad violence, see *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency: Ahmedabad* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1879), 256.

in Braj as the basis for an anti-British alliance, violence broke out in Varanasi between Hindus and Muslims over cow slaughter.<sup>245</sup>

Ignoring such instances of conflict in the name of the cow, scholars argue that it was only in the 1880s that socio-religious organizations such as the Arya Samaj developed a systematic anti-Muslim politics using cow protection as a political strategy.<sup>246</sup> Starting with the Namdhari (a Sikh sect) attacks on Muslim slaughter houses in the 1870s to the formation of Gorakhshini Sabhas or cow protection committees in major north Indian cities in the 1880s, the politics of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century cow protection is seen by scholars as a movement “toward the Hindu definition of community and as an unusually successful integration of city and countryside in support of a single ideological program.”<sup>247</sup> I, on the other hand, use Holkar’s cow protection movement in Vrindavan to argue for a political religion already before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. I suggest that it was contestations over the body of the cow along with the *sikhara* temple that allowed for the re-inscription of Vrindavan within new symbolic and political orders of the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Beginning this section with this political religion of the early 1800s, I point towards multi-layered, and often contradictory, subjectivities that re-engaged Vaishnavism as an anti-colonial strategy. By locating the beginning of the cow protection

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<sup>245</sup> See Freitag, *Collective Action and Community* for the Varanasi riots.

<sup>246</sup> Recent scholarship on the cow protection movements in colonial India include Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*; Anand A. Yang, “Sacred Symbol and Sacred Space in Rural India: Community Mobilization in the ‘Anti-Cow Killing’ Riot of 1893,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22:4 (October 1980), 576-596; Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*; Sandria B. Freitag, “Sacred Symbol as Mobilizing Ideology: The North Indian Search for a ‘Hindu’ Community,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22: 4 (October 1980), 597-625; Ian Copland, “What to do about cows? Princely versus British approaches to a South Asian Dilemma,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 68:1 (2005), 59-76.

<sup>247</sup> Freitag, “Sacred Symbol as Mobilizing Ideology,” 624.

movement (at least in Vrindavan), not in the epiphanous moment of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century colonial modernity, but within the 1805-1806 Machiavellian manipulations between the East India Company, Ranjit Singh of Punjab, and Jaswant Rao Holkar, I argue for a more complex history of the political theological in India.

Jaswant Rao had declared himself the head of the Indore state after the death of his father in 1797. Within three years, he became embroiled in a series of conflicts with the Sindhias and the Peshwas to assert his pre-eminence as the key Maratha ruler in the region. The 1803 Second Anglo-Maratha War had led the Sindhias to sign a treaty with the British making Holkar, along with the ruler of Bharatpur and Ranjit Singh of Punjab, one of the few anti-British independent princely rulers in north India. The Mughal monarch Shah Alam II had already been placed under the Company's protection. In 1804, Holkar reoccupied Mathura and Vrindavan, which the Sindhias had ceded to the British in 1803. He then went on to attack Delhi, but was pushed back by David Ochterlony, the Resident of Delhi. In 1805, after an unsuccessful attempt at creating an anti-British coalition, Holkar was forced to make peace with the British and surrender a considerable portion of his kingdom. Although much of his territory was restored to him by 1806, it is said that Jaswant Rao's mortification was so great that he went insane in 1808 and was placed under restraint. Jaswant Rao Holkar died on October 28, 1811.

While Holkar's battles with the British, his attempts to create an independent Maratha kingdom in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and ensuing insanity is a celebrated narrative in Maratha histories, I turn to a little-known 1808 manuscript, the *Waqai-i-Holkar*, the *Events of Holkar*, for a thicker description of the events preceding



Holkar's 1806 defeat.<sup>248</sup> The *Waqai*, narrated by Bakshi Bhawani Shankar, a close confidant of Jaswant Rao Holkar, informs its readers that Holkar attacked Delhi on October 14, 1804. It was the day of *Vijayadasami*, the day of victory, the day when Rama, the warrior king and the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, killed Ravana. A popular Hindu festival in north India, effigies of Ravana are still burnt on this day to mark the celebration of the victory of righteousness, of *dharma*, over unrighteousness, *adharma*. It was also the day when the goddess Durga killed the buffalo-demon Mahisasura, again reiterating the defeat of evil.

The symbolism of attacking Delhi on that specific day was considerable. *Dharma*, as simultaneously implying “virtue, morality, religion, religious merit” and “ordinance, law, duty, right, justice,”<sup>249</sup> allowed Holkar to draw on popular mythologies to reinforce and legitimize this political act. As Bhawani Shankar, who was present at the battle, reports: “The Maharaja told the chiefs of his army: ‘This auspicious day is an omen of victory. Let us attack the English, in a body, from all directions and display our heroism vigorously.’”<sup>250</sup> This rhetoric of the “auspicious day” being “an omen of victory” was embedded in Hindu notions of political governance, between the dualities of good and evil. It was on the day of *Vijayadasami*, October 14, 1804, that Holkar would then bring back the ideal kingdom of the virtuous Rama, *ramarajya*, by overthrowing the British who, like Ravana, had brought *adharma* to the land. The choice of the day was no coincidence.

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<sup>248</sup> Mohan Singh, *Mohan Singh's Waqai-Holkar*, trans. Jadunath Sarkar (Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 1998).

<sup>249</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 510.

<sup>250</sup> Singh, *Waqai-Holkar*, 172.

It is easy to read this rhetoric of a political, anti-British *ramarajya* as the assertion of a Hindu self. Scholars have traced the trajectories of *ramarajya* through Gandhi and the rise of a Hindu nationalist politics in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Peter van der Veer writes: “The emergence of the idea of ‘the rule of Rama’ in Indian politics today does not show a continuity, but a significant rupture. The link between the Rama cult and divinization of kingship is not at all obvious in modern Hindu religiosity. It has to be inserted in the religious field through the gradual nationalization of religion, particularly in the middle class, and thus it has to be understood as a modern, ideological move.”<sup>251</sup> Certainly, *ramarajya* is, and was in the case of nationalist politics, an “ideological move.” But it was not a move born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In Vrindavan, for instance, the 1805-1806 contestations provided the references for a vocabulary of political action in the late colonial public arena. As late as the 1930s, it was not a mythic, hoary past that provided legitimacy to the cow protection movement in Vrindavan. Rather, Holkar remained a pivotal, much cited figure in Vrindavan’s early 20<sup>th</sup>-century anti-colonial politics – a moment that I will discuss in Section 9. Here, I want to return to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and Holkar’s assault on Delhi. Even as Holkar’s rhetoric was imbued with the idea of reestablishing *ramarajya*, the *Waqai* informs us that Holkar, before attacking the walled city, paid respect at the *dargah*, the shrine/tomb, of the Chisthi saint Bakhtiyar Kaki (d.1235).<sup>252</sup> This act of pilgrimage was followed by a visit to the Kalkaji temple, dedicated to the Hindu goddess Kali. While both the *dargah*

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<sup>251</sup>Peter van der Veer, “Writing Violence,” in David Ludden, ed. *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 250-268, 258.

<sup>252</sup> Singh, *Waqai-Holkar*, 174.

and the temple were situated outside the walled city of Delhi, they were in fact key pilgrimage sites for the residents of the city. Holkar's visit to Kalkaji, the primary *Sakta* (the worship of the goddess, the feminine power) temple in the area, on the eve of *Vijayadasami* can be seen as a ritualized display of legitimate Hindu kingship for an audience that consisted not only of an army of allegedly ninety thousand soldiers but also the residents of Delhi. This was a *dharma yuddha* – a religious battle between good and evil, between Holkar and the British – with the support and benevolence of the goddess Kali, the goddess of destruction and death.

Holkar's visit to the shrine of Bakhtiyar Kaki, on the other hand, complicates the idea of *dharma yuddha*. With the loss of authority in the larger 18<sup>th</sup>-century north Indian political arena, the Mughal elite, including the emperor Farrukh Siyar, had made Kaki's *dargah* an important royal shrine.<sup>253</sup> It was as if the indelible association between the Chishtis, the primary Sufi order in India, and the Mughals still remained unbroken even as their political authority had been considerably challenged. Not only was the *dargah* re-embellished in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and royal tombs built around it, but the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah II had also established his residence near the shrine. It was this Mughal authorization of a Chisthi *dargah* that Holkar acknowledged and paid respect to when visiting the shrine. In effect, this act of pilgrimage was a performative ritual, a public declaration, that it was the British, and not the Mughals, who were the enemies of *dharma*.

In a pre-colonial context, this easy movement between *dharma* and pilgrimage to a Muslim Sufi shrine was neither extraordinary nor aberrant. It is precisely this fluidity in

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<sup>253</sup> See Asher, *The Architecture of Mughal India* for a history of Mughal patronage at the shrine.

pre-colonial community formation that has been routinely described by scholars as the “fuzziness” of pre-modern Indian politics. As Sudipta Kaviraj writes: “Living in an unmapped and unenumerated world may have allowed them to live ordinarily in non-aggressive proximity. [...] Their sense of community being multiple and layered and fuzzy, no single community could make demands of pre-emptive belonging as comprehensive as that made by the modern nation state.”<sup>254</sup> For example, Tipu Sultan (r. 1782-1799), the Muslim ruler of Mysore, used the symbol of the tiger to situate his politics simultaneously within an Islamic and a Hindu context while the Hindu ruler of Vijayanagara, Bukka I (r. 1344-1377), adopted the title *Hindu-rāya-suratrāṇa*, Sultan among Hindu Kings, in 1352 to “Islamicize” his Hindu kingship.<sup>255</sup> Holkar’s performative pilgrimage to a Hindu temple and a Muslim shrine was no different.

Yet, in 1801, only three years earlier, Holkar had attacked the Pushtimarga temples of Shrinathji in Nathadwara and Dwarkadhish in Kankaroli (both in the princely state of Mewar) forcing the priests of the temples to pay him Rs. 35000 and Rs. 40000 respectively.<sup>256</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup>-century temples at Nathadwara and Kankaroli were built when the two deities were removed from Vrindavan to protect them from the supposed destructive wrath of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.<sup>257</sup> By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Nathadwara

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<sup>254</sup> Kaviraj, “The Imaginary Institution of India,” 26.

<sup>255</sup> Kate Brittlebank, “Sakti and Barakat: The Power of Tipu’s Tiger. An Examination of the Tiger Emblem of Tipu Sultan of Mysore,” *Modern Asian Studies* 29:2 (1995), 257-69; Phillip B. Wagoner, “‘Sultan among Hindu Kings’: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55:4 (November 1996), 851-880.”

<sup>256</sup> Singh, *Waqai-Holkar*, 116-117.

<sup>257</sup> In Part One, I suggested that this 17<sup>th</sup>-century exodus of the principal Vaishnava images from Mathura and Vrindavan had very little to do with Aurangzeb’s alleged iconoclasm. Rather, it was a result of intricate political maneuvers by various western Indian princely states to claim legitimacy and power through persuading the images (through the hereditary Brahmin families who served the images) to reside in their

and Kankaroli had become important temple towns in western India and key pilgrimage sites for Pushtimarga devotees. To protect the icon of Shrinathji from Holkar, the priests of the Nathadwara temple, with assistance from the ruler of Mewar, moved the deity to Ghasiyar, a small village closer to Udaipur, the capital of the Mewar state, where it remained until 1807 when the British defeated Holkar.<sup>258</sup> In Ghasiyar, a new temple was built imitating the original structure at Nathadwara. For six years, the new temple at Ghasiyar was the key Pushtimarga shrine in western India while the temple at Nathadwara remained unoccupied.

While instances of transgressions and syncretic religio-cultural practices in the pre-colonial period (for example Tipu Sultan, Bukka I, and, in this section, Holkar's pilgrimage to a Sufi shrine near Delhi) allows for the invention of a romanticized pluralist past untarnished by the crisis of colonial modernity, acts of violence in the name of religion simultaneously resist, and problematize, such easy narratives. How does one account for, or hold together within one narrative, Holkar's devout pilgrimage to the Kalkaji temple and his attack on Nathadwara? It is perhaps easy to discuss Holkar's defilement of the temple of Srinathji as a secularized maneuver – a maneuver devoid of religion – to disgrace the Mewar monarch, thus asserting Holkar's political and military primacy in the region. But how then does one think religion? Within three years of attacking the most important Pushtimarga shrine in western India, Holkar declared war

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kingdom. For example, the princely state of Mewar “convinced” Srinathji to make his home in Nathadwara with enormous land endowments.

<sup>258</sup> Rajendra Jindel, *Culture of a Sacred Town: A Sociological Study of Nathdwara* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1976), 23.

on the British, claiming: “In this country, which is a most sanctified place of worship, and the residence of our God, how can we support the slaughter of cows?”<sup>259</sup>

Although Holkar had occupied Mathura and Vrindavan for only a few days before attacking Delhi, from 1803 onwards, he started communicating with a number of princely states in north India, for example Bharatpur and Punjab, to create an anti-British coalition. The threat of Holkar’s coalition was grave enough for Gerard Lake, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, to write to Richard Wellesley, the Governor-General of India: “The deposition of this person, by name Nerunjun Lall, taken before Mr. Mercer on the 1<sup>st</sup> instant, states that he has been long employed as the channel of communication between Jeswunt Rao Holkar and the Rajah of Bhurtpore, and several Zemindars in the Doab, and that the object of the correspondence carried on was the entire subversion of the British power and influence in Hindostan.”<sup>260</sup>

A close analysis of these “subversive” letters shows that, over and again, it was cow slaughter in Braj that created empathy and solidarity across the Hindu states of north India. As the ruler of Bharatpur, Randhir Singh’s (r. 1805-1823) letter to Holkar stated: “I consider my own interest interwoven with the exaltation of Holkar. I am ready to join his victorious army. By the blessing of God, when his triumphant troops arrive in this country, we shall have a meeting.”<sup>261</sup> Niranjan Lall further corroborated Singh’s loyalty: “Seeing Koer Rundhere [Kumar Randhir] is enterprizing [sic] and high-minded, and

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<sup>259</sup> “No. 9. Letter from Nurunjeen Lall to Jeswunt Rao Holkar,” *PP 1806*, Vol. XVI, Paper 176, 20.

<sup>260</sup> “No. XXXVI. Lieut.-General Lake to the Marquess Wellesley,” August 13, 1804. Published in Robert M. Martin, ed. *The Despatches, Minutes & Correspondence of the Marquess Wellesley, K. G. During His Administration in India*, Vol. IV (London: W. H. Allen & Company, 1837), 183-184.

<sup>261</sup> “Letter from Nurunjeen Lall to Jeswunt Rao Holkar,” in Martin, ed. *The Despatches, Minutes & Correspondence*, 188-189.

detesting the continuance of the English in this quarter, and their killing cows, and scorns to yield obedience to them; he has therefore taken an oath to join you heart and hand.”<sup>262</sup>

Similarly, Ranjit Singh of Punjab sent a letter to Holkar through Lall: “All the great and the low, praise the wisdom with which God has endowed you who have formed such a plan as will put all the Caffers (English) to flight.”<sup>263</sup> Lall goes on to report: “But now, conformable to this oath, and by the worship of the cow, he has girt his loins with firmness. If just now your victorious army will approach, he is ready to sacrifice his life.”<sup>264</sup> However, this anti-British coalition did not survive for more than a year. By 1805, Lake had defeated Holkar, Bharatpur had signed a treaty with the British, and Ranjit Singh of Punjab had withdrawn his support from the coalition.

Nonetheless, Holkar’s anti-British efforts continued well after he signed a treaty with Lake. In fact, even as Holkar was signing this treaty on the banks of the river Beas on December 24, 1805, his “agents” continued to operate in Mathura. As a cryptic December 1805 file in the Records of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India claims, “attempts [have been made] by the agents of Jaswant Rao Holkar to subvert the allegiances of Company’s sepoys [soldiers] at Muttra [Mathura].”<sup>265</sup> In the following year, Holkar introduced three coins that claimed his loyalty, not to the British, but to the Mughal throne.<sup>266</sup> The Sanskrit inscription on one of the coins stated: “This coin of

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 187-188.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> “Attempts by the agents of Jaswant Rao Holkar to subvert the allegiance of the Company’s sepoys at Muttra,” British Library, Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections, London (henceforth APAC), Board’s Collection, F/4/295, No. 6794 December 1805-September 1809.

<sup>266</sup> “Jaswant Rao Holkar [Maharaja of Indore] is suspected of entertaining a design to establish a federal union between the Maratha and Rajput states - a new coinage is introduced by him which contrary to former usage is engraved with his own name,” APAC, Board’s Collection, F/4/251, No. 5627 February-

Jeswant, whose mind attached to the Lotus, like feet of Lakshmee's husband, as the bee to the Lotus, is celebrated on the face of the Earth. The paramount sovereign [the Mughal emperor] who resides at Indraprastha [the Sanskrit name for Delhi], reigns in an auspicious realm, and the coin struck by his favor, shines in this world."<sup>267</sup> The second coin directly acknowledged Akbar Shah II (1760-1837), then titular head of the Mughal throne, as the real ruler of Delhi. This was soon followed by a coin in Persian that described the Mughal emperor as the "Lord of planetary conjunctions, the custodian of Holkar."<sup>268</sup> Archibald Seton, the Resident of Delhi, noted: "Jaswant Rao Holkar is suspected of entertaining a design to establish a federal union between the Maratha and Rajput states – a new coinage is introduced by him which contrary to former usage is engraved with his own name."<sup>269</sup> However, Holkar's purported insanity from 1808 and subsequent death in 1811 abruptly ended this episode of espionage, resistances, and alliances to overthrow the East India Company.

But Holkar's protests against cow slaughter and British hunting sprees in Braj became a leitmotif that persistently dominated much of the region's anti-colonial politics thereafter. After recapturing Mathura and Vrindavan from Holkar in 1805, the first official decree issued by Gerard Lake was the banning of cow slaughter in the region. On July 3, 1805, Lake issued an order stating: "Nobody from the butcher's community, etc., of Mathuraji [the town of Mathura personified as a god] and the men belonging to the Lashkar (i.e., [British] camp), and the persons visiting the city and the camp and the

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March 1808. For a description of the coins, see P. K. Sethi, S. K. Bhatt, and R. Holkar, *A Study of Holkar State Coinage* (Indore: Naia Dunia Press, 1976), xxiii-xxv.

<sup>267</sup> "Jaswant Rao Holkar [Maharaja of Indore] is suspected of entertaining," 13.

<sup>268</sup> Sethi, Bhatt, and Holkar, *A Study of Holkar State Coinage*, xxv.

<sup>269</sup> "Jaswant Rao Holkar [Maharaja of Indore] is suspected of entertaining," 3.



suburbs of the city, shall slaughter cows. In case any one slaughters cows on the said land, he shall be severely punished. He shall get no pardon for his offence.”<sup>270</sup>

Metcalf’s 1806 *Memorandum of Hindostan* – a document that I cited earlier in this section – suggests that this act of appeasing the local Hindu population of Vrindavan and Mathura had its desired effect. Metcalfe writes: “This proclamation appears to have been attended with beneficial effects on the minds of the Hindoos, and has silenced the clamors of the adversaries of the British government.”<sup>271</sup> Indeed, as many scholars have noted, the East India Company, in its early years, enthusiastically participated in the elaborate cultural politics of the Islamicate world that it had suddenly acquired. Thus, Lake’s decree, issued in the name of the “Badshah [King] of England,” suggested a seamless continuity with earlier regimes of power. Only fifteen years earlier, Shah Alam had issued a similar royal order banning cow slaughter in the region. Usurping Shah Alam’s authority, the “Badshah of England,” with Lake as his representative, now became an upholder of Hindu *dharma*, protecting the people of Braj. Vrindavan and Mathura were from this moment the Company’s responsibility.

It was not surprising that Lake had issued a decree banning cow slaughter in Braj as an act of appeasing the Hindu population of the region. The 1793 *Cornwallis Code*, which gave legal form to the administrative structure of British India, was categorical in its protection of the “free exercise” of religion in India.<sup>272</sup> Lake’s decree thus demonstrated the magnanimity of the “Badshah of England” in assiduously protecting

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<sup>270</sup> “Memorial protesting against the cow slaughter and ill-treatment of cattle in the city of Muttra,” UPSC General Administration Department, File No. 507/1909, December 5, 1909, 4.

<sup>271</sup> Metcalfe, “Memorandum of Hindostan,” 504.

<sup>272</sup> Nancy G. Cassels, *Religion and Pilgrim Tax under the Company Raj* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988), 1.

Hindu sentiments while simultaneously keeping an earlier Mughal ethos alive. Shah Alam's ban on cow slaughter in Braj had only been issued fifteen years before Lake's annexation of the region. The British then presented themselves as not merely foreigners, *mleccha* (outcaste) meat-eaters from across the seas, but a power that recognized and empathized with the intricacies of Vrindavan's Vaishnava culture.

By 1832, the territories that constituted British-occupied Braj were incorporated into the newly formed Mathura District with its headquarters in the town of Mathura. The formation of the district led to the establishment of a cohesive administrative structure under the office of the District Magistrate. By the 1840s, hospitals, schools, jails, printing presses, as well as a strong police system were introduced.<sup>273</sup> Yet from the very beginning the relationship between that of the local communities of Braj and the East India Company was that of antagonism. Writing on the contestations between the East India Company and ascetics groups in north India, William Pinch marks out the political sphere of secular governance that was occupied by merchant/warrior ascetics from the time of Akbar.<sup>274</sup> Antagonistic nomadic ascetics who traveled across the sub-continent carrying subversive information threatened the very system of a structured model of power that the British attempted to introduce in India.<sup>275</sup>

The ascetic's religious authority, often in conflict with British desires, thus challenged the Company's authority as the absolute sovereign in India. For example, the practice of *dana*, charity or gift-giving, an integral part of Hindu religious duty,

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<sup>273</sup> Whiteway, *Report on the Settlement of the Muttra District*.

<sup>274</sup> William R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>275</sup> See *Ibid.* for this history.

threatened the Company's self-professed privilege as the sole agency that could extract tribute from the people of India. Itinerant monks and ascetics traveled from village to village preaching the word of god in exchange for money and food grains. However, this practice of religious tribute, the act of collecting *dana*, has to be situated within a system of political action that exceeded the economic. Much has been written on the act of *dana* in pre-colonial India.<sup>276</sup> Recent scholarship has challenged a purely economic reading of this act to suggest that the *dana* should be seen as a form of "generalized exchange" which promoted "social solidarity."<sup>277</sup>

Given that most ascetic communities in pre-colonial India operated as landowners and merchants, tribute was never the main source of income for this community. *Dana*, thus understood, was a complex relationship between the priest and the laity – a relationship that marked social identity, built communities, and produced a mode of "face-to-face, day-to-day interaction between lay people and the religious."<sup>278</sup> It was precisely this resilient relationship between the laity and anti-British groups of ascetics that the East India Company attempted to restrain through a series of legislative actions.<sup>279</sup>

Consequently, innumerable late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century British reports posit the act of collecting *dana* by ascetics as the tyrannical oppression of spurious holy men. *Dana* –

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<sup>276</sup> For example, see Maria Heim, *Theories of the Gift in South Asia. Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Reflections on Dāna* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Vijay Nath, *Dāna, Gift System in Ancient India, c. 600 B.C.-c. A.D. 300: A Socio-Economic Perspective* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987); Ivan Strenski, "On Generalized Exchange and the Domestication of the Sangha," *Man* 18:3 (September, 1983), 463-477.

<sup>277</sup> Strenski, "On Generalized Exchange," 471.

<sup>278</sup> Heim, *Theories of the Gift*, 73.

<sup>279</sup> For example, in 1780, police surveillance was introduced at public religious festivals in Calcutta. "Addition of Police Regulations and Order for prevention of disturbances at Muharram and other Festivals, Extract of Proceedings of Governor General Council at Fort William 26 June 1780," APAC Home Miscellaneous156/1, East Indies Series 64, Negative 3923, 507-540.

a transaction between the ascetic and the householder – was presented in terms of a debasement of religious values, a corruption in Hinduism itself that made divine blessings into a commodity to be purchased and sold. British administrators repeatedly suggested that not only was the ascetic corrupt and deceitful in selling divine blessings but the Hindu householder gullible and irrational in purchasing this commodity. The “taming,” in the words of Peter van der Veer, of this dangerous figure of the itinerant ascetic was part of a post-1780 British attempt to control and make manageable the mobile, and hence uncontrollable, aspects of Hindu religious practices.<sup>280</sup> van der Veer further suggests that the transformation of Hindu practices from within itself added to the decline in the importance of nomad ascetics within a larger social order.<sup>281</sup>

The decline of the itinerant ascetic was simultaneous with the rise of sedentarized groups of Brahmin temple priests who now asserted their power as holders of religion. The post-1800s explosion in non-elite pilgrimage reiterated further the importance of traditional priestly groups in pilgrimage sites, for example Allahabad, Gaya, and Varanasi.<sup>282</sup> In Mathura, it was the Chaube Brahmins who became the most important priestly group. A Brahmin sub-caste which had derived its name from its distinction of reading all four (*chatur*) Vedas, the Chaubes of Mathura were celebrated in texts from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The text *Mathurā Māhātmya, The Greatness of Mathura*, attributed

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<sup>280</sup> Peter van der Veer, “Taming the Ascetic: Devotionalism in a Hindu Ascetic Order,” *Man: New Series* 22:4 (December 1987), 680-695.

<sup>281</sup> As van der Veer writes, “One may argue here for a relation between the devotional worship of images in a localised temple cult and a process of sedentarisation. Moreover, the priestly worship of images should be confined to members of pure castes, and especially Brahmins, if one wants to have the support of lay members of higher castes.” *Ibid.*, 693.

<sup>282</sup> For example, Kama Maclean discusses the role of the traditional water-priests at Allahabad in contributing to the increase of wealthy peasant pilgrimage. See Maclean, *Pilgrimage and Power*.

to the Vaishnava saint Rupa Goswami, is a good example.<sup>283</sup> Describing in detail the exemplary virtue gained through pilgrimage to Braj, the *Māhātmya* explains the preeminence of the Mathura Chaubes. The author is careful to enumerate the immense merit accrued from charitable acts towards these priests. As verse 326 of the *Māhātmya* states:

“If the *brahmana* residents of Mathura are devoid of Vedic knowledge and the *brahmanas* of other places are well versed in the four Vedas, one should leave aside the other *brahmanas* and feed the *brahmanas* of Mathura.”<sup>284</sup> Similarly, verse 328 – arguing for acts of charity – suggests: “Oh Vasudha [Goddess Earth], you should know that the forms of the *brahmanas* of Mathura are my form. Therefore, by feeding a *brahmana* in Mathura one accumulates the piety of feeding millions of *brahmanas*.”<sup>285</sup>

While it would be difficult to ascertain the position of the Chaubes in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, with the growth of 19<sup>th</sup>-century pilgrimage, they certainly became one of the wealthiest social groups in Mathura and Vrindavan.<sup>286</sup> The sudden increase in pilgrimage enhanced both the social and economic position of these temple priests. Claiming exclusive rights of worship in Vaishnava temples, the Chaubes controlled the most important sites and temples in Braj, for instance the Bishrant Ghat, the primary site in Mathura for worshipping the river Yamuna. Not surprisingly, the growing authority and wealth of the *pandas*, Chaubes, and Vaishnava priests led to repeated conflicts with

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<sup>283</sup> For identification and dating of this manuscript, see Entwistle, *Braj*, 235-236. For a history of the Chaubes of Mathura, see Owen M. Lynch, “Contesting and Contested Self-Identities: Mathura’s Chaubes,” in Wimal Dissanayake, ed. *Narratives of Agency: Self-Making in China, India, and Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 74-103.

<sup>284</sup> *Śrī Mathurā Māhātmya*, 108.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>286</sup> Growse, *Mathurā*, 9-10.

British authorities over control of the sacred spaces of Vrindavan and Mathura. The control of space, real and symbolic, became the primary point of contention.

In Vrindavan, one of the first conflicts between the Company and temple priests occurred in 1808. Lieutenant Thomas Bacon's 1837 travelogue describes the incident: "In 1808, two young officers from Muttra [Mathura] shot at, and wounded one of the monkies, upon which the infuriated Brahmins, attacking the elephant upon which the soldiers were mounted, drove it into the river, and both were drowned. The natives attribute this revenge to the monkies themselves, who, with sticks and stones, are said to have driven the elephant before them."<sup>287</sup> This incident, widely discussed in British administrative reports, travelogues, and gazetteers, took place only three years after Lake had banned cow slaughter in Braj.<sup>288</sup> Monkeys occupied a special place in Vaishnava mythology as the foremost devotees of Rama and were worshipped in Vrindavan, according to travel accounts, from at least the time of Akbar.<sup>289</sup> The feeding of monkeys, peacocks, and fish was part of an everyday ritual for devotees in Vrindavan.

This act of killing monkeys by itself would not have been so provocative had it not been committed within the sacred space of Vrindavan and for its recent annexation by the British from Jaswant Rao Holkar. Although the Company punished the responsible

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<sup>287</sup> Thomas Bacon, *First Impressions and Studies from Nature in Hindostan; Embracing an Outline of the Voyage to Calcutta, and Five Years' Residence in Bengal and the Doab from 1831 to 1836*, Vol. II (London: W. H. Allen and Company, 1837), 344.

<sup>288</sup> For example, Crooke, *Things Indian*; Robert G. Hobbes, *Reminiscences and Notes of Seventy Years' Life, Travel and Adventure; Military and Civil; Scientific and Literary* (London: Eliot Stock, 1893); Walter Hamilton, *The East-India Gazetteer; containing particular descriptions of the empires, kingdoms, principalities, provinces, cities, towns, districts, fortresses, harbours, rivers, lakes, & c. of Hindostan and the adjacent countries, India beyond the Ganges, and the Eastern Archipelago; together with sketches of the manners, customs, institutions, agriculture, commerce, manufactures, revenues, population, castes, religion, history & c. of their various inhabitants* (London: J. Murray by Dove, 1815).

<sup>289</sup> Entwistle, *Braj*, 208-209.

priests by confiscating land, British officers, for example Major William Thorn, who served under Lake, complained that this punishment was not suitably harsh.<sup>290</sup> However, the killing of monkeys in 1808 was not the only moment of contestation between army officers from the Mathura cantonment and the residents of Braj regarding animal slaughter. Growse writes about how the residents of Gokul – the pilgrimage town nine miles south-east of Mathura where Krishna spent his childhood – “rose *en masse*” in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to protect waterfowls that were being hunted by an army party from the cantonment.<sup>291</sup>

While these incidents entered Vrindavan’s public memory through oral narratives, it was in the 1843 *Vṛndāvan Dhām Anurāgāvalī*, a description of Vrindavan by a local poet Gopal Kavi that these incidents finally became part of an indigenous textual history of the town.<sup>292</sup> Written almost thirty-five years after the killing of the monkeys, the *Anurāgāvalī*, part travelogue, part history, and part instructions on ritual behavior, presented the incident in a section titled *About the English, Āgrej Prasāṅg*. One of the most detailed description of the town ever written, the text discussed over three hundred and fifty images of Krishna worshipped in Vrindavan, innumerable temples and sacred spaces, and biographies of important saints and ascetics who resided in the town.

Gopal Kavi’s account was, however, not about a primordial, timeless Vrindavan – in Eliade’s oft-cited words “a primordial mythic time made present” – but situated within

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>291</sup> Growse, *Mathurā*, 282.

<sup>292</sup> Gopal Kavi, *Vṛndāvan Dhām Anurāgāvalī* Microfilm, Vrindaban Research Institute. Reel 666, Acc. No. H5 (3). For a discussion on the manuscript, see Entwistle, *Braj*, 272; Heidi R. M. Pauwels, “Paradise Found, Paradise Lost: Harirām Vyās’s Love for Vrindāban and What Hagiographers Made of it,” in Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara, eds. *Pilgrims, Patrons, and Place: Localizing Sanctity in Asian Religions* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003), 124-180.

a chronological historically located narrative of Mughal patronage and consequent Company rule – the “profane time of ordinary temporal duration.”<sup>293</sup> Although Akbar’s land grants in Vrindavan were posited through his alleged piety as an incarnation of an Allahabad Brahmin, the text was remarkably historical in its understanding of time and space. Much like traditional *mahatmyas*, texts extolling the sanctity of pilgrimage sites and providing prescriptive circumambulation routes, the *Vṛndāvan Dhām Anurāgāvalī* too begins with a descriptive circumambulation of Vrindavan. Yet, interspersed within the characteristic descriptions of sacred sites were accounts of non-religious buildings.

Although texts such as these allow for a re-thinking of modern time-space in pilgrimage towns, Eliade’s binary of sacred and profane time has remained the predominant paradigm through which pilgrimage practices in India are routinely understood. For example, Maclean, in her recent book on the Kumbh Mela [Fair] at Allahabad, writes: “At the same time, an abstract notion that the *mela* has existed from time immemorial is important in the ways pilgrims interpret and value their own participation in it. The agelessness of the *mela*, in combination with its enchanted Puranic origins and related stories [...] informs pilgrims of the festival’s sanctity.”<sup>294</sup> Similarly, van der Veer, discussing the construction of Rama’s supposed birthplace at Ayodhya, suggests, “Ayodhya’s sacred time and place are set beyond profane society and history.

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<sup>293</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. William Trask (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1987), 68.

<sup>294</sup> Maclean, *Pilgrimage and Power*, 85.



[...] The tendency in Hindu religion to obliterate historical time and historical person makes it exceedingly difficult to find independent, historical facts.”<sup>295</sup>

Yet, as it becomes obvious from the section *About the English, Āgrej Prasāṅg*, the *Vṛndāvan Dhām Anurāgāvalī* did not wish to present to its readers a primordial timeless Vrindavan. Instead, the history of the town was situated within the here and now of an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century time-space. And, over and again, the contestations and claims to legitimacy that produced an indigenous Vaishnava subjectivity in Vrindavan was not situated on the buttresses of enduring traditions and timeless inherited values, but from within the judicial-legal framework of colonial governmentality. That Krishna was a cowherd who grew up tending cattle in the forests of Braj and that sculptures from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE onwards show him surrounded by cows certainly helped the cow protection movement in Braj.<sup>296</sup> However, the claims of the movement were not based on this image of the young cowherd Krishna but the 1805 promise of the Company to ban cow slaughter in the region.

The burning of the Mathura district records room in 1857 unfortunately makes impossible a discussion of the early moments of the movement. Interestingly, the British government strategically mobilized this absence of pre-1857 documents in the colonial archive to delegitimize and disenfranchise the movement in Vrindavan. In 1909, the colonial government launched a search for pre-1857 documents that would validate their stance on not banning cow slaughter in Braj. This search in the state’s archives at

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<sup>295</sup>Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth: Religious Experience and Identity in Ayodhya* (New Delhi: Oxford University, Press, 1997), 49.

<sup>296</sup>Sunil K. Bhattacharya discusses 2<sup>nd</sup>-century images of Krishna with cows. Sunil K. Bhattacharya, *Krishna-cult in Indian Art* (New Delhi: M.D. Publications, 1996), 28.

Mathura and Agra – documented in a series of letters between the Chief Secretary to the Government, United Provinces (later Uttar Pradesh), the Commissioner of Agra, and the District Magistrate, Mathura – did not produce a single document from before the 1870s that discussed cow slaughter.<sup>297</sup> While the government used this lack of documents to argue that the Company had never supported the ban of cow slaughter in the region, arbitrary references to cow protection agitations in Braj gleaned from other sources suggest that cow slaughter remained a concern through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, an extract from the May 23, 1815 Bengal Judicial Consultations suggests:

Cattle are slaughtered during [the] annual fair at [the pilgrimage site of] Hardwar [Haridwar]. The Council found it objectionable and to be calculated to give serious offence to the religious feeling of every class of Hindoos. [...] Similar considerations render it desirable also that the slaughtering of cattle at Muttra [Mathura] and Bindraban [Vrindavan], and in those places in their immediate vicinity which are considered by the Hindoos to be sacred should be prohibited in future. The application of this rule to Muttra may probably be attended with some difficulty as affecting the comforts of the troops ordinarily cantoned at that place, and it may perhaps be necessary to introduce some partial and local exception in that respect.<sup>298</sup>

This brief extract from 1815 makes obvious that the British had, by and large, ignored Lake's decree. And, equally importantly, the setting up of the Mathura cantonment made it difficult for the government to authorize a strict vegetarian diet that the Vaishnava constituencies of the towns insistently demanded. By giving in to demands of banning

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<sup>297</sup> "Memorial protesting against the cow slaughter," UPSA File No. 507/1909.

<sup>298</sup> "Extracts from earlier records regarding the imposition of the pilgrim tax and the support of native religious institutions," APAC, Board's Collection, IOR/F/4/1306, No. 51857 February 1808-September 1831, 54-56.

cow slaughter and hunting in the forests of Braj, the government would in effect acknowledge the symbolic authority of the Vaishnava merchants and priests in Vrindavan and Mathura.

However, the altercations between the British and the residents of Braj went beyond the symbolic. In 1816, the Chaubes of Mathura started protesting against the recently imposed Chaukidari (police) system instituted under Regulation XXII.<sup>299</sup> Introduced in Varanasi in 1795, the Chaukidari system involved the establishment of a private police force responsible to the city's *daroga*, the head of the official city police.<sup>300</sup> The money to set up this mercenary policing system was forced from the residents of towns through a Chaukidari tax. This system in effect created an additional police force with allegiances to the British, the cost of which had to be borne by the town residents. Not surprisingly, this new state surveillance was met with protests in a number of cities in north India.<sup>301</sup> In Mathura, it was the Chaubes who led the fight to prevent a complete surrender of their space to British supervision, administration, and control. After a series of public protests on the streets of Mathura, the Chaubes finally won a partial victory –

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<sup>299</sup> “A regulation for reenacting and reducing into one Regulation, with Amendments and further Provisions, the Rules in force for the Appointment and Maintenance of Choikedars of Police. — Passed by the Governor General in Council, on the 27<sup>th</sup> December, 1816.” Published in David G. Sutherland, *Regulations of the Bengal Code in force in September 1862, with a List of Titles and Index* Vol. II (Calcutta: Geo Wyman & Company, 1864), 1354.

<sup>300</sup> B.B. Misra, *The Central Administration of the East India Company, 1773-1834* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1959), 362-266.

<sup>301</sup> For instance, see “Report on the origin and causes of the disturbances which occurred in the town of Bareilly in the year 1816 in consequence of the introduction of the Chaukidari system,” APAC, Board’s Collection, F/4/640, No. 17691, May 1816-August 1818.

the right to minimal taxes, self-assessment, and exemption from punishment in case of non-payment.<sup>302</sup>

If the dispute over Chaukidari taxes was a key moment of conflict between the British administration and local communities in Braj, the next conflict that entered the colonial archive was 1857.<sup>303</sup> Of course, the 1857 uprisings have been analyzed by innumerable scholars over the last hundred and fifty years. Rather than attempting to write the history of the uprising and its repercussions in the Mathura district, I focus on the representation of Vaishnava priests within the official British narrative of 1857. Growse's narrative of 1857, very similar to more official accounts, for instance in the *Parliamentary Papers* presented to the House of Commons, provides an uncomplicated picture of the greed of native soldiers that fuelled an unplanned, unprovoked outbreak in Mathura on May 29. It was the transfer of the government treasury from Mathura to Agra to protect it from mutineers coming in from Delhi that supposedly provoked the uprising in the district. While the gold was being loaded onto carts, the sepoy of the 44<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry suddenly killed the officer in charge, looted the treasury, freed prisoners from the district jail, burnt government offices, police and revenue records, and then proceeded towards Delhi. After the sepoy left, the local population of Mathura pillaged the treasury

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<sup>302</sup> APAC, Bengal (Criminal) Judicial Proceedings IOR/BCJ/132/43. As cited in Christopher A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 321.

<sup>303</sup> For the narrative of events in Braj, see Growse, *Mathurá*, 46-49; Mark Thornbill, "No. 102. Dated 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1858. Narrative of events attending the outbreak of disturbances and restoration of authority in Muttra 1857-1858," NAI Foreign and Political Department Notes, Proceedings No. C 575, 1872; "Papers relative to Mutinies in E. Indies: Appendix B," *PP 1857-1858*, Vol. XLIV, Paper 2363, 117-121.

through the night. The District Magistrate, Mark Thornbill, returned to Mathura the next day, and with the assistance of “wealthier inhabitants,” brought the town under control.<sup>304</sup>

Over the next few months, Mathura and Vrindavan remained undisturbed except when mutineers passing through the district attempted to loot the towns. However, each time, local inhabitants resisted these attacks. This report of local cooperation and support of the British in opposition to aggressive sepoy from Delhi, Gwalior, Nimach, and Morar who looted wealthy merchants, raped women, and plundered temples produced a narrative of a local endorsement of the British Raj. The nature of the uprising was then merely a military one that did not have popular support.<sup>305</sup> However, the only group that apparently did not support the British during this time was the Vaishnava priests of the two towns. Growse, rather sardonically, notes: “It is said that during their stay in the city the rebels found their most obliging friends among the Mathuriya [Mathura] Chaubes, who, perhaps, more than any others, have grown rich and fat under the tolerance of British rule.”<sup>306</sup>

This comment – inserted in the middle of a description of how the mutineers “oppressed” the inhabitants of Vrindavan and laid the town to siege – had its desired effect. The connection between godless Hindu mutineers who did not hesitate to loot temples or “spare the Holy City” and Vaishnava priests, who supported these heinous acts, was effectively established.<sup>307</sup> The section on 1857 in *Mathurá, A District Memoir* then ends rather aptly with the return of law and order with the arrival of the District

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<sup>304</sup> Thornbill, “No. 102. Dated 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1858,” 3.

<sup>305</sup> See Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt, 1857-58: A Study of Popular Resistance* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), among others, for revisions of this thesis.

<sup>306</sup> Growse, *Mathurá*, 48.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

Magistrate M. Thornbill. This cryptic assertion of the Chaubes finding “their most obliging friends” in the mutineers of 1857 remains an uncorroborated and unverifiable sliver of information. No empirical evidence lies in the state’s archive.<sup>308</sup> Neither local histories and oral narratives, nor 19<sup>th</sup>-century vernacular texts, ever mention the Chaubes’ involvement in 1857. Was this alleged involvement then Growse’s fabrication? Or was it merely one of those countless events that elude history by its sheer absence from the archive?

But certainly, by the 1880s, the colonial project of categorizing India had made the Chaube into a figure of derision. Growse’s magisterial *District Memoir*, the first edition of which was published in 1874, had by then become symptomatic, the Ur text, which informed almost all later understandings of Mathura and Vrindavan. Growse writes:

The Chaubes of Mathurá however, numbering in all some 6,000 persons, are a peculiar race and must not be passed over so summarily. They are still very celebrated as wrestlers and, in the Mathurá Máhátmya, their learning and other virtues also are extolled in the most extravagant terms; but either the writer was prejudiced or time has had a sadly deteriorating effect. They are now ordinarily described by their own countrymen as a low and ignorant horde of rapacious mendicants. Like the Prugwálás [water-priests] at Allahabad, they are the recognized local cicerones; and they may always be seen with their portly forms

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<sup>308</sup> My search at the Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections, British Library, London; National Archives, New Delhi; the Uttar Pradesh State Archives in Lucknow and Allahabad; and the Mathura District Records Room did not produce any document that discussed the role of the Chaubes in 1857. Neither does the Advisory Board for History of Freedom Movement’s six volumes *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh* – a rich source of documents, letters, and telegrams from that year – mention Vaishnava priests of Mathura and Vrindavan. S.A.A. Rizvi, ed. *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh: Source-material* (Lucknow: Information Department, 1960).

lolling about near the most popular ghats and temples, ready to bear down upon the first pilgrim that approaches.<sup>309</sup>

We are today all too familiar with the figure of the “rapacious” priests at pilgrimage sites. And it is perhaps in the colonial labyrinth of censuses and reports that this figure was created. Of course, I am not suggesting that *pandas*, pilgrimage priests, were anything but traders of divine benevolence. As always, pilgrimage operated from within a patron-client system that involved an exchange of money for divine intervention. But it was only in the 1880s that this trader of religion, the *panda*, was made into a figure of derision and ridicule, an “ignorant, extortionate class,” as a 1914 encyclopedia of religion asserted.<sup>310</sup>

An 1885 official volume on the caste system in the North-Western Provinces (later Uttar Pradesh) situates the *panda* in opposition to an ideal Brahmin who sacrificed the secular world of wealth and domesticity to seek the sacred.<sup>311</sup> Liberally citing from the ca. 2<sup>nd</sup>-century *Manusmṛiti*, the Laws of Manu, the text argues for this idealized Brahmin as “the copingstone to which all the other stones of the social arch converge, the model upon which all the other castes were formed, and in a certain sense the cause of their existence.”<sup>312</sup> On the other hand, the *panda* was posited as “an inferior class of Brahman, whose special function consists in taking charge of temples and assisting visitors to present their offerings to the shrine.”<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Growse, *Mathurá*, 9.

<sup>310</sup> James Hastings, ed. *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. VI (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1914), 517.

<sup>311</sup> John C. Nesfield, *Brief View of the Caste System of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh* (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces’ Government Press, 1885).

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

A Pandit [*panda*], who has amassed wealth through the offerings made at his temple, seldom remains there himself, but hires out some poorer Brahman to act as his proxy. If, however, he hears that some raja or other rich man is about to visit the temple, he takes good care to be there himself and secure the largest share of the liberal offering or fee that is expected. Almost every Panda has a distinct circle of clients living at various distances from his own house or temple, and sometimes at a distance of one hundred miles or more. He endeavours to pay each of them a visit at intervals of one or two years, in expectation of the fee which clients so visited are accustomed to give.<sup>314</sup>

From William Crooke's *The North-Western Provinces of India* (1897) and *Natives of Northern India* (1906) to the 1872 official census of the North-West Provinces, colonial texts systematically worked towards the making of this immoral, avaricious *panda*.<sup>315</sup> And, Growse's *District Memoirs* remained central to this new discourse cited, over and again, in countless reports, travelogues, missionary pamphlets, and Orientalist scholarship.<sup>316</sup> It was the *panda*'s determined habitation and interference in the world of colonial governance, local taxation systems, and municipal administration that was unpalatable for the government and its Orientalist scholarship. By the 1880s, the Chaubes had blatantly started criticizing the government's management of Vrindavan and Mathura. Repeatedly, the local administration was pushed into competing with resilient

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> William Crooke, *Natives of Northern India* (London: Archibald Constable, 1906); William Crooke, *The North-Western Provinces of India, their History, Ethnology, and Administration* (London: Methuen & Company, 1897); W. C. Plowden, ed. *Census of the N.- W. Provinces, 1872*, Vol. I (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces' Government Press, 1873).

<sup>316</sup> As Crooke writes, "The Chaubes of Muttra are a similar class. They are celebrated more for their skill in wrestling than for priestly learning. The old religious histories of the place extol their virtues in the most extravagant terms; but either the writers were prejudiced, or time has exercised a sadly deteriorating effect. 'They are now,' says Mr. Growse, 'ordinarily described by their countrymen as a low and ignorant horde of rapacious mendicants.' They may always be seen with their portly forms lolling about the sacred places, ready to bear down on the first pilgrim that approaches." Crooke, *Natives of Northern India*, 106. Also see Crooke, *The North-Western Provinces*, 62; Plowden, ed. *Census of the N.- W. Provinces*, lxxviii.



priests who attempted to subvert colonial interventions in the public sphere while claiming a certain degree of self-autonomy. In the following sections, I turn to the systems of space-making that arose out of this political crisis in Braj. I look at temple architecture, print culture, photography, and cartographic practices that made visible an anti-colonial political praxis in Braj.

## 6. The Islamicate in Vrindavan: The Shahji temple (1868)

In 1850, Manik Chand, a scribe at the court of Begum Samru (1750-1836), the ruler of the princely state of Sardhana, revised an 1822 biography of the Begum titled *Zib-ut tāwārīkh*, *The Ornament of History*.<sup>317</sup> Significantly editing and augmenting the original text, Chand included an additional section in the *tāwārīkh* that described the important monuments of Delhi, Agra, Mathura, and Vrindavan. Produced specifically for a British audience, for the pleasure, the *shauq*, of English sahibs, the rather incongruous inclusion of a travel narrative within a traditional illustrated biography was perhaps intended to meet the colonial desire of collecting native views. Much like Thomas T. Metcalfe's 1844 *Reminiscences of Imperial Dehlie* [Delhi], a description of the city with one hundred and twenty six watercolors, Chand's manuscript too was embellished with seventy-seven paintings.<sup>318</sup> While the inclusion of Mathura, Vrindavan, and Agra, within a description of the city and its surroundings speaks much about travel and mobility in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, I begin this section with the description of Vrindavan in the manuscript. Neither Manik Chand nor Begum Samru will appear again in this dissertation. The *Zib-ut tāwārīkh* provides me with a helpful frame, a picture, to think Vrindavan as a metaphor, a space, and an idea beyond the Vaishnava constituencies on which my dissertation largely focuses on.

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<sup>317</sup> Manik Chand, *Zib-ut tāwārīkh* (1850), Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Arabic Persian Research Institute, Tonk, Ms. 330. For a history of this manuscript, see Aditya Behl, "Articulating a Life, in Words and Pictures: Begum Samru and *The Ornament of Histories*," in Barbara Schmitz, ed. *After the Great Mughals: Painting in Delhi and the Regional Courts in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2002), 100-123.

<sup>318</sup> Thomas T. Metcalfe, *Reminiscences of Imperial Dehlie* (1844), APAC, Or.5475.

Inserted between a section on the birth of the Begum's son in 1808 and her 1825 Bharatpur campaign, the description of the sites/sights in the manuscript included mosques, temples, palaces, markets, and gardens. However, even as the artist(s) responsible for the paintings replaced the white marble dome of Nizamuddin Auliya's tomb in Delhi with a golden one, in general the depiction of the monuments in Delhi was fairly accurate albeit constructed within a repetitive, standard iconographic program. The three paintings of Vrindavan included in the manuscript depicted temples dedicated to Krishna and a pavilion with a tripartite arcade, a *baradari*, in a Mughal-style *chahar bagh*, a four-part garden. Manik Chand's text described the *baradaris* as "novel" while poetically comparing the golden finials, the *kalasas*, of temples in Vrindavan to stars shining in the night sky.<sup>319</sup>

One of the three paintings depicts a white marble temple with a red sandstone *sikhara*. An enormous sculpture of Krishna, flanked by cowherd girls, cherubs, and male worshippers, adorn the neo-classical façade (Figure 6.1). While the sandstone superstructure closely resembles the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Madanmohan temple, a temple I discuss in Section 1, the façade is based on the Shahji temple that was being constructed in Vrindavan in the 1850s, approximately at the same time when Chand was writing the *tāwārīkh* (Figure 6.2, See Figure 1.4). The Shahji temple, with its Italian colonnades and marble cherubs adorning the façade, was however completed only in 1868. Perhaps the artist, or Manik Chand himself, had seen the incomplete temple during a visit to

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<sup>319</sup> I thank Abdul M. Khan, Director of the Arabic Persian Research Institute, Tonk for helping in translating the Persian manuscript during my visit to the Institute in 2008.

Vrindavan and thus added a 16<sup>th</sup>-century *sikhara* to the temple, thinking that the superstructure would be added later.

Why did Manik Chand and/or the artist responsible for the paintings visualize a 19<sup>th</sup>-century flat-roofed temple with a 16<sup>th</sup>-century *sikhara*? By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, almost all key Vaishnava temples in north India – the Govind Dev in Jaipur, the Srinathji in Nathadwara, as well as a number of temples in Vrindavan itself – were invariably built with a flat roof and a façade constituted through repeating arched colonnades. The Shahji temple, when completed in 1868, was also, not surprisingly, built without a *sikhara*. How then does this visualization of Vrindavan’s temples in the *Zib-ut tāwārīkh* allow us to think 19<sup>th</sup>-century imaginings of Vaishnava temple architecture? What were the resonances of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century sandstone *sikharas*, symptomatic of Vrindavan’s Islamicate temple architecture, in colonial north India?

Although Jaswant Rao Holkar’s early 19<sup>th</sup>-century citation of cow slaughter in Vrindavan and Krishna Chandra Sinha’s *sikhara* temple suggests the importance of the pilgrimage town in a larger north Indian Hindu consciousness, Braj was not part of a circuit of important pilgrimage sites in the early 1800s. For example, in 1786, as many as one hundred and seventy thousand Maratha pilgrims had traveled to Allahabad, while in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century there were almost thirty thousand Maratha immigrants, including pilgrims, in Varanasi.<sup>320</sup> Certainly, as travel accounts confirm, pilgrims visited Mathura and Vrindavan in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, but the scale of pilgrimage to Braj was not

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<sup>320</sup> Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars*, 127-137.

commensurate with that of Gaya, Allahabad, or Varanasi.<sup>321</sup> It was only with the reopening of the communication system between Delhi and Agra under British governance that pilgrimage to Braj became viable once again.

The 1807 setting up of a police system on the river Yamuna to facilitate cotton trade had a significant effect in the rejuvenation of pilgrimage.<sup>322</sup> Moreover, travel to Vrindavan and Mathura became safe with the British subjugation of river bandits, who were notorious for their harassment of merchants and pilgrims passing through the Indo-Gangetic plain. Given that Mathura was both on the Grand Trunk Road, which connected Afghanistan to Bengal, and the river Yamuna, which connected Delhi to the Ganges, the opening of this trade route had immense implications for the development of pilgrimage. The 1832 construction of a new road between Mathura and Vrindavan, with support from the princely state of Gwalior, further facilitated pilgrimage. In 1846, the Maharaja of Gwalior further extended this road as an act of piety.<sup>323</sup>

The early 19<sup>th</sup> century was also marked by a transition in the demography of pilgrims coming to Braj. While there is no pre-1857 statistical account of pilgrims coming to Braj, travelogues eloquently speak of Vrindavan as a vibrant pilgrimage center. For example, Bholanath Chunder, in his 1869 *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India*, writes:

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<sup>321</sup> For instance, Ashim Kumar Roy records the building of a number of temples in the Braj region in the 18<sup>th</sup> century under the patronage of the Kachhwahas. A few examples include the Sitaramji temple in Mathura (1732), Govardhannathji temple in Govardhan (1736), Nrityagopal temple in Vrindavan (1779), and the Chatar Shiromaniji temple in Vrindavan (1810). Ashim Kumar Roy, *The History of the Jaipur City* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978), 228-230.

<sup>322</sup> Dharma Bhanu, *History and Administration of the North-Western Provinces* (Agra: Shiva Lal Agarwala & Company, 1957), 27.

<sup>323</sup> "Plan of road between Muttra and Vrindaban," NAI Central India Agency Records, Gwalior Residency, Proceedings No. 92, 1846 (Old No. 1/1827).

November 3. —This is the sixteenth day, and we are at Brindabun. Our grandfathers and great-grandfathers had to make their wills before setting out on a pilgrimage to *this Ultima Thule* of their days. By land, the journey was unsafe from wild beasts, from highway robbers, from Thugs, and from Mahratta rovers. By water, the voyage was unsafe from Nor-Westerns, from pirates, and from the river-police. Those were days of might over right—of *tera ke mera*, in which the timid Bengalee, who quitted his home, scarcely hoped to escape the thousand accidents by flood and field. But travelling thus far we have not lost a pice, and not a man has dared to approach us either in the mountain gorge, or upon the lonely heath. In a few years the Railway shall further abridge this distance and time, and inaugurate an era of security to life and property which has been never known to these regions.<sup>324</sup>

Chunder's 1860s scrutiny of *panda* (pilgrimage priests) record books in Vrindavan further makes evident the increase of pilgrimage in the first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>325</sup> As he writes: "Few of the vouchers or certificates [in the record books] were found to be older than three generations, or beyond the age of our grandfathers. This is a proof, that pilgrimages to Brindabun were less frequent when British rule had not extended to these provinces—when the inroads of the Mahratta and Jaut, of Holkar and Ameer Khan, had plunged the valley of the Jumna in misrule and anarchy."<sup>326</sup>

Indeed, by the 1830s, pilgrimage to Braj had considerably increased, along with an escalation of temple-building in Mathura and Vrindavan. That most temples in the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Chunder, *Travels of a Hindoo*, Vol. II, 40.

<sup>325</sup> *Pandas*, or pilgrimage priests, are found at most important pilgrimage sites in India. Since rituals of worship at these sites require obeisance to one's forefathers, *pandas* maintained detailed records of family genealogies, including the dates of visits to the particular site. Over time, families would use the services of a particular *panda* and these record books would be passed down from father to son. This documentation provides an elaborate account of, not only family histories, but the changing nature of pilgrimage.

<sup>326</sup> Chunder, *Travels of a Hindoo*, 42.

century were built not by princely rulers but by Vaishnava merchants from Bengal, Rajasthan, and Delhi reflects the transformation of Vrindavan into a popular pilgrimage site. A number of scholars have discussed the political resonances of the democratization of Hindu philanthropy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Douglas Haynes writes about philanthropic acts by merchants in Surat as bringing religio-centric community formation into the purportedly secular space of a national imagining. The movement of *dharma* into nationalist politics through conscious adaptations of Hindu models of public participation allowed for the creation of an anti-colonial politicized Hindu public sphere.<sup>327</sup>

Scholars have argued that it was through a Vaishnavization of politics, for example public acts of Hindu charity as part of nation-building or Gandhi being compared to Krishna in innumerable popular prints, that a secularized Hinduism, a political ideology of nation-making, came into being. Popular prints make evident the homology between Gandhian political practices and Vaishnavism, as Christopher Pinney has noted.<sup>328</sup> For example, in 1930, Shyam Sunder Lal, a Kanpur-based publisher, printed a lithograph of Gandhi defeating the serpent Kaliya at Vrindavan (Figure 6.3). The print drew its source from early 20<sup>th</sup>-century lithographs that memorialized a moment described in the sixteenth chapter of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* – the moment when the young Krishna battled with the poisonous serpent in the waters of the river Yamuna. According to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the serpent Kaliya had poisoned the river Yamuna at Vrindavan, which led to a group of young cowherds dying from drinking the poisonous waters. To purge the river of this poison, Krishna battled with Kaliya, overpowered him,

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<sup>327</sup> Douglas E. Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India: The Shaping of a Public Culture in Surat City, 1852-1928* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991).

<sup>328</sup> See Pinney, 'Photos of the Gods.'

and subsequently banished the serpent to the sea. Scholars such as Bruce Sullivan and David Haberman have read this narrative as making legible the topophilic paradigms of Vaishnavism that was committed to an idyllic pastoralism.<sup>329</sup> Equally importantly, Krishna's defeating of the serpent Kaliya, the defeating of evil, can be read as a narrative of political imperatives that enable social justice. The duality of a pastoralism with its overt emphasis on an idyllic rurality and imperatives of social justice and political change that marked the Krishna of Vrindavan then became a ready template for popular mythologizations of Gandhi as a Vaishnava hero in the 1930s. In the particular 1930 print by Shyam Sunder Lal, Gandhi is depicted as Krishna (complete with a halo and a spinning wheel as a substitute for Krishna's flute) saving the nation from the poisonous venom of Kaliya, labeled here as "Ordinance." Published in protest of the Indian Press Ordinance of 1930 (an act that suppressed the Indian press), the print makes a powerful comparison between the poison spewed in idyllic Vrindavan by the serpent Kaliya and the poison spewed by the British government in 1930s India. But what of the politicization of Vaishnavism?

The politicization of Vaishnavism raises important questions regarding the contested associations between religion and politics. In the earlier sections of this dissertation, I suggest that the politicization of the theological or the theologization of the political was not a phenomenon that began with late 19<sup>th</sup>-century nationalism. Here, I return to temple architecture in the 1850s. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre writes: "The past leaves its traces; time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now

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<sup>329</sup> David L. Haberman, *River of Love in an Age of Pollution: The Yamuna River of Northern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Sullivan, "Theology and Ecology at the Birthplace of Kṛṣṇa."



or former, a *present* space, given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality.”<sup>330</sup> In this section, I then suggest that “the ‘etymology’ of locations” – the memory of Vrindavan’s Islamicate past – left its traces in the making of the colonial fabric of the town. Yet, this palimpsest of reused imaginaries, rebuilt temples, and re-circulated metaphors does not for once suggest an unbroken continuity, a cohesive arrangement of lived practices, that was inexplicably held together over time.

This section argues for the *present* in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan – the *present* as “as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality.” How then did 19<sup>th</sup>-century temple patronage allow for an articulation of a new Vaishnavism – a Vaishnavism, even as it rehearsed earlier Islamicate traditions, was resolutely situated within the *present* of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan? Recuperating religion in colonial India as it was enacted, performed, and disseminated through practices of urbanity, I thus argue for the role of architecture in constructing modern political religiosity. Silent to the intersection of the urban and the religious, most scholars writing on the making of colonial urbanity have seen the public sphere as a product of secular (defined in opposition to religion) discourses of modern institutionalized governance.<sup>331</sup> Recent scholarship has, however, challenged this unilinear model of a triumphant “westernization” that was seen to have made colonial urbanity. Swati Chattopadhyay, Jyoti Hosagrahar, and William J. Glover, among others, have outlined the complex ways

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<sup>330</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 37.

<sup>331</sup> See Fn. 61.

in which westernization – as a form of colonial governance – was resisted, challenged, and rescripted by the indigenous elite in the colony.<sup>332</sup>

Colonial “difference” remains at the heart of these arguments. Take, for example, Chattopadhyay’s discussion on an 1840 temple in Calcutta built by Radhakanta Deb, a wealthy landowner from Bengal (Figure 6.4). The Vaishnava *nat mandir*, as the neo-classical temple was called, not only functioned as a temple to Krishna, the family deity, but was also used by Deb as a “public hall” to host meetings, dinners, and balls for the European elite of the city. As Chattopadhyay writes: “Conferring the name ‘Nat-mandir’ to a building with a Palladian façade, Radhakanta set up a definitional challenge that was premised on his authority to impute meaning. [...] By adopting symbols from two different architectural cultures – Hindu temple architecture and Palladian classicism – Radhakanta literally set the stage for displaying his own position in the new political and cultural order and illustrated the capacity of an indigenous idea to accommodate new forms and encapsulate new ideas.”<sup>333</sup> In delineating the multiple registers within which the *nat mandir* operated, Chattopadhyay thus eloquently recuperates an architecture practice that appropriated the vocabulary of the Empire to create a new language of power – a language that went beyond, indeed superseded, British attempts to remake the colony.

Chattopadhyay’s analysis becomes an important text in the historiography of colonial architecture in India. The few scholars who have studied the neo-classical as it was transformed by Indian architects and patrons in the 19<sup>th</sup> century tend to argue for this

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<sup>332</sup> Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*; Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities*; Glover, *Making Lahore Modern*.

<sup>333</sup> Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 158-160.

peculiar moment of hybridity as an “unsuccessful attempt at the Grecian” – a “failure” in its “jettisoning” of the “traditional.”<sup>334</sup> Indeed, as early as 1862, six years before the consecration of the Shahji temple, the British architecture historian James Fergusson had vehemently criticized the new “fashion” of natives building in European styles. “Of course no native of India can well understand either the origin or motive of the various parts of our Orders. [...] In the vain attempt to imitate his superiors, he has abandoned his own beautiful art to produce the strange jumble of vulgarity and bad taste. Nothing could more clearly show the utter degradation to which subjection to a foreign power has depressed than the examples of the *bastard style* just quoted.”<sup>335</sup>

Fergusson was not alone in his diatribe against indigenous articulations of the European neo-classical. Even as late as the 1980s, architecture historians continued to describe the neo-classical in India as a “failure” in its rejection of the traditional. Writing on the neo-classical palaces of Lucknow, Giles Tillotson thus argues: “And whether we assess them as classical or as Islamic design, they fail, for both traditions are clumsily (not cleverly) defined.”<sup>336</sup> Thomas Metcalf, on the other hand, writes: “Rarely did Indians themselves participate in the erection of a monumental architecture. With the government in foreign hands, the occasions for large-scale architecture were few and were limited, for the most part, to the princely states.”<sup>337</sup>

In accounts such as these, the Indian neo-classical is seen as a mere derivative discourse and unsuccessful even at that. The cardinal sin of embracing western modernity

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<sup>334</sup> Tillotson, *The Tradition of Indian Architecture*, especially Chapter One.

<sup>335</sup> James Fergusson, *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture; being a Sequel to the Handbook of Architecture* (London: John Murray, 1862), 422. Emphasis mine.

<sup>336</sup> Tillotson, *The Tradition of Indian Architecture*, 15

<sup>337</sup> Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision*, xii.

leads to a narrative of loss, the loss of authenticity and tradition. And it is in this loss that the “bastard” is created: a “bastard” architecture, which is neither modern nor traditional, neither Indian nor western. It is precisely this refusal to recognize the modernity of Indian architecture practices in colonial India, in fact the refusal even to recognize the very possibility of an indigenous architecture practice, that Johannes Fabian describes in another context as a denial of coevalness: “the persistent tendency to place the referent of anthropology in a time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse.”<sup>338</sup> Chattopadhyay’s text thus challenges this limited understanding of 19<sup>th</sup>-century architecture in India, reinstating coevalness and recognizing the modernity of colonized subjects. Radhakanta Deb’s *nat mandir* then becomes symptomatic, a visual metaphor, of a modern subjectivity. Appropriating the language of the master, Deb produced a modernity that was commensurate with imperial logics of power and display. The neo-classical temple became a space of modern (western) habitability – a “public hall” to host meetings, dinners, and balls for the European elite of Calcutta.

Yet, by disregarding the role of religion in creating this space of modern habitability, Chattopadhyay’s argument perhaps reiterates, once again, the centrality of secularizing regimes of (western) modernity. I suggest that it is not enough merely to reinstate coevalness, to delineate the contemporaneity of both British and indigenous architecture practices in colonial India. To claim for Radhakanta Deb the specter of modernity would mean, yet again, privileging the meta-narratives of a secularizing

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<sup>338</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 31.

European modernity, imperializing strategies of “first in Europe, then elsewhere.”<sup>339</sup> I suggest that the 19<sup>th</sup>-century engagement with the neo-classical be read as a “counter-aesthetics” of the western modern, an engagement that displaced the very terms of the western modern even as it engaged with its form.<sup>340</sup> As Gayatri Spivak writes, it was the “enabling violation” of European modernity that allowed for the production of the colonial subject. “The enablement must be used even as the violation is renegotiated.”<sup>341</sup>

This section argues that 19<sup>th</sup>-century architecture in colonial India – especially religious architecture – allowed for a political that was not necessarily embedded in practices of western modernity. Even as these temples drew their form from the visual language of the Empire, they resisted the political imperative in which this language by then had been embroiled. The Indian neo-classical, with its genealogies in Palladian rationality and the Enlightenment, had by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century become an appropriate metaphor of colonial governance – a visual symbol that marked “the ideals of empire, for the ‘ordered beauty’ of classical architecture had long best fitted the European conception of how a worldwide empire ought to be represented in stone.”<sup>342</sup> Imperial edifices including the Madras Banqueting Hall (1802), the Government House in Calcutta (1803), and the Bombay Town Hall (1833), with their imposing façades constituted through

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<sup>339</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 7.

<sup>340</sup> Writing on the Dang community of Gujarat, Ajay Skaria notes: “And vādilcha goth involve a counter-aesthetics of this modernity. By this, I do not mean an aesthetic that is anti-modern. Rather, I refer to an aesthetic that engages with western modernity, but not on its terms.” Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers, and Wildness in Western India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 21. I draw my arguments here not only from *Hybrid Histories* but innumerable conversations with Ajay Skaria over the last eight years.

<sup>341</sup> Gayatri Spivak, “Righting Wrongs,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103:2/3, (Summer 2004), 523-581, 524.

<sup>342</sup> Thomas R. Metcalf, *The New Cambridge History of India, III. 4: Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 51.

classical pediments held up by soaring columns, inextricably linked British architecture in colonial India to the world of antiquity.

It was precisely this representation of modern governance that Radhakanta Deb appropriated in creating a new indigenous architecture form – an architecture that, however, went beyond a mere claim to a “share in the empire,” a “share” in the project of colonial modernity.<sup>343</sup> As Timothy Mitchell reminds us:

Disciplines can break down, counteract one another, or overreach. They offer spaces for manoeuvre and resistance, and can be turned to counter-hegemonic purposes. Anti-colonial movements have often derived their organisational forms from the military and their methods of discipline and indoctrination from schooling. [...] At the same time, in abandoning the image of colonial power as simply a coercive central authority, one should also question the traditional figure of resistance as a subject who stands outside this power and refuses its demands. Colonial subjects and their modes of resistance are formed *within* the organisational terrain of the colonial state, rather than some wholly exterior social space.<sup>344</sup>

I then make an argument for a modern Vaishnavism, a Vaishnavism that operated from within the spaces of colonial governmentality, yet one that was consciously anti-colonial in its political imperative. Modern space created through the technological apparatuses of colonialism –railways, town planning, sewerage systems, and of course neo-classical architecture – became the very sites through which Vaishnava articulations of authority challenged, over and again, imperial exercises in making meaning, controlling space, and visioning order.

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<sup>343</sup> As Chattopadhyay writes: “The landscape centered on his mansion, enabled Radhakanta to claim his own space and share in the empire.” Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta*, 165.

<sup>344</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), xi.

In 1856, Kundanlal (1825-1873), a merchant from Lucknow, the capital of the princely state of Awadh, migrated to Vrindavan. The British had annexed Awadh in 1856, exiling its monarch Wajid Ali Shah (1822-1887) to Calcutta. In the very same year, Kundanlal migrated from Lucknow to Vrindavan. Wajid Ali's exile had been catastrophic for Lucknow – most of the city's elite moved out of Lucknow with the collapse of the Awadh monarchy. While very little is known of Kundanlal's career in Lucknow, hagiographic accounts suggest that the merchant was a close associate of Wajid Ali.<sup>345</sup> Thus, it was no surprise that Kundanlal too left the city with the monarch's exile. However, unlike most of Lucknow's courtiers who moved to Calcutta with Wajid Ali, Kundanlal chose to migrate to Vrindavan. This decision was no coincidence – Kundanlal's grandfather, Shah Behari Lal (a Lucknow-based banker) had sponsored the Radharaman temple in Vrindavan in 1826 and had purchased villages in the vicinity to maintain an estate there. The 1826 Radharaman temple was modeled on the town's traditional architectural repertoire (Figure 6.5). Like most temples in Vrindavan, the Radhamraman too was built in buff sandstone. The flat-roofed temple, with its sanctum overlooking an open courtyard, was embellished with cusped arches, baluster columns, and intricate floral patterns – motifs that, by the 1750s, had become representative, indeed typical, of Vaishnava architecture in north India.

Within three years of moving to Vrindavan, Kundanlal acquired an 18<sup>th</sup>-century mansion on the riverfront and began the project of adding a temple to the existing structure (Figure 6.6). Like most 18<sup>th</sup>-century residential architecture in north India, the

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<sup>345</sup> For example, see O.B.L. Kapoor, *The Saints of Vraja* (Caracas: Sri Caitanya Bhakti Raksaka Mandapa, 1992).

original structure, built under the patronage of the Saiva ascetic-warrior Anupgiri Gosain, was set in a Mughal-style four-part garden. The latticework, the use of sandstone, baluster columns, and cusped framing devices had by the 18<sup>th</sup> century become standard motifs deployed in much of north Indian architecture. While this visual repertoire drew its source from 17<sup>th</sup>-century Mughal royal architecture, by the 1700s the style had become ubiquitous in north India.

Completed in 1868, Kundanlal's temple was, however, a radical break from this rich architectural vocabulary – a vocabulary that I discuss in detail in Part One. Indeed, temples like Radhakanta Deb's 1840 *nat mandir* in Calcutta or Kundanlal's 1868 Shahji temple in Vrindavan signaled towards the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century transformation of the neo-classical into an indigenous form. These hybrid structures, conceptually situated in-between the metropole and the colony, threatened the conceit of the Empire, discourses of superiority, cultural and racial, that had been carefully crafted in stone. It is precisely this threat, this ambiguity in meaning making, that the Shahji made possible, that I suggest be read as a counter-aesthetics of the western modern.

If colonial modernity made claims to a universalism based on the Enlightenment as a pedagogical and political project, the Shahji temple, situated at the margin of this modern, reached out to claim yet another universalism. And, it is here perhaps that coevalness becomes inadequate as a political strategy to imagine cosmopolitanisms that were not centered on the west. Even as its neo-classical façade with a central pediment situated the temple unequivocally within British paradigms on architecture, the temple's diverse architecture elements resisted an easy classification (See Figure 6.2). One entered



the temple complex through a gateway that was modeled on Lucknow's 1784 Rumi Darwaza, the Roman Gateway, built by Asaf al-Daula (1748-1797), the fourth Nawab of Awadh (Figure 6.7, Figure 6.8).

Seeing themselves as cultural heirs of the Mughal legacy, Asaf al-Daula's gateway cited earlier Mughal gateways, for example the ca. 1587 Buland Darwaza at Akbar's capital at Fatehpur Sikri, to produce a politics of inheritance.<sup>346</sup> The title Rumi, Roman, on the other hand, referred to the Eastern Roman Empire – an allusion that drew from a range of sources including the 30<sup>th</sup> *sūrah* of the Qur'ān, the *sūrah al-rum*.<sup>347</sup> After the fall of Constantinople in 1483, the Ottoman emperor Mehmed II (1432-1481) had declared himself as the *kayser-i rûm*, the Roman Emperor.<sup>348</sup> The gateway thus allowed the Lucknow monarchy to situate their capital city within a grid of intelligibility that stretched from Mughal India to to Rum, that imperial ideal of the Islamic world.

While it would be easy to see Kundanlal's citation of the Rumi Darwaza in Vrindavan as an exilic remembering, an act of commemorating Lucknow, or even perhaps as a conscious articulation of a syncretic architecture form, not very different from the syncretic cultures of Lucknow under the nawabs, I suggest that the translation of this metaphor of power within the context of Vaishnava architecture was a more complex move. The citation of Lucknow's architecture went beyond the gateway. A pair of fish – the Lucknow monarchy's royal insignia – prominently flanked the central pediment of the temple's façade (See Figure 6.2). These elongated carved fish, very similar to

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<sup>346</sup> See Asher, *The Architecture of Mughal India*, 109-110 for a discussion on Lucknow's architecture.

<sup>347</sup> For a discussion on the *sūrah*, see Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980).

<sup>348</sup> Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapi Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 249.

representations of fish in Lucknow's royal architecture, also adorned the doorways of the temple while mermaids, first used in Wajid Ali's 1850s Qaisarbagh palace in Lucknow, were used as bracket figures (Figure 6.9). In Lucknow, however, the use of fish imagery was strictly restricted to palaces and courts patronized by the monarchy. While the fish as an insignia had a long history in pre-Islamic India, from the time of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, the *Māhī Marātib*, the Order of the Fish, seems to have become the highest honor of the Empire awarded to nobility only above the rank (*mansab*) of 7000 men.<sup>349</sup> Sa'adat 'Ali Khan (1680-1739), the founder of the Awadh dynasty, had been awarded this order in 1720.

Perhaps then, the citation of both Lucknow's royal insignia and the Rumi Darwaza allowed Kundanlal to claim a politics beyond nostalgic allegiances and cultural belonging. If the Lucknow monarchs, claiming to be the successors of the Mughals, used the Rumi Darwaza as a means to articulate an inheritance that drew from both Mughal India and Rum, Kundanlal re-conceptualized this lineage of power to participate in a language of universalism beyond the frames of colonial modernity. This universalism then drew its map, the contours of its world, not through and around western Europe but the failing, faltering empires of old – Awadh, the Mughals, and Rum.

Yet, this was not a move towards merely a remembrance of the past. Even as the past left its traces in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan, colonial modernity – the neo-classical façade and a pair of flanking lions based on the East India Company's insignia – were incorporated within the Shahji temple. Much like Krishna Chandra Sinha's use of a neo-classical entrance in his temple, the Other did not claim coevalness but challenged

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<sup>349</sup> M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1966), 140.

western temporality, inscribing the west within another universalism. If devotees literally entered the Shahji temple through Rum, Lucknow, and Mughal India, the Solomonic columns adorning the façade claimed for Shahji temple the Western Roman Empire (See Figure 6.2). The history of Solomonic pillars – from the Old Saint Peter’s (ca. 3rd century CE) to Gianlorenzo Bernini’s *baldacchino* (1623-1634), from José Benito Churriguera’s retablo for the monastery of San Esteban, Salamanca, Spain (1693) to Cristóbal de Medina Vargas’ Santa Teresa la Antigua, Mexico City (1678-1684) – is, by now, well-known.<sup>350</sup> In England, however, this particular column type was more infrequently used – a few rare examples include the 1637 porch of Saint Mary the Virgin at Oxford and the Gorges Monument at the Salisbury Cathedral (ca. 1635).<sup>351</sup> Given the popularity of British architecture in India, the very few churches to use Solomonic columns were mostly in the Portuguese colony of Goa.<sup>352</sup>

Why then did Kundanlal choose an obscure pillar type, at least within an Indian context, to mark the façade of his temple? Perhaps he had seen a print of Bernini’s legendary *baldacchino* and found in its peculiar form a welcome relief from the severity of the Doric. Or perhaps, much like the allusions to the Eastern Roman Empire through the Rumi Darwaza, the Solomonic pillars allowed Kundanlal to claim Western Rome in Vrindavan. It is precisely this claim to a universalism, to both the east and the west,

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<sup>350</sup> For a history of the Solomonic column in Europe, see Stefania Tuzi, *Le Colonne e il Tempio di Salomone: La storia, la leggenda, la fortuna* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2002).

<sup>351</sup> Richard Durman, “Spiral Columns in Salisbury Cathedral,” *Ecclesiology Today: Journal of the Ecclesiological Society* 29 (2002), 26-35.

<sup>352</sup> Most Portuguese churches in Goa, for example the Basilica of Bom Jesus (1594-1605), used Solomonic pillars in the altar.

through the language of architecture that allowed for an assertion of a universal beyond colonial modernity.

Yet, the presence of the neo-classical cannot be ignored. The projecting porch of the Shahji temple with its classical columns was merely a smaller version of similar entrances in colonial structures like the Madras Banqueting Hall and the Government House in Calcutta (Figure 6.10). If the imposing staircases of these colonial edifices provided a stage, an architectural frame to display authority through elaborate public ceremonies, Kundanlal appropriated, reworked, and remade this very metaphor of power to present the temple deity to pilgrims coming to Vrindavan. On special occasions, the temple deity was brought out from the inner sanctum and kept on a bejeweled throne on the porch. Framed by classical pillars, Roman pediments, Solomonic columns, and a Mughal/Awadhi gateway, Krishna thus became the cosmopolitan monarch, an imperial figure of veneration and worship.

But what of Vaishnavism? If my reading of the Shahji temple presents a narrative of a secularizing politics, a politics of this world, the inner sanctum of the temple allows me to move easily into the world of the divine. The walls of the inner spaces were decorated with marble inlay imagery of women dancing, singing, painting, flying pigeons, undressing, and getting intoxicated (Figure 6.11). While the clothes were based on Lucknow's distinctive sartorial cultures, the explanation for this sexualized imagery perhaps lies in the poetry that Kundanlal wrote as a devotee of Krishna. Although very little of his poetry survives today, late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century commentaries suggest

that Kundanlal was known for writing about the erotic play of Krishna with the cowherd girls of Vrindavan.<sup>353</sup>

A well-established trope of Krishna worship, the act of worshipping the lord involved a conceptualization of the relationship between the devotee and the divine through erotic love. Vaishnava texts such as the 16<sup>th</sup>-century *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* had repeatedly emphasized devotion through love (*prema bhakti*) as the ideal devotional practice. *Sakhibhav* – devotion to Krishna as a woman – was a key process in this emotional sublimation through which the devotee engaged with the lord. In its most emblematic formulation, Krishna replicates himself to embrace the cowherd girls, the *gopis* of Vrindavan, in a moonlit night by the river Yamuna to satisfy their desire for the lord. Texts such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* elaborate on the *raasa lila*, the circular dance of Krishna and his *gopis*, as a mode through which this romantic love becomes a metaphor of intimate devotion between Krishna and his devotees.<sup>354</sup> By become a *gopi*, a cowherd girl, the devotee could then partake in the divine *raasa lila*. The inner space of the temple could then be imagined as that *raasa mandala* – the circular formation of Krishna with his cowherd girls, the *gopis* of Vrindavan. The devotee surrounded by this imagery would become a part of the *mandala*, would join the cowherd girls in their various stages of undress in an uninhibited love for Krishna. The temple space was then a transformation of this poetic metaphor into stone.

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<sup>353</sup> See Ronald Stuart McGregor, *Hindi Literature from Its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984) for commentaries on Kundanlal's poetry. Works by Kundanlal include the *Abhilāṣ-mādhurī* and the *Laghu-ras-kalikā*, as well as short poems on Krishna's *shringara rasa* – the erotic/amorous *rasa*. Much of this literature is now lost.

<sup>354</sup> Graham M. Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love: The Rāsa Līlā of Krishna from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, India's Classic Sacred Love Story* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

The upper level of the temple had twelve realistic sculptures – eleven women singing and dancing to Krishna, the twelfth a representation of the Lucknow monarch Wajid Ali Shah dressed as a cowherd girl (Figure 6.12). Scholars, writing on Wajid Ali’s extraordinary career as a musician and poet, have noted that the monarch often staged elaborate theatrical performances within the Qaisarbagh palace, where he would dress up as a cowherd girl and dance to Krishna.<sup>355</sup> One of the primary justifications for the 1856 British annexation of Awadh was Wajid Ali’s purported effeminate depravation. A 1857 history of Awadh thus states: “Dressed in female attire, Wajid Ali Shah entered into rivalry with Nautch girls; or trifled in his garden amid swarms of beautiful women draped in transparent gauze, with wings fastened to their shoulders, in humble imitation of female angels.”<sup>356</sup> Kundanlal, too, had taken on the name and persona of a woman, Lalita Kisori, while writing his poetry to Krishna. Both Wajid Ali and Kundan Lal’s becoming a cowherd girl was situated within 16<sup>th</sup>-century theological discourses on emotional sublimation known as *sakhibhav*, that is to nurture within oneself the emotions of a *sakhi*, the lover of Krishna.<sup>357</sup>

It is perhaps in this insistence on dislodging colonizing binaries of gender that Kundanlal’s most perceptive critique of the Empire becomes visible. If the “vigorous muscular Christianity” of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century marked its Other, the Indian male, as effeminate – not male enough, modern Hindu reformers took up the challenge to reform

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<sup>355</sup> Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *A Fatal Friendship: The Nawabs, the British and the City of Lucknow* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985)

<sup>356</sup> Author Unknown, “Oude, as a kingdom,” *Dublin University Magazine* 49 (January 1857), 116.

<sup>357</sup> For example, Chaitanya used to imagine himself as Radha, Krishna’s consort, while Gaudiya theologians claimed that he was the dual incarnation of Krishna and Radha.

Hinduism from within.<sup>358</sup> In 1862, the Maharaja Libel Case had led to a national outcry when the priests of a Pushtimarga temple in Bombay (now Mumbai) sued an Indian journalist for publishing reports that claimed that practices in Vaishnava temples were sensual, obscene, and corrupt.<sup>359</sup> The priests lost the suit and were derided in progressive vernacular newspapers across the country. It was at root a controversy over the proper form of worship and led to a considerable restructuring of the more libidinous practices of Krishna worship.<sup>360</sup> Monier Monier-Williams (1819-1899), the founder of the Indian Institute at Oxford and the compiler of one of the most widely used Sanskrit-English dictionaries, wrote in response to this infamous court proceedings:

But the Vallabhāchāryans interpreted that attachment [Krishna's love for the *gopis*] in a gross and material sense. Hence their devotion to Krishna has degenerated into the most corrupt practices, and their whole system has become rotten to the core. Their men have brought themselves to believe that to win the favour of their god, they must assimilate themselves to females. Even the Mahārājas, or spiritual chiefs, the successors of Vallabhāchārya, are accustomed to dress like women when they lead the worship of their followers.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> The term “muscular Christianity” originated in a review of Charles Kingsley’s novel, *Two Years Ago*, published in Britain in 1857. Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). See Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly Englishman” and the “Effeminate Bengali” in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) for this history.

<sup>359</sup> *Report of the Maharaja Libel Case and the Bhatia Conspiracy Case connected with it* (Bombay: Bombay Gazette Press, 1862)

<sup>360</sup> Amrita Shodhan, *Legal representations of Khojas and Pushtimarga Vaishnava polities as communities: The Aga Khan case and the Maharaj libel case in mid-nineteenth century* (Ph.D. dissertation: Bombay University, 1995). As Jürgen Lütt writes: “The Maharaja Libel Case influenced English literature on Hinduism for the rest of the century – less in scholarly books, more so in popular descriptions. The extent of its impact can be seen in Max Weber’s study on Hinduism and Buddhism where – due to his sources – the topos of ‘orgiasticism’ obtained prominence.” Jürgen Lütt, “From Krishnalila to Ramarajya: A Court Case and its Consequences for the Reformulation of Hinduism,” in Dalmia and von Stietencron, eds. *Representing Hinduism*, 142-153, 146.

<sup>361</sup> Monier Monier-Williams, “Progress of Indian Religious Thought” *The Contemporary Review* XXXIV (December 1878), 19-45, 37.

If the Maharaja Libel Case influenced the modes through which Vaishnavism was from then on imagined by metropolitan Indological discourses, modern Vaishnava reformers too attacked the libidinous aspects of Krishna worship. The Bengali novelist Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's 1886 *Krishna Charitra* (The Life of Krishna) presented to its audiences a biography of Krishna cleansed of *sakhibhav* and *prema* while 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hindi literature vehemently criticized the effusive sexual undertones in the Vaishnava poetry of Braj.<sup>362</sup>

Completed within six years of the Maharaja Libel Case, the iconography of the Shahji temple was however replete with the very eroticism of Krishna worship that this new middle class Hinduism, informed by imperial discourses on gender and sexuality, attempted to censor. The temple's *basanti kamra* – a room decorated with European chandeliers and mirrors, silk fabrics, and a marble water channel running through the center – further heightened the sensorial experience of seeing Krishna as an intimate lover (Figure 6.13). Unlike most Vaishnava temples, the inner space of the Shahji was divided into two distinct rooms. On the left was the customary sanctum where the deity is still worshipped while, on the right, was the *basanti kamra*, the room of the spring festival. Every year, during *Basant Panchami*, the festival that heralds the beginning of spring, the deity was moved to this room for two weeks. While the movement of deities within a temple complex is not an unusual phenomenon within Vaishnava liturgical practices, the dedication of a room only to be used for two weeks in a year is exceptional.

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<sup>362</sup> See Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995) for a discussion on Bengali middle class imperatives to rethink Vaishnavism. McGregor, *Hindi Literature* provides a history of the transformation in north Indian literary cultures.



The eclectic decoration of the *basanti kamra* – the chandeliers, the gold-painted architectural elements, and the profuse use of Belgian mirrors – had its stylistic lineage in the *imambaras* (Shia Muslim shrines used during Muharram) of Lucknow (Figure 6.14). Yet, the vision of a bejeweled Krishna, seated in a golden throne, framed by reflecting mirrors, shimmering lights, and flowing water provided a visual metaphor for the description of Vrindavan in texts such as the *Haribhaktivilāsa*. The fifth chapter of *Haribhaktivilāsa* begins with a description of Vrindavan, “brilliant as the rising sun.”<sup>363</sup> The authors of this 16<sup>th</sup>-century text then write:

One should meditate on the desire tree of Vṛndavāna. The fresh twigs of the desire tree can be compared to the blue sapphire, the buds can be compared to diamonds and pearls, and the fruits can be compared to rubies. [...] The land of Vṛndavāna is as brilliant as the rising sun and is decorated with golden columns, jewels, and raised platforms. The entire scene sparkles because of the golden pollen that has fallen from the trees. [...] One should meditate on an excellent throne that is placed upon a raised platform bedecked with jewels. On that throne is a red lotus flower having eight petals. Next, one should meditate on how Śrī Kṛṣṇa joyfully sits in the middle of that lotus, appearing like a rising sun.<sup>364</sup>

One can only imagine the *basanti kamra* illuminated with innumerable oil lamps. The soft glow of the shimmering light reflects on the opulent Belgian mirrors, glowing like splendid jewels. Krishna, like a rising sun, is seated on his bejeweled throne bathed in this golden hue. Kundanlal thus strategically used architecture and interior decoration at

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<sup>363</sup> *Haribhaktivilāsa* Vol. I, 376.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 376-377.

the temple to return to a pre-colonial vision of a paradisiacal Vrindavan where Krishna played eternally with cowherd girls amidst bejeweled trees.

In Part One, I suggested that 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnava conceptualizations of Vrindavan were articulated in conversation with Mughal technologies of making space. By reengaging with this earlier moment of Vaishnava praxis, Kundanlal thus reclaimed an Islamicate past for himself in colonial Vrindavan. It is precisely through interventions such as these – insidious, minute, and fragmentary – that one sees a route to recuperate subjectivities, desires, and imperatives in colonial India that operated beyond the tyranny of modernity and its claim to the universal. Of course, neither Kundanlal’s temple, with its citations of an Islamicate past and a reworking of Christian architecture, or his ideals of a libidinous Krishna worship fit well with 19<sup>th</sup>-century colonial and national imaginaries that produced an expurgated form of a modern Hinduism. The Shahji temple thus provides us with a paradigm to recuperate a Hinduism, resolutely modern, yet operating beyond middle class epistemologies that were, at that very moment, being framed by Vaishnava reformers in urban centers such as Calcutta and Bombay.

19<sup>th</sup>-century Gaudiya interventions further provided the exegesis to frame modernity within theological frameworks of a new Vaishnava self. The Maharaj Libel Case had become a key moment that led to the modernization in Pushtimarga praxis. Scholars such as Vasudha Dalmia and Jason Fuller have argued that the 19<sup>th</sup>-century reform of Vaishnavism from within arose as a response to colonial and nationalist

critiques of the erotic and the sensual in rituals of Krishna worship.<sup>365</sup> If, in the 1870s, the founder of the Arya Samaj, Dayanand Sarawati critiqued image-worship and Pushtimarga *seva* (service) as not legitimized by the Vedas, the celebrated Bengali monk Swami Vivekananda derided the effeminacy of Krishna worship in Vrindavan in an 1898 interview: “At the present time, the worship of the divine play of Sri Krishna with the Gopis [cowherd girls] is not good. Playing on the flute will not regenerate the country. Playing on the khol and kartal and dancing in the frenzy of the kirtana [act of praising Krishna through communal singing made popular by Chaitanya] has degenerated the whole people.”<sup>366</sup>

It was this nationalist/Hindu/secularist critique of a traditional, ritualistic, *seva*-oriented Vaishnavism that led Bharatendu Harischandra from Varanasi and Bhaktivinoda Thakur from Calcutta, among others, to reform the religion from within itself. This history, now well known, remains an account of elite Vaishnava reformers modernizing and revitalizing Vaishnavism while claiming the national for their traditionalism. As Varuni Bhatia, writing on the colonial history of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Bengal, states: “I give key analytical space to rising nationalism in this period, and hence locate the various facets of Gaudiya Vaishnava recovery alongside nationalist assertions about culture, or the lack of it, among the proponents of recovery.”<sup>367</sup> Like most scholars, Bhatia too locates the formation of a modern Vaishnavism within the anti-colonialism of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century nationalism.

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<sup>365</sup> Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*; Fuller, *Religion, Class, and Power*.

<sup>366</sup> Interview with Swami Vivekananda at Belur Math, 1898. Published in *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* Vol. V Mayavati Memorial Edition (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1962), 388.

<sup>367</sup> Varuni Bhatia, *Devotional Traditions and National Culture: Recovering Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Colonial Bengal* (Ph.D. dissertation: Columbia University, 2009), 39.

But, as Kundanlal's Shahji temple makes apparent, Vaishnavism in Vrindavan was not necessarily framed through an engagement with the national – an argument that I further develop in Sections 8 and 9. In fact, attempts to bring into Vrindavan the reformist ideologies of nationalist leaders such as Bharatendu Harischandra led to resistances by local priestly communities. Inspired by Harischandra, Radhacharan Goswami (1859-1923) – a member of the priestly family that maintained the Radharaman temple – became the secretary of the Mathura division of the Indian National Congress in 1888.<sup>368</sup> Publishing texts, newspapers, and journals, the young priest formed a society in Vrindavan that called for reform from within the community.<sup>369</sup> However, within a short time, Goswami was forced by elder Vaishnava priests in Vrindavan to renounce nationalist politics and to return to the traditional *seva*-oriented practices of his family. The 1880s censoring of Radhacharan Goswami is merely one of a number of similar instances where nationalist attempts to remake Vrindavan were resisted by local communities. Yet, in resisting the colonial and nationalist the local did not relinquish modernity but rather, modernity was made to fit within tradition just as tradition was made to fit within modernity. And, it is through this resistance that a counter-aesthetics of the (western) modern was produced in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan.

But let me end this section with the paintings that allowed me to enter the debates on the old and the new, the modern and the pre-modern: the depiction of the Shahji temple in the *Zib-ut tawārīkh*, *The Ornament of History*, and the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century painting of Vrindavan in the Rijksmuseum that I discussed in Section 4 (See Figure 6.1

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<sup>368</sup> Sudhir Chandra, "Literature and the Colonial Connection," *Social Scientist* 11:6 (1983), 3-47.

<sup>369</sup> Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, 141.

and 4.1). It is no coincidence that both these paintings present to its viewers a vision of Vrindavan that was made recognizable through its 16<sup>th</sup>-century architecture. While the Shahji temple was imagined with a *sikhara* that resembled the ca. 1580 Madanmohan temple, the Krishna Chandrama's superstructure seamlessly blended in with the 16<sup>th</sup>-century temples of the town. The two paintings – one made for an illustrated biography while the second produced for pilgrims coming to Vrindavan – provide remarkably similar frames in imagining the sacred landscape of the town. Both paintings depict the colonial present of the town. Yet, the present is framed not through symbols and signs that referenced colonial modernity but through architectural styles that were symptomatic of the town's 16<sup>th</sup>-century visual repertoires.

In the Rijksmuseum painting, Vrindavan emerges as a space that is discernable through its dense foliage (the groves where Krishna dallied with his cowherd girls) and a vista marked by towering 16<sup>th</sup>-century *sikharas*. Given that the painting was acquired in Vrindavan itself in 1880, one can assume that pilgrims coming to the town in the 19<sup>th</sup> century would purchase similar images as reminders of their visit. It is in this context that the imagination of Vrindavan through allusions to its 16<sup>th</sup>-century architecture becomes suggestive of a conscious 19<sup>th</sup>-century artistic strategy. While I discuss the repercussions of this artistic strategy in Section 7, the painting, however, also acts as a reminder of the “life” of objects beyond their moment of creation.<sup>370</sup>

A history of architecture, “not from the bird's eye view, but from the experience of the pedestrian, the everyday user,” thus allows for an un-doing of narratives that

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<sup>370</sup> I am immensely indebted to Richard H. Davis' seminal *Lives of Indian Images* in thinking the “life” of objects as it accrues value and meaning over time.

privilege the authorial moment as key in meaning making.<sup>371</sup> Architecture is then not merely built space but the lived practices, the everyday tactics, which make buildings into spaces of habitation. The discursive and visual practices that create built space become equally important in understanding architecture as a cultural phenomenon. In 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan, representations of the Krishna Chandrama and the Shahji subsumed the architecture of the two temples into a language of the old – the language of pre-colonial temple forms.

Yet, these temples continue to “live” even today. During my many visits to Vrindavan between 2005 and 2009, I repeatedly asked priests, pilgrims, local guides, and even shopkeepers in the vicinity about the significance of the Shahji’s architecture. Why was the temple unlike any other in Vrindavan? Most of my conversations on the Shahji ended with a narrative where the Lucknow monarch Wajid Ali had ordered his courtier Kundanlal to build a pleasure pavilion in the heart of Vrindavan to offend the Vaishnavas of the town. Hence, the erotic imagery on the temple. However, after Wajid Ali’s deposition, Kundanlal, a pious Vaishnava, was able to ignore his erstwhile master’s orders and transform the pleasure pavilion into a temple to Krishna. Narratives where the figure of the “bad Muslim” (Wajid Ali and Aurangzeb) disrupted the functioning of the pilgrimage town were recounted to me, over and again. As the head priest at the Mira Bai temple told me in one such interview in 2007: “The Muslim kings of India looted

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<sup>371</sup> Mary McLeod, “Everyday and ‘Other’ Spaces,” in Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze and Carol Henderson, eds. *Architecture and Feminism* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 1-37, 23.

Vrindavan desecrating temples and killing pilgrims and priests. The British, on the other hand, were just rulers. It was under the British that Vrindavan flourished.”<sup>372</sup>

This peculiar interpretation of India’s history where the colonial government was seen as more sympathetic to Hindu desires and demands than the Mughal emperors is not exceptional. In the 2000s, the rise of a soft Hindutva, a political position that supports the chauvinism of Hindutva but shuns its violence, as a dominant idiom in Hindu middle class politics led a new language of anti-Muslim rhetoric. Scholars such as Arvind Rajagopal have suggested that this new language of Hindu nationalism has a wider purport and a larger support base precisely because of its move away from earlier aggressive Hindu nationalisms.<sup>373</sup> This new Hinduism, expressed through Internet blogs and websites, the popular media, and television, has given rise to a new form of hate politics that frequently resuscitates colonial histories as evidence of “Muslim despotism” in India.<sup>374</sup>

However, in its new techno-centric avatar, soft Hindutva remains an urban middle class phenomenon with little reach in rural India, social scientists have reassured us.<sup>375</sup> In a town like Vrindavan, far removed from the soft Hindutva of global cities such as Mumbai and New Delhi, I assumed that this new language of violence had not taken root.

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<sup>372</sup> Interview with the head priest of Mira Bai temple, Vrindavan, March 25, 2007.

<sup>373</sup> Arvind Rajagopal “Thinking about the New Indian Middle Class: Gender, Advertising and Politics in an Age of Globalisation,” in Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, ed. *Signposts: Gender Issues in Post-Independence India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999), 57-99.

<sup>374</sup> Websites, with its global accessibility, have become the most popular space for articulating this new Hinduism. Websites, for example [www.hindunet.org](http://www.hindunet.org) and [www.hindutva.org](http://www.hindutva.org), are but symptomatic of new cyber “history” that use accounts by Orientalist scholars, for example Max Mueller, to buttress their arguments.

<sup>375</sup> For example, see Sujata Patel, “Urbanization, Development and Communalization of Society in Gujarat,” in Takashi Shinoda, ed. *The Other Gujarat* (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 2002), 207-215; Yagnik and Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, 252-257.

I had hoped that someone would talk to me about the rich Islamicate culture of Vrindavan – a space where Krishna could become a Mughal king and the Nawab of Awadh his devotee. Perhaps, I could then write about “the ‘etymology’ of locations” in contemporary Vrindavan: Vrindavan as a Hindu pilgrimage town in post-1992 India that remembered its Islamicate past. But, that was not to be. I turn to the genealogies of this new Hinduism in my Coda. Let me return to the politics of colonial modernity in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan in the next section.



## 7. Of Roads and Maps: (Re)making “State Space”

“And truly the Grand Trunk Road is a wonderful spectacle. It runs straight, bearing without crowding India’s traffic for fifteen hundred miles – such a river of life as nowhere else exists in the world.”<sup>376</sup> Kim, the young protagonist in Rudyard Kipling’s 1901 novel, thus described the roadway that had been built by the 16<sup>th</sup>-century monarch Sher Shah Suri (1486-1545), a roadway that was extended from Calcutta to Peshawar by the British and had facilitated the movement of British troops from Bengal into the Indo-Gangetic plain. From 1780 onwards, the British had begun the leviathan project of repairing, improving, and extending the pre-existing network of Mughal roadways.

By the 1840s, the Military Boards of the various provinces (later the Public Works Department) had spent enormous amounts of money on building paved roads across India, with over Rs. 4900000 spent on the Great Trunk Road itself.<sup>377</sup> Not only did the development of this network of paved roads allow for an easy movement of the British army across the subcontinent but also made possible the economic growth and consolidation of the Empire with its centralized bureaucracy. As David Arnold writes, “[I]n timing and function, as in its military agency, road-building paralleled and supplemented the work of the Trigonometrical Survey, helping physically and politically to impress the colonial presence on the Indian landscape.”<sup>378</sup> Scholars have thus argued that it was modern roadways as a network of power that became symptomatic of the

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<sup>376</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1922), 90-91.

<sup>377</sup> F. B. Hebbert, “Roadways,” in *The Imperial Gazetteer of India: The Indian Empire, Economic* Vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), 401-410, 405.

<sup>378</sup> David Arnold, *The New Cambridge History of India, III: 5: Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 106.

modernizing project of the colonial state – the making of “state space” as an internal component of the imperial economy.<sup>379</sup>

How did 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnavism negotiate the technological apparatuses of colonialism while operating from within these very spaces of colonial governmentality? In Braj, many of the roadways that connected the various pilgrimage sites were built with Indian support. In 1832, the princely state of Gwalior constructed the road connecting the sites of Mathura and Vrindavan in Braj.<sup>380</sup> The road – the only link between the two towns – was from then on maintained with financial support from the local community. Even as late as the 1930s, the Public Works Department looked towards “private contributions” for repairing the Mathura-Vrindavan road.<sup>381</sup> By the 1860s, a number of road building projects had been initiated in the region. In 1868, five roads were built in Vrindavan itself to allow easy access to the temples and the bathing platforms, the *ghats*.<sup>382</sup> In the same year, trees were planted along the principal roads of the district with gardens at regular intervals.<sup>383</sup> In 1896, Mohini Mohan Roy, a Gaudiya devotee from Calcutta, contributed Rs. 7000 towards the paving of the road between Govardhan and

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<sup>379</sup> For example, see Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Anand A. Yang, *Bazar India: Markets, Society, and the Colonial State in Gangetic Bihar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>380</sup> Digby Drake-Brockman, *Mathura: A Gazetteer* (New Delhi: Usha Jain, 1984, Reprint of 1911 edition), 240.

<sup>381</sup> “Muttra – Gokul – Mahaban – Baldeo road in the Muttra district.” UPSA Public Works Department A, United Provinces, File No. 91C/1933, 1933.

<sup>382</sup> APAC, General (Sanitation) Department, North-Western Provinces, P/438/35, Proceedings No. 26/7, 1870.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*

Radhakund for the “convenience of pilgrims” visiting Radhakund, a key Gaudiya site in Braj (See Map 1).<sup>384</sup>

If indeed the British attempt to build a network of roads connecting the subcontinent was symptomatic of the modernizing project of the colonial state, why did devotees in Braj willingly participate in the making of this state space? Could these interventions be read as signaling a new localized vocabulary of imagining space that acknowledged, engaged with, yet remade the space of the Empire? In this section, I suggest that a slight shift in our frames of enquiry can allow us to envisage this process of making “state space” beyond the economies of colonial governance. Reading closely 19<sup>th</sup>-century representations of Braj, I argue that Vaishnava articulations of authority repeatedly challenged imperial exercises in controlling space and visioning order. The technological apparatuses of colonialism – railways, town planning, roadways, and neo-classical architecture – became the very sites through which Vaishnavism maneuvered resistance.

Vaishnava acts of patronage, recuperated from stray references in the colonial archive, suggest that the project of building roadways in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Braj was not merely the prerogative of the colonial government. The indigenous elite was an equal participant in the making of imperial “state space.” The Pushtimarga priests in Braj, for instance, sponsored the road connecting Mathura to Gokul in the 1930s.<sup>385</sup> Given the significance of the pilgrimage site of Gokul in Pushtimarga practice, it was not surprising that the priests made possible easy access to the site for pilgrims coming to

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<sup>384</sup> *Report of the Administration of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh for the year ending 1896-1897* (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces and Oudh Government Press, 1897), 100.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*

Braj. The majority of temples in Gokul, the town where Krishna is believed to have spent his childhood, belonged to the Pushtimarga community (See Map 1). Thus, an increase in pilgrimage would, of course, lead to an increase in revenue for the temples.

The building of the Mathura-Gokul road, however, had resonances beyond a purely materialist understanding of the colonial economy. In 1552, the Gaudiya theologian Narayan Bhatt had written the *Vrajabhakitvilāsa* – the most elaborate text ever composed on the sacred geography of Braj. The seventh chapter of the text prescribed the route of the *vanayatra*, a journey through the forests of Braj, a circumambulation of the important pilgrimage sites in the region. Arising from a larger practice of the circumambulation of temples and shrines, the circular *vanayatra* through the forests of Braj allowed pilgrims to gain merit. Given the significance of Braj's groves, forests, and lakes in 16<sup>th</sup>-century constructions of Vaishnava piety, the landscape of Braj was transformed into an iconic space that embodied the structural and conceptual meanings of a temple. By circumambulating Braj, pilgrims could, at least in theory, map the conceptual space of mythological Braj onto the cognitive and real spaces of a worldly Braj.

The Pushtimarga priests in Braj too proposed their own route for the *vanayatra* to counter the over-emphasis on Gaudiya spaces in Narayan Bhatt's *Vrajabhakitvilāsa*. Beginning with Mathura, Narayan Bhatt's text had suggested that pilgrims visit Govardhan, Kaman, and Vrindavan (See Map 1). The 16<sup>th</sup>-century Pushtimarga priest Vallabhacharya's son, Vitthalnatha's 1567 *vanayatra*, on the other hand, began at

Gokul.<sup>386</sup> From Gokul, the pilgrim was asked to visit the various sites in Braj, only to return to Gokul after the journey. Thus, if Gaudiya *vanayatras* were centered on the key Gaudiya sites of Mathura and Vrindavan, the Pushtimarga priests attempted to redraw the route, making Gokul the center of the *vanayatra*. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, *pichhwais*, paintings on cloth hung behind Pushtimarga icons in temples, repeatedly portrayed the sites that were supposed to be visited during a Pushtimarga *vanayatra* (Figure 7.1).

Yet, most pre-colonial pictorial representations of the *vanayatra* did not depict roadways that demarcated the route of circumambulation.<sup>387</sup> Rather, the painted *pichhwai* operated as a conceptual landscape, an object of veneration. Even as the key architectural markers of the various pilgrimage towns, for example the Bishrant Ghat at Mathura, were realistically rendered, space was abstracted, even compressed, into a picture that could provide the devotee a visual tool to imagine the ritualistic act of traveling through the groves of Braj. Of course, this act of abstraction, the visualization of the metaphysical space of Braj, was situated within a larger history of depicting Braj's topography through a mythological schema. Imagining Braj as a lotus with each petal symbolizing a forest, texts such as the *Bhāgavat Purāṇa*, the *Varāha Purāṇa*, and the *Brahmasaṃhitā* argued for the landscape of Braj as a *mandala* – a schematized representation of Goloka, literally the world of the cows, the unmanifest world where Krishna plays eternally.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> The *Vanjātrā Braj Caurāsī kos kī Parikramā* gives the itinerary of a circumambulation made by Vitthalnatha. The text, on the other hand, was written in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. See Entwistle, *Braj* for a discussion on the text.

<sup>387</sup> See Krishna, Talwar, and Goswamy, *In Adoration of Krishna*; Ambalal, *Krishna as Shrinathji*; Kay Talwar and Kalyan Krishna, *Indian Pigment Painting on Cloth* (Ahmedabad: Calico Museum of Textiles, 1979); and Susan Gole, *Indian Maps and Plans from Earliest Times to the Advent of European Surveys* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989) for a rich archive of *pichhwais*.

<sup>388</sup> See, among others, Entwistle, *Braj*, 72-73.

The theological imperatives that governed the making of *vanayatra pichhwais* were, of course, very different from administrative maps used in pre-colonial India. Gaudiya and Pushtimarga representations required an understanding of the landscape of Braj as embodied – space, a living being that could bleed if wounded. The corporeal topophilia inherent in such imaginings of sacrality drew the devotee into a bodily relation with space. Describing the 16<sup>th</sup>-century saint Chaitanya’s appearance in the groves of Vrindavan, Krsnadasa Kaviraja thus writes in the 1730s:

When they saw Prabhu [Chaitanya], the trees and creepers of Vṛndāvana bore their own gooseflesh in the form of shoots, and they rained tears of honey. Branches laden with fruits and flowers bent at the feet of Prabhu, as when a friend meets a friend he brings a gift. [...] Seeing the love of all of these, Prabhu was overcome with *bhāva* [devotional state of mind], and he played with them all, controlled by them. Prabhu embraced each tree and creeper, and in his thoughts he made offerings of the flowers and the rest to Kṛṣṇa.<sup>389</sup>

Space acquired newer meanings in Vrindavan. As Gillian Rose notes: “Topophilia is felt in part corporeally”<sup>390</sup> By perceptibly experiencing the embodied space of this pilgrimage town, devotees had the potential to construe an immersive relation between body and space.

The landscape of Braj then becomes the phenomenal manifestation of the non-phenomenal. This indifferenciability between Goloka and Vrindavan, between the manifest and the unmanifest, the celestial and the terrestrial, led to a pictorial tradition of mapping Braj as a lotus. Drawings of this metonymic landscape, Gaudiya representations

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<sup>389</sup> Dimock, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, 593.

<sup>390</sup> Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 48.

of the sacred landscape of Braj presented the space of Braj as a schematic lotus. Its topographic details – the *ghats*, groves, and forests – were carefully inscribed on the petals of the lotus flower (Figure 7.2). While Pushitmarga temples displayed *vanayatra pichhwais* during October, the month of the *vanayatra*, to commemorate the actual journey of the pilgrim through the groves of Braj, Gaudiya devotees used representations of this landscape as a visual focus for meditation. According to Gaudiya sectarian literature, Krishna and his consort Radha occupied the center of the lotus, imagined as Vrindavan, while the other pilgrimage centers were marked on the surrounding petals.<sup>391</sup>

Unlike most Hindu pilgrimage sites in India, pilgrimage at Braj, however, did not revolve around specific temples that commanded special significance. If in Varanasi the temple of Kashi Vishwanath was the focus of the pilgrim’s attention, in Gaya it was the Vishnupad. In Pandharpur, the most important temple was that of Vithoba while in Puri it was the temple of Jagannath. On the other hand, the innumerable pilgrimage sites in Braj did not refer to any specific space with clearly defined boundaries. Even as large temples such as the Govind Dev, the Jugal Kishore, and the Madanmohan were built to make visible the new sacrality of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the act of devotion to the natural landscape of Braj became a key mode to articulate Vaishnava devotion. Texts such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *Gītagovinda*, and the *Harivaṃśá* (a supplement to the *Mahābhārata*) repeatedly reiterate the celestial beauty of the worldly Braj where leaves and fruits of trees gleam like divine jewels.<sup>392</sup> This landscape – a space where Krishna

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>392</sup> Bruce M. Sullivan, “Theology and Ecology at the Birthplace of Kṛṣṇa” in Lance E. Nelson, ed. *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 247-268.

performed divine deeds – was then identical with his celestial abode. In Narayan Bhatt's 1552 *Vrajabhakitvilāsa*, Braj became Krishna's body, a topographic form of the divine.<sup>393</sup> Mathura was his heart, Madhuvan the navel, Vrindavan his brow. Bahulavan and Mahavan were his two arms while Bhandir and Kokilavan were his feet (See Map 1).

However, the conflation of Krishna's body with the landscape of Braj was not limited to Gaudiya practices. At the Pushtimarga temples in western India, *vanayatra pichhwais* depicted the icon of Srinathji enmeshed within the landscape of Braj. In an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century *pichhwai* from the Tapi Collection, Surat, the icon of Srinathji emerges from the Govardhan hill in Braj, the very space where Vallabha, the founder of the Pushtimarga sect, had enshrined the icon of Srinathji in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 7.3). The interrelationship between Srinathji/Krishna and the hillock at Govardhan is best exemplified through literary sources that imagine the hill as having a corporeal form.<sup>394</sup>

According to local legends, the Govardhan hill had started bleeding when workmen digging a well on the hill had struck it. That night Krishna appeared in a dream to the workmen explaining that their tools had cut his body and that they should refrain from further construction on the hill. The worship of Govardhan then involved imaging the hill as Krishna himself. Innumerable shrines at the site attest to this practice of visualizing the Govardhan hill as Krishna (Figure 7.4). Pilgrims are discouraged to climb

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<sup>393</sup> David Kinsley, "Learning the Story of the Land: Reflections on the Liberating Power of Geography and Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition," in Lance E. Nelson, ed. *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 225-246, 237.

<sup>394</sup> For this history, see Charlotte Vaudeville, "The Govardhan Myth in North India," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 22 (1980), 1-45 and Paul M. Toomey, *Food from the Mouth of Krishna: Feasts and Festivals in a North Indian Pilgrimage Centre* (New Delhi: Hindustan Publication Corporation, 1994).



Govardhan – a practice that is traced to Chaitanya’s refusal to climb the hill when he visited the site in 1514.

However, it is only in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that representations of the landscape of Braj started including roadways to define movement from one site to another (Figure 7.5). While one does find a few pre-colonial representations of this sacred landscape marked with roadways, most pre-1850s paintings depicted Braj through two distinct modalities – the landscape as a lotus *mandala* and *vanayatra pichhwais*.<sup>395</sup> The introduction of roadways into this visual vocabulary in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century does not, however, suggest a transformation in pictorial imaginings of space in South Asia. Both Susan Gole and Joseph E. Schwartzberg have documented a number of pre-colonial maps, both religious and administrative, that consistently and accurately marked roads, irrigation canals, property, and even travel routes for pilgrims.<sup>396</sup> In Nathadwara itself, artists painted maps of Nathadwara that clearly marked the roads that led to the important temples of the town even as they simultaneously painted *pichhwais* of Braj where landscape was seen through a metaphysical order.

However, the introduction of roadways in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century transformed this space of enchantment into a “space constituted by [modern/western] technics.”<sup>397</sup> As Gyan Prakash writes: “The colonial effort to configure India and Indians as resources [...] manifested in the state’s central role in establishing a network of railroads, irrigation,

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<sup>395</sup> See Gole, *Indian Maps*, 58-59 for an 18<sup>th</sup>-century representation of Braj with a roadway connecting the pilgrimage sites. The map is in the collection of the City Palace Museum, Jaipur.

<sup>396</sup> Gole, *Indian Maps*; Joseph Schwartzberg, “South Asian Cartography,” in J.B. Harley and David Woodward, eds. *The History of Cartography: Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies* Vol. 2.1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 293-509.

<sup>397</sup> Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 11.

mining, industries, and scientific and technical agencies of administration. India as a territory, that is, as a geographical entity, had become organized as a space constituted by technics.”<sup>398</sup> If indeed the British attempt to build an integrated network of roadways that connected the vast spaces of the subcontinent was symptomatic of the modernizing project of the colonial state, why did priests and devotees in Braj participate willingly and wholeheartedly in the making of this “state space”?

In *Attending Kṛṣṇa’s Image: Caitanya Vaiṣṇava mūrti-sevā as devotional truth*, Kenneth R. Valpey describes a 1916 photograph of the icon of Radharaman seated in a railway coach made of banana trees. In another photograph from the same year, the deity at the Vrindavan temple was positioned on the board of a battleship complete with canons and an inscription stating “Sri Krishna Bless our Beloved Emperor” (Figure 7.6).<sup>399</sup>

While Valpey reads these early 20<sup>th</sup>-century interventions by the priests of the Radharaman temple in Vrindavan as making modernity “with its varied and disruptive manifestations” a “part of Rādhāramaṇa’s līlā [play],” the performativity of these interventions could also be read as signaling a new localized visual vocabulary of imagining space that acknowledged, engaged with, and remade the neutralizing geometricized space of the Empire.<sup>400</sup> Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century local road building projects, representations of the Braj *vanayatra* marked with modern roads, and the redecoration of the Radharaman sanctum as a British battleship were moments of fissure that operated both within and beyond the dominant cartographies of the British Empire.

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> The photographs are in the collection of Padmanabh Goswami, the current head priest at the Radharman temple. Kenneth Russell Valpey, *Attending Kṛṣṇa’s Image: Caitanya Vaiṣṇava mūrti-sevā as devotional truth* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 75.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

While these fissures – insidious and fragmentary – acknowledged the hegemonic aspirations of the colonial road-making project, the power of the British Navy, and even the epistemological violence of the imperial project of mapping India, the local elite of Braj simultaneously transformed this “state space” for counter-hegemonic purposes, re-enchanting and re-inscribing a cartographic space appropriate for the habitation of their beloved Krishna. It is perhaps not coincidental that roadways were introduced in representations of Braj at the very moment when the local elite was making considerable financial contribution in rebuilding the roadway system in Braj. The act of building roads was then coterminous to the reimagining of sacred space.

Taken together, the making of roadways and its representation can be read as a heteroglossic act that appropriated and circumscribed colonial governance with newer meanings.<sup>401</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin’s emphasis on the intentional dimensions of heteroglossia is useful in thinking of the making of roadways as a speech-act that made possible an indigenous politicized gesture to claim modern space – to recalibrate, remake, and transform Braj into a space of enchantment. As Bakhtin writes: “The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention.”<sup>402</sup> Building roadways thus allowed for the creation of a new cartography of piety through making soteriological space from within the space of modern governance.

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<sup>401</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century lithographs of the *vanayatra* played an equally important role in making visible this new cartography of piety. While it is difficult to determine with certainty the precise moment when roadways were introduced in representations of the *vanayatra*, texts published in the 1870s had already started including modern maps of the region. An 1873 edition of the *Vanjātrā Braj Caurāsī kos kī Parikramā*, a text purporting to be an account of the circumambulation of Braj undertaken by Vallabhacharya’s son Vitthalnatha and his followers in 1543, had as its frontispiece a woodblock print of a modern map of Braj with legends and the key roadways demarcated with dotted lines (Figure 7.7).<sup>403</sup> Even though most 19<sup>th</sup>-century religious representations of Braj continued to imagine the landscape through systems that were determined by earlier spatio-visual conventions, the 1873 text, in a certain way, prefigured a fundamental transformation in image-making practices in the region.

The incorporation of a colonial technique of power – the roadway system as a technique of making modern “state space” – within Pushthimarga cartographies suggested an epistemological shift from the metaphysical image of space to the map as an abstract representation of territory. Unlike other contemporaneous representations of Braj, Krishna was not present within the space of the “map” printed in the 1873 text. Neither was Braj imagined as a lotus *mandala*. The label *nakṣha caurāsī kos kī parikramā*, a map of the eighty-four *kos* (approximately one hundred and sixty miles) *parikrama* of Braj, categorically asserts that this indeed was a *nakṣha* – the Persianate

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<sup>403</sup> Gokulnath (attr.), *Vanjātrā Braj Caurāsī kos kī Parikramā* (Mathura: Munshi Kanhaiyalal, 1873). Incidentally, the copy that I accessed was purchased in 1876 by the eminent Sanskritist M. Monier Williams in Mathura. This suggests that the book was not only in circulation for over three years but Monier Williams considered it important enough to take a copy back to England with him.

word used in Mughal court administration to describe city plans, navigational charts, and route maps. Printed within ten years of the making of a number of roadways in the Mathura district, the artist responsible for this *naksha* very carefully demarcated the new roadways that were being built across the region by Vaishnava devotees. The inclusion of a map of the modern roadway system of Braj in the central Pushtimarga *vanayatra* text suggests that both the making of roadways and its representation within religious imagery was indeed a heteroglossic act of re-making colonial “state space.”

The 1873 *naksha* was only the beginning of a new mode of representing the sacred landscape of Braj that became much more widespread in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the sudden increase in road building in the 1930s, printing presses in Mathura, and elsewhere, released a number of lithographs of the *vanayatra parikrama* with modern roadways clearly marked on the print (See Figure 7.5). I began this section by discussing the 1933 road built by the Pushtimarga priests of Braj to connect Mathura to Gokul. In the very same year, paved roads were constructed between Kosi and Nandgaon and Nandgaon and Barsana, while, in 1937, a road was built between Nandgaon and Kaman (See Map 1).<sup>404</sup>

The 1930s development of a network of roadways connecting the various pilgrimage towns in Braj had a direct effect in the increase of pilgrimage to the region. In the fiscal year of 1937-1938, the pilgrimage tax collected at Vrindavan was the highest in the United Provinces.<sup>405</sup> That the pilgrimage tax collected in this town was higher than that collected at other equally or perhaps even more important pilgrimage sites such as

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<sup>404</sup> “Muttra – Gokul – Mahaban – Baldeo road in the Muttra district.”

<sup>405</sup> *Report of the Municipal Administration and Finances of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh for the year 1937-1938* (Allahabad: Superintendent, Printing and Stationary, United Provinces, 1938).

Varanasi, Allahabad, and Haridwar suggests the importance of roadways in making Vrindavan the key Hindu pilgrimage site in north India. In 1937, the local elite of Vrindavan had also organized a Kumbh Mela – an important fair that is traditionally held at the pilgrimage site of Allahabad every twelve years.<sup>406</sup> By holding the Mela in Vrindavan, the local community attempted to increase the importance of Vrindavan as a pilgrimage site for a larger constituency. A similar attempt had been made in 1926 without much success.<sup>407</sup> However, the success of the 1937 Mela at Vrindavan, attested by the increase in the collection of pilgrimage tax that year, led to a similar fair being organized in the very next year. The easy access to Vrindavan due to the recently built network of roadways had perhaps been responsible for the great success of the 1937 Mela.

By the 1930s, roadways had thus become the preferred method of traveling to the pilgrimage towns in Braj. Although the 1913 Nagda-Muttra (Mathura) railway line built with support from the Kachhwaha rulers of the princely state of Jaipur in western India had played a key role in the growth of pilgrimage in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, by the 1930s increasing motor traffic led to a decline in rail revenue. Road traffic in 1934 was responsible for a decrease of over Rs. 9500 in pilgrimage tax collected at Vrindavan.<sup>408</sup> To prevent this steady decline in revenue, the Indian State Railways aggressively launched an advertising campaign in the 1930s. The Railways Department commissioned an internationally renowned French illustrator, Roger Broders (1883-1953), to design a

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<sup>406</sup> “Kumbh Mela at Haridwar and Brindavan,” NAI Punjab State Agency, General Branch, Proceedings No. 340 G, 1937.

<sup>407</sup> “Kumbh Fair Vrindaban,” UPSA Municipal Department, Box No. 138, S. No. 9, File No. 280/1926.

<sup>408</sup> *Report on Municipal Administration and Finances in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh for the year 1934-1935* (Allahabad: Superintendent, Printing and Stationary, United Provinces, 1935), 3.

poster promoting travel to Braj (Figure 7.8). Broders' poster was part of a larger 1930s Railways Department series on the key pilgrimage sites in north India including Gaya and Varanasi.

The Braj poster depicted the famed Bishrant Ghat in Mathura, the bathing platform where Krishna is said to have rested after killing his evil uncle, Kamsa. The image with its domes, graceful red sandstone architecture, and teeming pilgrims produced a *mise-en-scène* of seductive Orientalist fantasy whose genealogy could very easily be traced back to innumerable 19<sup>th</sup>-century European photographs of the pilgrimage town. Given Broder's internationalist Art Deco aesthetics, the use of English text, and the deployment of earlier colonial techniques of imagining the sacred spaces of Mathura, it can be safely assumed that the 1930s campaign was directly addressed to European tourists and travelers visiting India.

Lithographs of the *vanayatra*, on the other hand, were produced specifically for pilgrims coming to Braj. While a few versions of the lithograph were printed at Mathura-based printing presses, most entrepreneurs turned to larger printing companies in Bombay and Calcutta.<sup>409</sup> The Bombay-based Bolton Fine Art Litho Works was one of the key printing presses used by entrepreneurs in the 1930s to print these images (for example see Figure 7.5). Stylistically most of these lithographs, aimed at pilgrims coming to Braj, used an established format that drew its source from pre-colonial religious representations of space. Combining both multiple oblique perspectives and a planimetric view, the lithographs were very similar to pre-colonial painted maps used in pilgrimage

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<sup>409</sup> For an example of a *vanayatra* lithograph printed in Mathura, see Entwistle, *Braj*, 432.

towns such as Nathadwara and Shatrunjaya.<sup>410</sup> While the depiction of bridges, pontoons, and the roadways that were being constructed in the 1930s created a certain planimetric fidelity to the topography of the region, frontal perspective was used to represent the numerous temples and *ghats* of Braj.

Yet, in spite of the planimetric fidelity, these representations differed fundamentally from modern cartography that aimed to reduce space into a homogenous, empty Cartesian grid. The quest for an appropriate visual language to represent sacred space – a language that could simultaneously make visible the magical, the mythological, the sacred as well as the cognitive space of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Braj arose from a Vaishnava theological imperative that argued for an indifferenciability between the manifest and the unmanifest, between Braj in colonial India and Braj as Goloka, the eternal abode of Krishna. This inter-dependent duality in imagining the landscape of the region thus necessitated an artistic strategy that could bring together the celestial and the terrestrial. The other-worldly and the worldly needed to cohabit to make the lithograph a representation of Braj as both a real space in north India and the unmanifest world where Krishna sports eternally.

The Bolton Fine Art lithograph thus depicts Krishna performing divine deeds, Radha worshipping her lord, and wild animals beloved to Krishna inhabiting the same space as that of a topee wearing European tourist taking a pleasure ride in the Yamuna

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<sup>410</sup> For a discussion on pre-colonial representations of space that include multiple perspectives and a planimetric view, see Hawon Ku Kim, *Re-formation of Identity: The 19<sup>th</sup>-century Jain pilgrimage site of Shatrunjaya, Gujarat* (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Minnesota, 2007); Debra Diamond, “The Cartography of Power: Mapping Genres in Jodhpur Painting,” in Rosemary Crill, Susan Stronge and Andrew Topsfield, eds. *Arts of Mughal India: Studies in Honour of Robert Skelton* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2004), 279-285.



near the Bishrant Ghat in Mathura (Figure 7.9). It is no coincidence that the khaki-wearing sahib is depicted near the famed Bishrant Ghat. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, this *ghat* in Mathura had become the key tourist destination for Europeans traveling to the city. Reproduced as travel posters including the Indian Railways poster that I just discussed, stereo-views, and postcards, the image of the Bishrant Ghat had become synonymous with the picturesque aesthetic that European tourists sought in a pilgrimage town like Mathura (See Figure 7.8). The 1924 edition of John Murray's legendary *A Handbook for Travellers in India, Burma and Ceylon* thus informs us: "The Arati ceremony, or worship of the sacred river, takes place about dusk at the Vishant [Bishrant] Ghat, when cows, monkeys and turtles are fed. The most convenient way of seeing the ceremony is to take a boat."<sup>411</sup>

It is in this momentary coalescence of time and space, in the uneasy co-habitation of a European tourist at the Bishrant Ghat in Mathura and Krishna at the Chir Ghat in Vrindavan, that a resolution to the representational dilemma that arose with the coming of colonial modernity was made possible. The enchantment of modern space could occur only when modernity and its techniques could be reconfigured to serve a different politics. Thus, in these lithographs produced for pilgrims coming to Braj, modern roadways and bridges were depicted alongside with European tourists. The landscape of Braj was thus situated in the here and now of colonial time-space. In Section 5, I suggested that 19<sup>th</sup>-century texts such as the *Vṛndāvan Dhām Anurāgāvalī*, a description of Vrindavan by a local poet Gopal Kavi, allowed for an understanding of Vaishnava

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<sup>411</sup> John Murray, *A Handbook for Travelers in India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon including all British India, the Portuguese and French possessions, and the Protected Native States* (London: John Murray, 1924), 227.

sacrality that was situated within the colonial topos. The 1843 *Anurāgāvalī*, for example, did not portray a primordial, timeless Vrindavan but situated the pilgrimage town within a chronological historically located narrative of Mughal patronage and consequent Company rule, the “profane time of ordinary temporal duration.”<sup>412</sup> Much like the *Anurāgāvalī*, early 20<sup>th</sup>-century lithographs of the *vanayatra* too consciously cited the modern techniques of colonial governance as marking the sacred landscape of the region.

It is in this citation, in the heteroglossic speech-act of re-making colonial “state space,” that these particular lithographs departed from pre-colonial painted images of pilgrimage towns. Given that pre-1850s representations of the landscape of Braj did not depict the Mughal network of roadways that connected the pilgrimage towns in the region, it would be safe to assume that the artists responsible for the 20<sup>th</sup>-century lithographs drew their visual language from earlier painted maps of towns such as Shatrunjaya and Nathadwara. Thus, rather than earlier representations of Braj itself, pre-colonial pilgrimage maps from western India depicting detailed roadways provided a template to imagine 20<sup>th</sup>-century Braj.

However, even as these lithographs drew their form from older visual regimes, space was imbued with newer meanings and connotations. In process of making visible the new roadways that were being built in the 1930s as integral to an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century experience of this sacred landscape, a new space was invented – one that transcended the abstract “state space” of the Empire. The space of the Empire, in Lefebvre’s words, the “representations of space,” the space of order, reason, and logic, the space of scientists, urban planners, and engineers, was thus remade into “representational space,” the space

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<sup>412</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 68.

of lived experiences, space invested with symbolism and magic, the space of Vaishnava desires.<sup>413</sup> This “representational space,” a counter-hegemonic space of fissure that disrupted the ideological fixedness of “state space,” emerged from a dialectical relation between “spatial practice” and “representations of spaces,” between Vaishnava cartographies and the modern Empire.

The simultaneous act of building roadways and mapping these new networks of Vaishnava space-making onto liturgical lithographs thus allowed for a tactical re-appropriation of the disciplinary apparatuses of modern space. This discursive resistance articulated from within the grid of dominant power, from within “state space,” allowed for a rethinking of a new Vaishnavism appropriate for the 20<sup>th</sup> century – a Vaishnava praxis that was not anti-modern, but one that redefined the techno-rational determinism of colonial modernity. In subverting and remaking the techno-rationalism of modernity, a new cartography of piety was created – one that moved beyond the dominant cartographies of the British Empire even as it operated from within it.

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<sup>413</sup> As Lefebvre writes, “Representations of space, which are tied to the relations of production and to the ‘order’ which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to ‘frontal’ relations.” Representational spaces, on the other hand, embody “complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life.” Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 33.

## 8. The Spatial Techniques of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vaishnavism

Contestation over sacred space in Braj was not just a product of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century colonial modernity. In Part One, I discussed the disputes between the Pushtimargis and the Gaudiyas over the possession of the temple of Srinathji at Govardhan. The consequent legal battles reached the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar who finally settled the case in favor of the Pushtimargis.<sup>414</sup> Similarly, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a battle over the ownership of the icon of Banke Bihari, now worshipped in an 1862 temple in Vrindavan, led to the murder of a devotee of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century ascetic Haridas.<sup>415</sup> In both these instances, it was the control of the key sites and images of Braj that led to the confrontation. Vrindavan's history as a space of domination, contestation, and transcendence thus arose out of two inter-related trajectories: the economic and the symbolic.

According to post-16<sup>th</sup> century Vaishnavism, Vrindavan was not merely a pilgrimage site but the manifest form of Krishna himself. Rupa Goswami's *Mathurā Māhātmya* repeatedly asserts the preeminence of Vrindavan and Mathura over other north Indian pilgrimage sites. In theological texts, Vrindavan is seen as no different from the non-phenomenal Goloka, literally the world of the cows, the unmanifest world where Krishna sports eternally. Vrindavan then becomes the phenomenal manifestation of this non-phenomenal.<sup>416</sup> This indifferenciability between Goloka and Vrindavan – between the manifest and the unmanifest, the celestial and the terrestrial – led theologians to declare: “Krishna and His name are non-different, and Krishna and His transcendental

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<sup>414</sup> Entwistle, *Braj*, 153-154; Mital, *Braj ke Dharm-sampradayo*, 251.

<sup>415</sup> Entwistle, *Braj*, 180-181.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

abode are also non-different.”<sup>417</sup> I discussed the representational politics of this piety in Section 7. In Section 7, I suggested that the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century confrontation between modern cartography and Vaishnava imaginings of geo-piety demarcated and made possible a new spatial configuring of the Vasihnava self. A cartography of piety was produced to visualize the phenomenal yet non-phenomenal, colonized yet extra-temporal, space of Braj. What then was the politics of this new Vaishnavism in Vrindavan’s public sphere? This is a question I turn to in this section.

An 1842 legal suit between some priests who had been worshipping a *kadamba* (*Nauclea Cadamba*) tree in Chir Ghat, Vrindavan and the state of Indore illustrates the modes through which this cartography went beyond the representational.<sup>418</sup> Even trees – innocuous dots on *vanayatra* lithographs – had histories of litigations transforming them into contested sites in Vrindavan. It was from a *kadamba* tree at Chir Ghat that Krishna purportedly stole the clothes of bathing cow-herd girls as an act of disrobing the ego, a moment narrativized in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and memorialized in innumerable paintings and prints, for example the Bolton Fine Art Litho Works *vanayatra* lithograph that I discussed in Section 7 (See Figure 7.9). By the 1550s, Narayan Bhatt had identified a specific bathing platform in Vrindavan as that Chir Ghat from which Krishna stole the clothes.<sup>419</sup> Very soon, a tree on the *ghat*, the bathing platform, was included in Vrindavan’s prescribed circumambulatory route and descriptions of the town from the

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<sup>417</sup> A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, *The Perfection of Yoga* (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1973), 62.

<sup>418</sup> “Petition from Lalit Kishore and other of Brindabun for permission to institute a civil suit against the Indore Durbar to establish the ownership of a certain tree which stood on Chirghat,” NAI Foreign and Political Department, Internal Branch B, Proceedings No. 249-250, May 1917.

<sup>419</sup> Narayan Bhatt’s 1552 *Vrajabhaktivilāsa* was one of the key texts – a catalog – of the key pilgrimage sites in Braj. See Section 7 for a discussion on the *Vrajabhaktivilāsa*.

1750s onward mention women tying pieces of fabric to the tree in hope of getting a husband like Krishna (Figure 8.1).<sup>420</sup>

The proceedings of the 1842 suit provide a glimpse into the simultaneously symbolic and economic importance of a single tree in Vrindavan. The Indore state attempted to stop the *pandas* from accessing the tree, claiming that the priests were trying to occupy the *ghat* illegally, while the *pandas* complained to the court that the Indore state was robbing them of their source of livelihood. The Sessions Judge passed a judgment in favor of the Indore state. In 1916, Lalit Kishore, a descendent of the *panda* who fought the Indore state in 1842, sued the princely state once again. This time the *pandas* produced two documents. One was an 1890 land deed certifying the sale of Chir Ghat to his grandfather by the Indore state while the second was a 1638 royal order claiming that his family had been given the right to worship the tree from the time of Akbar. The District Judge summarily declared both documents to be forgeries. And it was Growse's *Mathurá A District Memoir* that finally allowed the colonial government to settle the case in favor of the Indore State. B. C. Forbes, the presiding judge, dismissed Lalit Kishore's suit by stating: "The possibility is that it [Chir Ghat] was built by some Raja [...] and Mr. Grouse [sic] states that it was built by Malhar Rao Holkar. The book is [a] well-known authority and Mr. Grouse [sic] particularly says that he has been very careful in historical matters. I find that the Ghat was constructed by the Indore State."<sup>421</sup>

In Section 5, I had suggested that the ascetic's religious authority, often in conflict with British desires, challenged the East India Company's authority as the absolute

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<sup>420</sup> Entwistle, *Braj*, 406-407. This is a practice that continues even today.

<sup>421</sup> "Judgment by B. C. Forbes in the Court of the Subordinate Judge of Muttra, Suit No. 29 of 1915," NAI Foreign and Political Department, Internal Branch B, Proceedings No. 249-250, May 1917.

sovereign in late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century India. Similarly, in 1860, the British government forbade the ruler of Bharatpur to travel to Vrindavan with an arms-bearing retinue.<sup>422</sup> Bharatpur retorted by claiming that the display of armed soldiers in Vrindavan was part of “the ancient rights, usages, and customs” that were promised by the British crown in 1858. However, the colonial administration was firm in refusing permission to the Bharatpur monarch to enter Vrindavan in full regalia. After a series of exchanges between the Bharatpur court, the district authorities in Mathura, and the Office of the Governor General, the British government finally informed the court that the “rights and privileges which have been hitherto enjoyed” by Bharatpur could be suspended if the sovereign authority of the government was challenged.<sup>423</sup> The British looked upon the sight of the Bharatpur court in full regalia in the lanes of Vrindavan as a powerful symbol that could possibly challenge their authority in the town.

Simultaneously, the enormous wealth, in terms of philanthropic patronage, which Vrindavan attracted with the popularization of pilgrimage in the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to hostile disagreements between contending groups of Vaishnava priests, the local elite, and merchants. For instance, in the Chir Ghat legal case that I just discussed, the main contention of the suit was that the Indore court was depriving the *pandas* of their source of livelihood. However, rather than merely reading this court case as a dispute over ownership of land, I suggest that the Chir Gat suit becomes symptomatic of a new mode of reclaiming authority and power during the era of colonial modernity. The innumerable

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<sup>422</sup> “Permission to Bharatpur subjects to carry arms when going to Muttra, Vrindaban and Govardhan and rights of the Bharatpur State at the three places,” NAI Rajputana Agency, Political Branch, Proceedings No. 62-Bharatpur, 1860.

<sup>423</sup> “Permission to Bharatpur subjects.”

cases concerning ownership of temple property that were brought to the Mathura District Court from the 1860s onwards suggest that ritualized performative acts – processions, the right to worship, *seva* (service to the divine) – became mnemonic strategies to claim authority within the sacred topos of the town. For if indeed the spaces of Vrindavan – its gardens, trees, and even dust – were the manifest form of the unmanifest, Krishna himself, the symbolic authority of *seva*, serving this space, became a mode to display a commitment to the sacred in terms of a “spatial technique.”<sup>424</sup>

The legal suit over the possession of the *kadamba* tree at Chir Ghat then provides an appropriate opening to this section. Yet, as the proceedings of the suit make obvious, the claims to ownership of land in Vrindavan was not situated on the buttresses of enduring traditions and timeless inherited values but from within the judicial-legal framework of colonial governmentality. However, one of the most discussed legal suits in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan was a contestation between the priests of the Rangji temple (1851) and the Gwalior temple (1860) over the right to procession in the town during the annual Brahmotsav festival, a festival where the Rangji icon was carried in procession through Vrindavan.<sup>425</sup> Widely reported in local newspapers, the controversy had its roots in an 1899 altercation between the priests of the two temples that led to a minor riot in Vrindavan.<sup>426</sup> On April 3, 1899 the Rangji procession escorted by an armed company of Bharatpur soldiers and crowds of people was met by the Brahmachari Govind Saran Deo, the head priest of the Gwalior temple, seated on an elephant and accompanied by soldiers

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<sup>424</sup> Foucault, “Space, Knowledge, and Power,” 362.

<sup>425</sup> “Vrindaban fair,” UPSA General Administration Department, File No. 319/1904, Box No. 107; “Disturbances at Muttra, North-West Provinces & Oudh,” UPSA General Administration Department (A), File No. 361C/1904, Box No. 107.

<sup>426</sup> “Riot at Brindaban, Muttra District,” *Surma-i-Rozgár*, April 8, 1899.



of the Jaipur state. As the two processions approached each other, an argument arose regarding the right of way leading to a struggle that led to the death of a number of pilgrims and onlookers. The Vrindavan police tried to intervene but was beaten back by the contending groups.

A 1890s photograph of the Rangji procession as it made its way through the streets of Vrindavan allows us to understand the implications of the 1899 conflict in terms of the spatial politics of the pilgrimage town (Figure 8.2). Taken from the top of an adjoining building, the albumen print shows the bullock cart carrying the Rangji icon followed by a crowd of people. Women peer from the balconies of surrounding buildings as the procession laboriously moves through the narrow alleys of the town. The procession with its firework displays, music, armed retinues, and crowds of devotees was a ritualized performance that allowed the Rangji icon to claim the space of Vrindavan through the act of traveling through the town.<sup>427</sup> Much has been written on religious processions as spectacle, a performative ritual that produces political space. As David Chidester and Edward Linenthal write: “A sacred space is not merely discovered, or founded, or constructed; it is claimed, owned, and operated by people advancing specific interests.”<sup>428</sup> The establishment of sacred place is then a conquest of space, sacredness maintained through claims and counterclaims on its ownership.

The fact that the control of space was a fundamental exercise in power (to rephrase Foucault) is perhaps best read through the albumen print that shows a narrow alley in Vrindavan thronging with pilgrims attempting to catch a glance of the icon as he

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<sup>427</sup> For a description of the procession, see Growse, *Mathurá*, 260-261.

<sup>428</sup> David Chidester and Edward Linenthal, “Introduction,” in David Chidester and Edward Linenthal, eds. *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 1-33, 15.

makes his way through the streets. One has only to imagine the chaos that would occur if the Rangji procession were to meet a large retinue of soldiers and elephants marching towards the icon from the opposite direction. The only way for either group to move forward would be if one turned back. Of course, this turning back, giving the other the right of way, would be an act of symbolic defeat witnessed by the large crowds that followed the procession. Not surprisingly, neither of the groups turned back on April 3, 1899 leading to a scuffle that led to the death of a number of onlookers.

Discussing religious processions in colonial north India, Sandria Freitag suggests: “The urban environment carried with it the sense that sacred time and sacred space had to be reckoned as limited commodities. Any move by one group to expand its share of them constituted an effort to subtract from the share of another group. Thus, in the very process of fostering a sense of shared identity lay the potential for conflict. Given certain circumstances, the integrative nature of public ceremonials could work, instead, to exclude those considered outsiders.”<sup>429</sup> It was precisely this logic of sacrality as a “limited commodity” that led to a conflict between the Rangji and the Gwalior procession over the symbolic ownership of Vrindavan.

However, what distinguished 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan from most north Indian cities was the absence of the “outsider,” the figure of the Muslim, in the town’s public sphere. Even as there was a tacit recognition and acceptance of Islamic influences, and even Mughal authorization, in the making of 16<sup>th</sup>-century poetry, music, and architecture, the two hundred and forty two Muslim households in 1872 Vrindavan lived in

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<sup>429</sup>Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*, 138.

Kishorepura, a neighborhood on the periphery of the town (See Map 2).<sup>430</sup> The only mosque in the town, a late 18<sup>th</sup>-century structure, was also in this neighborhood (Figure 8.3). This nondescript single-storied mosque, hidden behind a high wall, was invisible enough for Growse to assert categorically: “Next to Benaras, Brindá-ban is the largest purely Hindu city that I have seen. I could not discover in it a single mosque.”<sup>431</sup>

Unlike major north Indian towns, for example Delhi and Agra, where the Hindu and Muslim population resided in close proximity thus leading to a possibility of conflict, the segregation of the town’s population on the basis of religion and caste had, on the one hand, led to the ghettoization of Muslims while, on the other hand, made them into a non-threatening entity on the fringe of the town. The fact that the eight hundred Muslims in Vrindavan were mostly non-elite service providers and thus completely dependent on the town’s largely Hindu population for employment further made them into a community with absolutely no public representation.<sup>432</sup> Responding to the Indian Councils Act of 1909, the Morley-Minto reform to create separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims, the Municipal Board of Vrindavan thus categorically stated: “The [Municipal] board now consists of nine elected members and in view of the Muslim population being quite negligible the board considers that the case of Muslim representations as separate electorate does not arise here.”<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> Plowden, ed. *Census of the N.- W. Provinces*, 364. In comparison, there were five thousand eight hundred and forty five Hindu households in Vrindavan in 1872.

<sup>431</sup> Growse, *Mathurá*, 188.

<sup>432</sup> Plowden, ed. *Census of the N.- W. Provinces*, 364. There was not one Muslim landowner in Vrindavan while only twelve Muslim men were literate.

<sup>433</sup> “Reconstruction of Municipal Board of Vrindaban,” UPSA Municipal Department Block, Box No. 479 S. No. 2267, File No. RB/28.

It was this absence of the Muslim population of Vrindavan in its public discourses, municipal administration, and for that matter, the charged sacred spaces of the town, that problematizes Freitag's argument of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hindu processions and festivals acting as a vehicle to exclude "those considered outsiders." Almost all scholarship on post-1880s political Hinduisms, without fail, tends to subscribe to Freitag's argument. For instance, Manu Goswami's recent work asserts that 19<sup>th</sup>-century nationalism imagined the nation as Hindu "in order to preserve it against contamination from both the colonial present and the particularistic foreign body of the Muslim."<sup>434</sup> The imagined nation was then situated within an "idealized space-time that was understood as outside of and temporally prior to colonial space."<sup>435</sup> I, on the other hand, argue for the presence of the colonial in this new Hinduism. Simultaneously, the figure of the Muslim was already absent, or to be more specific, made absent in Vrindavan before the coming of colonial nationalism. What was the politics of this new Hinduism in Vrindavan?

Not surprisingly, the district administration took the 1899 altercation between the priests of the two temples over the right to procession in Vrindavan extremely seriously. While the government was less concerned about the intra-communal strife that marked the pilgrimage town, the presence of princely states' armed retinues in Vrindavan alarmed the British authorities. In 1860, the government had forbidden the ruler of Bharatpur to travel to Vrindavan with an arms-bearing retinue. Yet, the continued presence of Bharatpur soldiers in the pilgrimage town made the Lieutenant-Governor of

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<sup>434</sup> Goswami, *Producing India*, 167.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*

the North-Western Provinces and Oudh write to the District Magistrate asking him to take immediate action to stop this practice.<sup>436</sup>

Within a month, the District Magistrate passed a regulation forbidding armed soldiers from princely states to enter the district. Raja Lachman Das, the patron of the Rangji temple and one of richest bankers in Mathura, was able to convince the district administration to provide British military police to accompany the procession in lieu of the Bharatpur soldiers. However, after the death of the banker in 1901, the district administration withdrew its support to the procession. In 1904, the temple authorities presented a petition to the Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (formerly the North-West Provinces and Oudh) during his visit to Mathura. The petition, signed by the region's preeminent bankers and businessmen, requested the British government to reinstate the practice of providing military support to the procession. Recounting the history of the 1899 altercation, the petition then claimed:

In the following year 1901, the said late Raja Seth Lachman Das, C. I. E. died and the arrangement some how came to an end. The splendour and display of the said fair consequently has suffered much; moreover this has led many persons to think that how it is that the dignity of Sri Rang Nath Temple has thus been lowered in the estimation of the public, as also doubt the worthiness of the management committee, which is for no fault of its own held as faulty on that score [...] By this act of kindness of Your Honour, the faith and devotional spirit of the Hindus in general and of the Sri Vaishnavas in particular will get an stimulus when the

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<sup>436</sup> "Disturbances at Muttra, North-West Provinces & Oudh."

status of the Temple will no longer suffer in the eyes of the public and the ceremony [sic] fair will redeem its lost position.<sup>437</sup>

As the petition makes obvious, processions with army retinues were an integral marker of “status” in 1900s Vrindavan. The “dignity” of the temple was then dependent on a performative politics that engaged with the public sphere of Vrindavan. The conflict between the Gwalior and the Rangji processions arose out of a conflict over the right of way. The 1899 altercation had made obvious to the district administration that its attempts to censor the presence of Ram Singh (1873-1929), the Maharaja of Bharatpur, in Vrindavan had not been successful. In providing the Rangji temple with a retinue, Ram Singh disregarded the 1860 order prohibiting the presence of his soldiers in Vrindavan. To make matters worse, the 1899 altercation and subsequent disciplinary action did not seem to have daunted Bharatpur. In 1904, the District Magistrate wrote to the Lieutenant-Governor in despair: “Following the disturbances of 1899, the Bharatpur soldiers now carry painted wooden muskets during the annual festival. From a distance, the muskets look like real weaponry creating an unwarranted excitement with the natives.”<sup>438</sup> By using fake weaponry during the annual Rangji procession, Ram Singh thus found an ingenious method to uphold the government’s orders while maintaining his “status” in Vrindavan.

This altercation between the Rangji temple and the Gwalior temple, between soldiers from Jaipur and Bharatpur, was not a random encounter. In Part One, I laid out a

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<sup>437</sup> Choubey Ram Das, *Petition to His Honor Sir James Digges LaTouche, I.C.S. C.S.I, K.C.S.I; & C. & C., Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* (Allahabad: Anwar Ahmadi Press, 1904), 2.

<sup>438</sup> “Disturbances at Muttra, North-West Provinces & Oudh.”

history of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-century contestations between the Kachhwahas of Jaipur and the Bharatpur state. In 1690, a battle between the Mughal army led by the Kachhwaha monarch Bishan Singh and the Jat overlord Rajaram led to the defeat of the Jats in Braj. However, by 1713, Churaram, the younger brother of Rajaram, was acknowledged as *Braj Raj*, the ruler of Braj, by the Mughal emperor Farrukh Siyar. I concluded Part One by locating the migration of Vaishnava icons from Vrindavan and the desecration of the Govind Dev temple within this Mughal-Kachhwaha-Jat conflict over the control of Braj. In 1825, a claimant to the Bharatpur throne, Durjan Sal, seized Bharatpur in defiance of British orders. When David Ochterlony started preparations to crush the rebellion at Bharatpur, the Kachhwahas of Jaipur sent their state cavalry to aid the British East India Company in their battle against Bharatpur.<sup>439</sup> The 1825 conflict then makes obvious that the Jaipur-Bharatpur antagonism had not been resolved in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is then not surprising that an encounter between armed soldiers from these two states in the narrow alleys of Vrindavan would inevitably result in a battle over symbolic authority in this sacred town.

Yet, scholars have been quick to point out that much of communal Hindu-Muslim riots in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century occurred over clashes between rival religious processions. It is difficult to synoptically discuss this vast literature here, but, as early as 1955, W. Norman Brown writes: “The precipitating cause [for communal violence in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century India] might be a quarrel over ownership of a parcel of land and the right to erect a religious building on it or the playing of music by a Hindu wedding procession as it

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<sup>439</sup> H. C. Batra, *The Relations of Jaipur State with the East India Company 1803-1858* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Company, 1958), 96.

passed a mosque where such noise constituted sacrilege [...] or sacrifice of a cow by Muslims, or the clash of crowds when a Hindu and a Muslim festival coincided.”<sup>440</sup> Over the last few decades, a number of scholars have discussed the role of religious processions, festivals, and performative public rituals that propelled late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Hindu-Muslim violence in the colonial urban sphere.<sup>441</sup> If religious processions and conflicts over symbolic ownership of the public sphere were the main mode through which Hindu-Muslim strife was fomented in colonial India, how then does one discuss these very ritualized acts of public performances that were strategically mobilized by Vaishnava temple authorities to prove their pre-eminence within a predominantly Hindu town?

Yet again, a number of riots broke out in Hathras, a town twenty-five miles west of Vrindavan, between the Jain and Vaishnava merchants of the town. In a particular 1835 conflict, the British Commissioner in charge of the Hathras region was perplexed by the violence in the town. He wrote: “Though they [the Vaishnava merchants of the town] tolerate other Hindu processions and the Muslim Tazia, yet they are violently opposed to the religious procession of the Sarraogis [Jains] – to the point that there was an embargo on the supply of goods to the members of the Saraogi sect. According to the Vaishnavas, the seeing of the icon was a ‘profanation’ and the only way the procession could be

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<sup>440</sup>W. Norman Brown, *The United States and India and Pakistan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955), 142.

<sup>441</sup> Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*; Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*; Raminder Kaur, *Performance Politics and the Cultures of Hinduism: Public Uses of Religion in Western India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003); and Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London: Reaktion, 2004).



allowed was if it went in a palanquin.”<sup>442</sup> As the report makes apparent, the Vaishnava merchants of Hathras had no problems with Muslim processions that made their way through the main market of the town. Rather, it was the Jain community, a considerable economic and political force in the town, who challenged the preeminence of the Vaishnava merchants in Hathras. Conflict over religious processions and public spectacles was thus not a phenomenon of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Neither was it limited to Hindu-Muslim confrontations in colonial India.

By the 1890s, the British government started actively intervening to prevent princely states from acquiring property in British India. A number of rulers, for example the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Maharaja of Kashmir, saw this new policy as an attempt by the British administration to further undermine the political independence of the princely states.<sup>443</sup> Not surprisingly, anti-colonial newspapers such as the *Jámi-ul-Ulúm* (published from Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh) relentlessly critiqued this new policy. A report published in the *Jámi-ul-Ulúm* on May 14, 1897 thus stated:

The *Jámi-ul-Ulúm* is very indignant that while the Government forces the Nizam of Hyderabad to permit Europeans to permanently settle and buy landed property in his dominions, it forbids Indian chiefs to hold immovable property within British territory. The Nizam protested against Europeans buying land in his territory, especially as they are not to be tried by his own criminal courts. But the Government of India brushed aside the Nizam’s objection by telling him that the subject of one Government could be tried by the ordinary criminal courts of

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<sup>442</sup> “Papers regarding a riot which broke out in the Hathras in Aligarh District on February 11 1835 owing to clash between Vishnuvite and Saraogi sects – law and order is soon restored [February 1833],” APAC, Board’s Collection, F/4/1554, No. 63441, September 1834-July 1835.

<sup>443</sup> The Maharaja of Kashmir responded to this dictate by preventing British traders to buy property in Kashmir. For this history, see Mridu Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights and the History of Kashmir* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004)

another only when both the Governments were on equal footing but that Hyderabad was a State subordinate to it. [...] In Europe there are kingdoms much smaller than Hyderabad, but they are treated as equals by the great European Powers. The British Government of India is no doubt strong, and all the native states must obey its orders. But the invidious distinction which the Government makes between its own countrymen and native princes is simply calculated to wound the latter's feelings. Is a native prince not to be treated with the same regard as an ordinary Englishman?<sup>444</sup>

In Braj, this new policy translated into the princely states losing the right to build temples in the pilgrimage town. A number of princely states, for instance Bharatpur, were coerced by the district administration to sell their land in Mathura and Vrindavan to the government.<sup>445</sup> The Bharatpur monarchs, who had from the 18<sup>th</sup> century seen themselves as *Braj Raj*, the kings of Braj, thus lost the right of sovereignty in Vrindavan and Mathura. If the Bharatpur monarchy had until then made their presence, their "status," felt in the region through processions and temple-building, henceforth, the district authorities carefully monitored their purchase of property in Braj, even for religious purposes. The Executive Council of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh provided firm guidelines to the district administration regarding the process through which purchases of land in Vrindavan and Mathura by princely states had to be approved.<sup>446</sup>

Building temples in Vrindavan then took on an added symbolism in this political climate. Temple-building had always been seen as an act of great philanthropy. However,

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<sup>444</sup> *Jāmi-ul-Ulūm*, May 14, 1897.

<sup>445</sup> "Possession by Bharatpur Durbar of house property in Agra Muttra," NAI Foreign and Political Department, Internal Branch A, Proceedings No. 321-328, March 1895.

<sup>446</sup> Guidelines regarding the acquisition of land in British India by princely states was summarized in Charles Tupper, *Indian Political Practice: A Collection of the Decisions of the Government of India in Political Cases* Vol. III (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1895). The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh used Tupper's text to frame their rules on this issue.

given the post-1890s colonial predilection of prohibiting new temple-building projects by the princely states in Braj, the few rulers who were able to secure British permission to acquire property in the region used the opportunity to assert their preeminence in the region. Of course, Bharatpur was one of the first states to face the wrath of the colonial government. Not only was Ram Singh, the Maharaja of Bharatpur, forced to sell off much of his property in Vrindavan and Mathura but all new temple-building projects by Bharatpur were summarily rejected.

However, given that by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Jaipur emerged as a key ally of the British government, requests from the Kachhwahas to build temples in Braj were given a much more favorable response.<sup>447</sup> As early as 1873, the Jaipur court had given F.S. Growse Rs. 5000 to restore the Govind Dev temple in Vrindavan.<sup>448</sup> The 1873 donation was part of a larger 19<sup>th</sup>-century Kachhwaha strategy to revitalize their familial association with Vrindavan for both local and national audiences. However, it was only under Madho Singh II (r.1880-1922) that this attempt at revitalization was taken up in all seriousness by the Kachhwaha monarchy.

Appointed to the throne in 1880 after the death of his uncle Ram Singh II (r. 1835-1880), Madho Singh's reign has been, more often than not, described as a "strange combination of Conservatism and Progress."<sup>449</sup> If, for the British authorities, Madho Singh was a "noble example" of a native prince "trained to all the advantages of Western

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<sup>447</sup> I discuss the political maneuvers through which Jaipur emerged as the most important state in western India elsewhere. See Sugata Ray, "Of 'Divine' Kingship and 'Modern' Museums: The Making of the Jaipur Economic and Industrial Museum" (Under review, 2012).

<sup>448</sup> "Donation of Rs. 5000 by the Maharaja of Jaipur for the restoration of the temple of Govind Dev at Vrindaban," NAI Rajputana State Agency, Political Branch, Proceedings No. FN 289, 1873-1875.

<sup>449</sup> Robert W. Stern, *The Cat and the Lion: Jaipur State in the British Raj* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 184. For the political career of Madho Singh, see Jadunath Sarkar, *A History of Jaipur c. 1503-1938*, revised and edited by Raghubir Singh (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1984); Roy, *The History of the Jaipur City*.

culture, but yet not divorced in instinct or mode of life from their own people,”<sup>450</sup> vernacular histories (histories not necessarily in vernacular languages but operating outside the colonial state’s direct realm of influence) written under the patronage of the Jaipur state reproduced this very same colonial binary to argue for a different Madho Singh.<sup>451</sup> Unlike imperial narratives that portrayed Madho Singh as primarily a modern ruler who had not forfeited his inherited traditions, vernacular histories posited him as first and foremost an “ideal Hindu ruler” whose participation in the pedagogic project of colonial modernity was part of a larger conceptualization of a modern Hindu kingship.

Madho Singh’s investment in the imperially-owned Bombay, Baroda, and Central Indian Railway Company’s Nagda-Muttra (Mathura) line then becomes an appropriate example to discuss the monarch’s conceptualization of this modern Hindu kingship. Not only did the Jaipur monarchy invest over five million Rupees in the construction of the railway line, but by 1924 the Jaipur State Railway privately owned over two hundred and thirty eight kilometers of tracks within the state, thus connecting a large part of the Jaipur state to the imperial railway network.<sup>452</sup> Not surprisingly, most scholars writing on colonial railways argue that capital investment, along with a desire to participate in the project of colonial modernity, was a key motive for the princely states to invest in the

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<sup>450</sup> George N. Curzon, “State Banquet at Jaipur,” in Thomas Raleigh, ed. *Lord Curzon in India: Being a Selection from His Speeches as Viceroy & Governor-General of India 1898-1905* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1906), 224.

<sup>451</sup> For example, Futeh Singh Chanpawat, *A brief history of Jeypore* (Agra: Moon Press, 1899); Bhavar Pratap Sinha, *The Lives of their Highnesses the Maharaja of Jeypore, the Maharaja of Vizianagram, the Rao Saheb of Alipoor, the Raja of Bhinga and the Raja of Malapur* (Vizianagram: Sri Viziarama Vilas Press, 1897); and Thakur Narendra Singh, *A Brief History of Jaipur* (Jaipur: Jaipur Electric Printing Works, 1939).

<sup>452</sup> Stern, *The Cat and the Lion*, 191-192.

imperial railway system.<sup>453</sup> Of course, profit was a key motive. Within twenty years, the Jaipur state's investment in the Nagda-Muttra line paid a dividend of over nine million Rupees.<sup>454</sup>

However, it was not merely coincidental that Madho Singh invested specifically in the Nagda-Muttra line connecting Jaipur to Mathura and Vrindavan. By connecting Jaipur to Braj, Madho Singh ensured easy access to these sites, effectively facilitating an increase in pilgrimage, and thus reiterating his dynastic association with these pilgrimage centers. The Kachhwahas' traditional role as a benefactor in Mathura and Vrindavan can be traced back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Man Singh I built the 1590 Govind Dev temple in Vrindavan. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the temple deity had been moved to Jaipur. By revitalizing this association between the Kachhwahas and the primary Vaishnava pilgrimage centers in north India, Madho Singh thus proclaimed himself as a devout Hindu ruler.

Madho Singh's re-working of a Hindu kingship in the colonial context thus involved an engagement with the very mechanisms of colonial modernity. Appropriating modern technologies to produce counter-narratives of Vaishnava religiosity and Kachhwaha suzerainty, Madho Singh undermined the colonial railways as a "synonym for ultra-modernity."<sup>455</sup> Instead, he effectively transformed the Nagda-Muttra line into a tool for articulating a quintessential Kachhwaha *raja dharma*, royal duty. The translatability of *dharma* as both moral responsibly and social duty allowed Madho Singh

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<sup>453</sup> For example, Barbara N. Ramusack, *The New Cambridge History of India, Volume III. 6. The Indian Princes and their States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 191-196.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: An Economic History of Britain since 1750* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), 89.

to very easily negotiate the discrepancies between modern (western) governance and the customary religious obligations of a Hindu ruler.<sup>456</sup> This then was a counter-narrative of Vaishnava religiosity, one that seamlessly mobilized both roadways and cartographic imaginaries, an idea that I developed in Section 7.

That Madho Singh was also responsible for building two temples in Braj should hardly be surprising. In 1884, Madho Singh began constructing a temple in Vrindavan (Figure 8.4). Built in memory of his mother, the Madho Bilas temple in Vrindavan was completed in 1904. The second temple was built at Barsana, the village where Radha was believed to have spent her childhood (See Map 1, Figure 8.5). While land for the Vrindavan temple had been acquired by 1884, much before the government issued an order prohibiting princely states to purchase property in British India, Madho Singh was able to acquire land for the Barsana temple after considerable negotiations with the colonial government.<sup>457</sup>

Archival records suggest that Madho Singh was able to persuade the government to allow the Jaipur state to purchase land only after the famine of 1896-1897. Indeed, the devastation of the North-Western Provinces following the famine seems to have provided Madho Singh with an ideal opportunity. Using the famine as a point of leverage, the Jaipur monarch requested the government for permission to build the Barsana temple as famine “relief work.” The money spent in building the temple would bring valuable

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<sup>456</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 510.

<sup>457</sup> “Acquisition by Jaipur Durbar of plot of land in Barsana, Mathura District,” UPSA Municipal Department Box No. 46, File No. 189A, 1896; “Purchase by the Maharaja of Jaipur of a plot of land in Brindaban in connection with His Highness’ temple there,” NAI Foreign Department Notes, Internal Branch A, Proceedings No. 219-225, May June 1905.

employment to the region, Madho Singh astutely argued.<sup>458</sup> Construction on the Barsana temple began in 1897.

Chiman Lal, the Darogah (director) of the Raj Imarat, the Royal Building Department of Jaipur, was responsible for designing both the temples. A formal comparison of the Madho Bilas in Vrindavan and structures constructed by Chiman Lal in Jaipur show certain distinct resemblances. Take, for example, the Mubarak Mahal, a reception hall built by Chiman Lal within the Jaipur palace complex in 1900 (Figure 8.6). Scholars have suggested that the design for the Mubarak Mahal reflected Chiman Lal's long years of training under Swinton Jacob (1841-1917), the director of the Jaipur Public Works Department.<sup>459</sup> Overlooking the minor similarities, for example the use of floral motif and the crisp carving, the first thing that strikes the viewer is the resemblance in the trifoliate arched entrance of both the temple in Vrindavan and the audience hall in Jaipur. Both structures are double-storied buildings with projecting balconies framing the arched entrances. Repeating colonnades, projecting eaves, and delicate latticework railings mark the upper levels of the structures. However, while the Mubarak Mahal is flat-roofed, the addition of domed kiosks and a pavilion capped by a sloping *bangla* roof on the Madho Bilas situated the temple well within the architectural cultures of pre-colonial north India.

In Section 3, I discussed structures such as the Datia temple in Vrindavan that were decorated with similar architectural devices (See Figure 3.11). The citation of Shah Jahan's architecture – cusped arches, projecting terraces with *bangla* roofs, and baluster

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<sup>458</sup> Acquisition by Jaipur Durbar of plot of land in Barsana, Mathura District.”

<sup>459</sup> Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision*; Tillotson, *The Tradition of Indian Architecture*; Giles H.R. Tillotson and Vibhuti Sachdev, *Building Jaipur: The Making of an Indian City* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002); Vikramaditya Prakash, *Productions of Identity in (Post)Colonial “Indian” Architecture: Hegemony and Its Discontents in C19 Jaipur* (Ph.D. dissertation: Cornell University, 1994).

columns – created an architectural language of power in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan. Of course, the use of pavilions with *bangla* roofs was not limited to the pilgrimage town of Vrindavan. Much of pre-colonial architecture in Jaipur too cited this Mughal idiom. By simultaneously referring to this architecture of pre-colonial north India and the colonial ethos of the Mubarak Mahal, Chiman Lal was able to create a new architectural language in Vrindavan that brought into conversation these two discrete visual idioms.

As an architectural device that linked the outer world to the inner spaces of the structure, this trifoliate arched entrance had significant symbolic and ritualistic meaning – at least within the sacred context of the Madho Bilas temple. The entrance, marking a separation between the sacred and the profane, was a space of purification. The devotee, while entering the temple, was expected to pause at the entrance, sit on the side niches for a moment to contemplate and remove all impure thoughts, and then finally take a step forward into the realm of the divine.<sup>460</sup> While the antecedent of this ritual is perhaps not traceable to any historical past of great antiquity, the fact that this architectural device had symbolic usages in religious praxis perhaps suggests that Chiman Lal consciously attempted to combine both sacred and non-religious motifs and devices in creating an architectural repertoire for the Madho Bilas.

When placed within a larger field, Chiman Lal's interventions can be read as producing a radical citational subjectivity that defined itself by distancing and differentiating from the master (both literal and metaphorical, given that Lal apprenticed under Swinton Jacob) narrative of British architecture in India. If Swinton Jacob's archaeological approach to designing buildings was situated within imperial discourses of

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<sup>460</sup> The head priest of the Madho Bilas temple at Vrindavan described this process to me in 2007.



rationalist historicism, Lal re-enchanted this space of habitation through his architectural interventions. Scholars, writing on Jacob's architecture, have suggested that the buildings he designed in Jaipur were inspired by Mughal architecture in Delhi and Fatehpur Sikri.<sup>461</sup> Jacob encouraged his draughtsmen to produce scale drawings of Mughal plinths, brackets, and column types which were subsequently used as models for buildings in Jaipur. Thus, the Albert Hall, a museum designed by Jacob in Jaipur in the 1880s, faithfully reproduced innumerable motifs, patterns, and column types that were representative of Mughal architectural idioms (Figure 8.7).

One encounters the trifoliate arched entrance of the Chiman Lal's Mubarak Mahal and the Madho Bilas at Jacob's Museum, suggesting that Lal's design, to a certain degree, had been inspired by his teacher's architectural language. Unlike Lal's imperatives, Jacob's "museumizing imagination," an attempt to historicize and narrativize India's pre-colonial past, was of course embedded within colonial archaeology as a rationalist discourse of the Empire.<sup>462</sup> As Jacobs himself put it: "The endeavour has been to make the walls themselves a Museum, by taking advantage of many of the beautiful designs in old buildings near Delhi and Agra and elsewhere."<sup>463</sup>

On the other hand, Chiman Lal's architecture, for example his use of Jacob's doorway, then allowed for a subversion of this colonial "museumizing imagination." By re-enchanting the empty space of Enlightenment rationality, Lal forged a new

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<sup>461</sup> Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision*; Tillotson, *The Tradition of Indian Architecture*; and Tillotson and Sachdev, *Building Jaipur*.

<sup>462</sup> As Benedict Anderson writes, "Museums, and the museumizing imagination, are both profoundly political." Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 178. For the history of colonial museology, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-colonial India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>463</sup> Swinton Jacob cited in H. L. Showers, *Notes on Jaipur* (Jaipur: Jail Press, 1916), 80.

architectural paradigm that produced an experience of built spaces through a rupturing of the archaeological gaze of colonial modernity. It would be difficult to state with certainty whether Lal's trifoliate arched entrance at the Madho Bilas heralded a transformation in Vaishnava praxis or whether Lal was responding to a Vaishnava requirement when he remade Jacob's Museum entrance into a space of ritualistic contemplation. But certainly, this remaking of architectural space produced a subjectivity that defined itself by making habitable the cold archaeological gaze of the Empire.

For the patron, Madho Singh, on the other hand, the temple in Vrindavan inextricably linked the architecture of Jaipur to the sacred spaces of Vrindavan. Not only had he sponsored the railways that connected the Kachhwaha capital to Braj but the building of the Madho Bilas also situated his benefaction within an illustrious Kachhwaha genealogy that went back to Man Singh's patronage of the Vrindavan Govind Dev in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that building temples in British India had become extremely difficult by the 1890s further added to his reputation for a larger national audience. By the 1910s, Hindu revivalist leaders such as Madan Mohan Malaviya started asking Madho Singh to endorse their cow-protection movement and attempts to stop the barraging of the Ganges in Haridwar, a Hindu pilgrimage site in Uttar Pradesh.<sup>464</sup> The building of the Madho Bilas then allowed the Maharaja of Jaipur to make himself prominent within an emerging Hindu/nationalist public sphere.

In Braj, however, Madho Singh's temples were not well received by the local Vaishnava communities. In 1896, a priest from Mathura instituted a civil suit against the Maharaja of Jaipur claiming that the drains carrying rainwater from an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century

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<sup>464</sup> "Memorial protesting against the cow slaughter," UPSA File No. 507/1909.

Kachhwaha temple in the town flooded his temple.<sup>465</sup> While the priest lost the suit in the district court, the court case was symptomatic of a larger local discontent with Madho Singh's attempts to interfere in pilgrimage patterns in Braj. Local priests and *pandas* assumed that the two temples that were being built by the Jaipur monarch would result in a reorientation of pilgrimage practices.

In Barsana, for instance, the Lariliji temple was the only important temple in the village. Situated on top of a hillock, the temple with its glistening *sikharas* symbolically dominated the landscape (Figure 8.8). Although the current temple was constructed only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the site of Lariliji had been part of the Braj *vanayatra* from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The Gaudiya theologian Narayan Bhatt had purportedly discovered the deities worshipped in the temple and disciples of the theologian maintained the site from then on. Not only had Bhatt written about Lariliji in a number of texts including the *Vrajotsavacandrikā* but the site attracted considerable patronage in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>466</sup> Popular myths suggest that the 19<sup>th</sup>-century temple stood on the very site where Radha's father lived, making the temple a significant pilgrimage site for Vaishnavas.

It was thus not surprising that the priests of the Lariliji temple did not welcome the building of a new temple in the village. The Jaipur court, however, chose the site for the new temple strategically (Figure 8.9). The village of Barsana was located on a mountainous ridge with the temple of Lariliji occupying the highest peak on the ridge.

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<sup>465</sup> "Bankali Chaubey permitted to institute a civil suit against Maharaja of Jaipur in respect to the drainage of temple in Muttra." NAI Foreign Department, Internal Branch B, Proceedings No. 203-207, September 1896.

<sup>466</sup> Entwistle, *Braj*, 374-375. Christopher Bayly discusses the rise of Barsana as an important pilgrimage site in the 1740s under Rup Ram, the family priest of Bharatpur and the Maratha states of Nagpur and Gwalior. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars*, 131.

While the Lariliji was on the extreme east of the ridge, Madho Singh selected a hill on the extreme west to build his temple. In effect, the two temples, connected by a roadway that was sponsored by the Jaipur court, now framed the village.

To further underscore this image of the two temples framing Barsana, a number of murals on the temple's walls depicted the Lariliji and the Jaipur temple, distinctive in their architecture, as part of a single landscape (Figure 8.10). While the three *sikharas* of the Lariliji were easily recognizable, the Jaipur temple was marked by a distinctive gateway with domed kiosks and a pavilion capped by a sloping *bangla* roof, a gateway that pilgrims would see in the Madho Bilas temple in Vrindavan. Cows, peacocks, and monkeys played in the forests that surrounded the two temples while Krishna and Radha dallied in one corner. Pilgrims laboriously made their way to both the temples completing this image of the eternal play, the *raasa lila*, of Radha and Krishna.

Yet, this picture of eternal play was, to a certain extent, misleading. Substantial local resistances met the building of the temple in Barsana. In 1895, the priests of the Lariliji temple complained to the district administration that the land on which the Jaipur temple was going to be built was owned by the Lariliji. Subsequently, the Jaipur court discovered that the land in fact belonged to the descendants of Krishna Chandra Sinha, the patron of the 1810 Krishna Chandrama temple (a temple I discussed in Section 4), who had bought the village of Barsana in 1812. The Jaipur court then contacted Sarat Chandra Sinha in Calcutta, a descendent of Krishna Chandra, who gifted the land to Madho Singh in 1897. It was only after this that the government gave permission to the Jaipur court to build the temple in Barsana.

Even though the claims of the Lariliji priests had been ignored by the district administration, the temple authorities continued to foment public opinion against the Jaipur temple. The Jaipur temple was, however, opened for worship in July 1914. In the very same month, newspaper, not just in Mathura but also in a number of north Indian cities, carried reports about the new temple. The *Leader*, a newspaper published from Allahabad, stated:

The writer expresses regret that, disregarding public opinion, the Maharaja of Jaipur is preparing to remove the sacred image of Sri Ladliji from the old to the new temple constructed by the Jaipur Darbar [Court] at Barsana in the Muttra [Mathura] District. [...] The removal of this image might serve as a precedent for ruling chiefs to remove other images or for [the] Government to demolish temples. [...] The Hindu public should collect twenty thousand rupees in order to endow the temple and institute legal proceedings against the [Jaipur] priests.<sup>467</sup>

While there is no archival evidence to suggest that the Jaipur court ever attempted to remove the icons of Krishna and Radha from the Lariliji temple at Barsana, the 1914 article in the *Leader*, just one among the innumerable newspapers that reported the incident, presented the conflict in terms of an attempt by the Jaipur temple to violate the sanctity of the pilgrimage site. The newspaper report further stated: “Sacred influences are generally confined to a certain area round an image and increases with length of time, and that as the birthplace of Radhaji is within the compound of the Barsana temple, the image should not be removed.”<sup>468</sup> While it would be difficult to ascertain the political

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<sup>467</sup> *Leader*, July 24, 1914.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*

imperatives that compelled the editor of the newspaper to malign the Jaipur court, the report makes visible an argument of sacrality as a “limited commodity.”

According to the report, the sacredness of Barsana was confined to the “compound” of the Lariliji temple. Not only did the temple house the very icons that had been discovered by Narayan Bhatt in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but sacrality had accrued at the site only because of assiduous ritualistic practices performed over time. The Jaipur temple thus could not claim the same degree of significance within the political economy of pilgrimage at Barsana. In a system where space becomes a “limited commodity,” attempts of expansion by a group inevitably lead to conflict. The many instances of conflict between Vaishnava groups, princely states, or even between Vaishnavas and Jains that I discuss in this section then allows me to reiterate an argument that I have already presented in the earlier sections of the dissertation.

By moving away from an understanding of spatial practices in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through an overt focus on either western modernization or Hindu nationalism, I want to make space for the heterogeneities that constituted the everyday. Hinduism, as it evolved into a modern practice of political mobilization in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, was not necessarily always calibrated within a frame of communalism and/or nationalism. For instance, the contestations between Bharatpur and Jaipur over the right to procession in Vrindavan, a contestation that led to significant violence in the pilgrimage town, was a conflict between two devout Vaishnava princely states. While scholars have usually studied 19<sup>th</sup>-century riots revolving around religious processions as an indication of Hindu-Muslim violence, the Bharatpur-Jaipur clash along with the other conflicts that I

presented in this section were never directed against the Muslim community in the region.

Localized practices in Braj, often at odds with nationalist or even Hindutva politics, then make legible diverse desires that allow us to think of the 19<sup>th</sup> century beyond the epistemological duality of (western) modernity and (nationalist) tradition. Put differently, I want to suggest that Hinduism as a political practice in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not always reducible to the language of Hindu nationalism or its more virulent Hindutva counterparts. As this section demonstrates, the spatial techniques of modern Hinduism were not always directed towards creating the public arena of an exclusionary Hindu nation.

## 9. Cow Protection in the Era of Colonial Nationalism

In Section 8, I delineated a history of confrontations between various Vaishnava constituencies in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Braj to argue that the spatial techniques of modern Hinduism were not always directed towards creating the public arena of an exclusionary Hindu nation. Moving beyond scholarship that routinely posits modern Hinduism as a political machination arising from within nationalist politics, Section 8 made possible an analysis that disturbs both colonial and nationalist articulations of power and space. As Homi Bhabha reminds us: “The aim of cultural difference is to rearticulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying position of the minority that resists totalization [...] producing other spaces of subaltern signification.”<sup>469</sup> Yet, the making of this other space of the local was never an enduring project of authenticity that operated beyond the regimes of modernity. Such neat binaries merely reiterate the local as reified, effacing its dynamism and political creativity. The local and the national are thus always intricately and significantly intertwined in complex ways.

In this section, let me then return to an argument that I presented earlier in this dissertation. In Section 5, I had argued that it was contestations over the body of the cow that allowed for the re-inscription of Vrindavan within new symbolic and political orders of the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Section 5 thus allowed me to argue for a deeper history of the political theological in Vrindavan. I suggested that the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century history of the cow protection movement makes difficult easy understandings of political Hinduism as a product of colonial modernity. The body of the cow emerged as a key symbol to articulate a political theology in 1805-1806 – much before the emergence of

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<sup>469</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 232-233.



secular nationalisms and the political imperatives of the Hindutva. I ended Section 5 by suggesting that this early 19<sup>th</sup>-century moment informed the terrains of the cow protection movement in its later incarnations. Here, I return to the cow protection movement in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Braj. The politics of cow protection then becomes an example par excellence to bring out the spatial frames of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century faith/ideology debate that my dissertation focuses.

Much has been written on the cow protection movement in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century India. Scholars argue that it was in the 1880s that socio-religious organizations, for example the Arya Samaj, developed a systematic anti-Muslim politics using cow protection as a political strategy.<sup>470</sup> As Peter van der Veer writes: “[T]he Cow Protection Movement was particularly directed at defining the Hindu community against Muslim sacrificers and British rulers. Muslims bore the brunt of the ensuing violence and reacted by asserting their own identity in distinction from that of the Hindus.”<sup>471</sup> By the 1890s, violence over the body of the cow took on epic proportions. In 1893, riots erupted in western India, the North West Provinces, Bihar, and as far as Rangoon in British Burma. In 1909, the killing of a cow triggered a riot outside of Calcutta. Riots followed in 1912 at Fyzabad, in 1916 at Patna, and in 1917 in the Shahabad district of Bihar.

For most scholars, the cow protection movement was symptomatic of a new late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hindu politics that attempted to redefine its self in opposition to the foreign body of the Muslim. However, in recent years, scholars such as Anand Yang and Sandria Freitag have brought to light the spatial practices that constituted the movement as it

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<sup>470</sup> See Fn. 236.

<sup>471</sup> Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 95.

erupted into the colonial public sphere.<sup>472</sup> As Yang writes: “The sacred became generalized in many daily routines and living space itself became ritualized. Moreover, the issue of the cow touched the religious sensibilities of many Hindus deeply because it centered on their fundamental symbol as well as their ‘sense of place.’ In short, it related to a community’s self-definition.”<sup>473</sup>

In keeping with the larger concerns that have framed this dissertation so far, this section then attempts to make visible the heterogeneous realms and discourses that constituted this imagined community, the multi-faceted practices that made the contours of political Hinduisms in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the 1870s, riots between Hindus and Muslims over religious processions and cow slaughter became a common occurrence in north Indian cities. Scholars, for example Sandria Freitag, Christopher Bayly, and Ian Copland, have argued that it was intra-community conflict over the control of symbolic space that led to much of pre-1890s Hindu-Muslim riots in north India.<sup>474</sup>

In Vrindavan, on the other hand, there was no Muslim elite to contest a Hindu domination of the public sphere. The 1872 census of the North Western Provinces clearly shows that the two hundred and forty two Muslim households in Vrindavan lived in Kishorepura, a neighborhood that was incorporated within the town limit only in the 1920s.<sup>475</sup> It was the colonial government that had developed Kishorepura, constructing much of the town’s administrative offices in the neighborhood (See Map 2). Thus, the

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<sup>472</sup> Yang, “Sacred Symbol and Sacred Space in Rural India”; Freitag, “Sacred Symbol as Mobilizing Ideology.”

<sup>473</sup> Yang, “Sacred Symbol and Sacred Space in Rural India,” 580.

<sup>474</sup> See Section 5

<sup>475</sup> Plowden, ed. *Census of the N. - W. Provinces*, 364; “Revision of Vrindaban Municipality,” UPSCA Municipal Department (A), Box No. 66, File No. 1035/56, 1956.

Municipal Board, the railway station, bus stand, and the Infectious Diseases Hospital surrounded the mosque in Kishorepura, making difficult an argument that the Muslim community provided a threat to the sacred spaces in the town. If indeed the cow protection movement in its larger national context was part of a new definition of Hinduism that fostered a chauvinist nationalism through disenfranchising the Muslim community, the cow protection should not have been a concern in Vrindavan. There was no Muslim community to challenge the pre-eminence of the Hindu priests and merchants in the town. There was no contested “sense of place” that divided the Hindus and Muslims of Vrindavan. It is in this respect that the agitations in Braj were very different to the movement’s trajectories in most north Indian towns.

One could argue that the lack of a Muslim opposition to the various avatars of this movement was a result of systematic repressions and the silencing of minority voices in Braj. The absence of the figure of the subaltern Muslim in the state’s archive, popular literature, oral narratives, and newspaper reports makes difficult a recuperation of this history. Histories of Muslim Vrindavan, a history of silence, would then require a different methodological maneuver. As James C. Scott reminds us: “The job of peasants [here the Muslim minority], you might say, is to stay out of the archives.”<sup>476</sup>

Yet, much like Agra, Delhi, and Varanasi, the cow protection agitation remained a conflict over control of symbolic space in Vrindavan. Why then did the cow protection movement emerge as a key locus of spatial politics in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Vrindavan? In this section, I suggest that the cow protection movement, at least from the perspective of

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<sup>476</sup> James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 34.

the Hindu agitators, was not a contestation between the Hindus and Muslims of the town but a contestation between the Hindus and the colonial government, between the Hindus and the British army in the Mathura cantonment. Let me begin this section by situating this late 19<sup>th</sup>-century movement within a longer history of the contestation over sacred space in the region.

On August 1, 1864, the District Magistrate of Mathura issued an order to kill the large population of stray dogs in the town. Previous attempts to move these dogs, seen as a municipal hazard, out of the town limits had been unsuccessful. This killing of dogs within the sacred city of Mathura, however, enraged the Vaishnava population of the town. The town sweepers had been instructed to kill dogs wherever they were found. Consequently, as a petition from the town residents to the Governor-General of India reported, the sweepers “cut their heads, spread the blood in the vicinity of the most sacred places, cut them off within the houses of some high-caste Hindoos, and on the most sacred Ghat in the religious assemblage.”<sup>477</sup>

On that very night, the merchants of Mathura gathered together to discuss an appropriate mode of protest. It was decided that over the next four days, the mercantile town of Mathura would come to a standstill. All shops would be shut down in Mathura, in effect bringing trade and commerce to a complete halt. This move was strategic. Even as the merchants themselves would lose money, it was the government that would face an immense financial distress due to the loss in revenue collection. Merchants who did not participate in this protest would be seen as committing a sacrilege as grave as eating beef.

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<sup>477</sup> “Killing of dogs in Muttra,” APAC, Judicial (Criminal) Department, P/235/44, Proceedings No. 17 & 18, December 1864, 16.

Not participating in this protest, then, was tantamount to a rejection of Vaishnavism, a rejection that would place the non-participant outside the rigid structures of caste and community that was inherent to Hindu-majority mercantile towns such as Mathura.

However, in a later report of this incident, the Commissioner of Agra claimed that the petitioners had blown the event out of proportion by making a simple act of municipal administration seem like a deliberate attempt by the government to insult the Hindus of the town. It was actually the Rs. 2 tax that had been recently put on every household in Mathura for the development of a drainage system that had aggravated the town's residents, the Commissioner asserted.

The act of spilling animal blood in the sacred city of Mathura, however, was reported sympathetically by a number of newspapers, including the *Delhi Gazette*. These reports called the local administration to task for its insensitivity to Hindu customs, especially in a pilgrimage city like Mathura. As a direct result of this agitation, the colonial government moved all meat shops from Mathura's Sadr Bazaar, the trading center, to the margins of the town.<sup>478</sup> This symbolic defeat merely set the stage for a number of similar conflicts in post-1857 Braj. In each instance, the government was brought to task, its authority challenged, and its administration subverted through non-cooperation. It was as if the British did not understand the Vaishnava ethos of Braj and therefore had no right to govern it.

Within two years of the dog-killing incident, in March 1866, the colonial government issued an order prohibiting the slaughter of animals in Braj as an act of appeasing the Vaishnava constituencies of the district. A stone plaque bearing an

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<sup>478</sup> "Memorial protesting against the cow slaughter," UPSA File No. 507/1909.

inscription of this order was placed in front of the ruler of Bharatpur, Suraj Mal's 1763 cenotaph near Govardhan (Figure 9.1, Figure 9.2). One of the foremost rulers of Bharatpur, Suraj Mal had transformed the state into a powerful north Indian kingdom in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>479</sup> Until 1827, much of the Mathura district was under the rule of Bharatpur. The location of the inscription, then, was strategic. By placing this inscription prohibiting hunting and animal slaughter in front of Suraj Mal's cenotaph, the British very skillfully associated themselves with earlier regimes of power. The inscription, in Devanagari, Urdu, and English, was placed on the edge of the water-tank, making it clearly visible from the road. Pilgrims traveling to the pilgrimage town of Govardhan, one mile from the cenotaph, would inevitably pass the inscription (See Map 1).

Thus, to create a façade of continuity, key sites of earlier regimes were saturated with newer hegemonies of governance that masqueraded as the old. The inscription, written in cursive, simulates the ubiquitous government document, marked, circulated, and then preserved in the state's archive. By bringing the decree into the public sphere and memorializing it in stone, the government naturalized and made the colonial political order a part of the everyday. As it became obvious to the colonial government during the 1864 embarrassment, judicial and legal administration, by itself, was insufficient for the production of a new political order. To implement this new hegemonic order successfully, the post-1857 government, then, had to move beyond the judicial-legal, exceed and become more than a bureaucratic regime, and engage with the symbolic, the ritualistic, and the spatial.

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<sup>479</sup> See Part One for this history.

That the inscription was a symbolic gesture, not enforced on army officers from the cantonment, becomes obvious from the petitions submitted to the District Magistrate of Mathura by Hardeo, a Vrindavan-based legal practitioner (*mukhtar*). In an 1873 petition, Hardeo, appealing as a representative of the Hindu population of Vrindavan, argued not only for the banning of hunting in Braj but for the closing down of butcher shops in Vrindavan. As “the general residents of Brindaban are Hindus, and all houses, temples and other immovable property belong to and are occupied by Hindus, the prohibition of this new practice cannot cause harm to any one,” Hardeo argued.<sup>480</sup>

Keeping in mind the post-1857 government’s decree of privileging customary law in case of a conflict, Hardeo posited the selling of meat in Vrindavan as a “new practice” that could thus be prohibited without hesitation. The District Magistrate, on the other hand, dismissed Hardeo’s claim by stating that the meat trade “has existed since hundreds of years and no new reason has arisen for issuing orders for discontinuing it now.”<sup>481</sup> That Vrindavan’s octroi schedule mentioned meat as a taxable category implied that “the trade of meat selling existed when the schedule was prepared, and its continuance was expected.”<sup>482</sup>

It is in Hardeo’s 1873 appeal that, for the first time, the Muslims of Vrindavan emerge as a community that could perhaps be affected by the banning of animal slaughter. However, as Hardeo put it, since there was no significant Muslim population in the town, the prohibition could not cause “harm to any one.”<sup>483</sup> Further, preempting a

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<sup>480</sup> “Memorial protesting against the cow slaughter,” UPSA File No. 507/1909.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid.

possible Muslim criticism of the agitation, Hardeo's appeal categorically denounced any possibility of a Muslim backlash against the cow protection politics in Vrindavan. The appeal stated:

All houses and buildings in Brindaban belong to Hindus. There is no Musalman *rais* [landowner] there; but only men carrying on menial trades, like those of manufacturing fireworks and dyeing cloth reside in the town. These were made to settle since some time past with the help of Hindus merely for the necessary service of the Hindu community, and the Muhammadans [Muslims] can accordingly exercise no right against the wishes of the Hindu for the purpose of the wounding Hindu feeling with the aid of the court (i.e. Government officers), for this would be a manifest injustice.<sup>484</sup>

The Muslims of Vrindavan, "men carrying on menial trades," then, posed no threat to the town's Hindu population. There were no Muslim merchants within the city limits – a fact corroborated by the 1872 census of the North Western Provinces. Given the already marginalized status of the Muslim community in Vrindavan, the cow protection movement could not have been a viable exclusionary anti-Muslim politics. The figure of the Muslim was already excluded. As Hardeo's 1873 appeal suggests, the cow protection movement was not a conflict between the Hindu and Muslim communities of Vrindavan over the control of symbolic space but a contestation between the Hindus and the colonial government over space as a metaphor of sovereignty.

Yet, another instance of conflict over the control of Braj's symbolic spaces was the 1896 attempt by the District Magistrate to prevent priests in Vrindavan and Mathura

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<sup>484</sup> Ibid.



from collecting money from pilgrims. The Mathura Chaubes retaliated by suing the administration at the Civil Court. The priests claimed that they had the customary right to collect “octroi” from the time of the Mughal emperors and that the Magistrate did not have legal jurisdiction to deny them this right.<sup>485</sup> The administration was finally forced to retract the order. Exasperated with such local resistances, the Commissioner of the Agra Division wrote to the Secretary to Government, North-Western Provinces stating that it was “undesirable to suppress or change customary practices of the people, especially when such practices can be in any way interpreted as the performance of a religious duty.”<sup>486</sup>

Similarly, the 1892 Lodging-House Act – an act that gave the government the right to fine unlicensed lodging-houses for ignoring basic sanitary requirements – was met with resistances at almost all pilgrimage sites.<sup>487</sup> In Vrindavan and Mathura, both priests and pilgrims protested that the accommodation provided by *pandas* did not qualify as a commercial venture, and therefore could not be constricted by this Act. Money given to priests in exchange of accommodation was *dana*, charitable offerings, and therefore an inherent part of a traditional pilgrim-priest relationship. The protests forced the administration to concede defeat, yet again, leading to the exemption of priestly establishments from this Act in 1895. As is evident in both cases, colonial attempts to order, control, and maintain unruly spaces of sacrality almost inevitably failed.

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<sup>485</sup> “Interference with temples and Chaubes,” UPSA Proceedings of the Government of the United Provinces in the General Administration Department for the Month of September 1896, BoX 19, File No. 201-C,

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

<sup>487</sup> See Prior, *The British Administration of Hinduism in North India* for a discussion on the politics of the Lodging House Act.

If the administration's repeated efforts at surveillance arose out of a need to display authority and British sovereignty, this compulsion was further complicated by a fear of epidemic diseases. By the 1860s, a direct association had been established between the spread of cholera and overcrowded, under-sanitized Hindu pilgrimage sites. In 1867, an attempt was made, for the first time, to sanitize the Haridwar fair and in 1869, C. Planck, the Sanitary Commissioner of the North-Western Provinces, visited Vrindavan to suggest improvements in the town's sanitation.<sup>488</sup> Given the proximity of the Mathura cantonment, one of the largest cantonments in north India, to these pilgrimage centers, the British were extremely afraid of epidemics breaking out in Braj.

The Hindu residents of the district, on the other hand, saw British interference in Mathura and Vrindavan as not only an infringement of their customary rights and laws, but a challenge to Hinduism itself from a Christian administration. By 1888, a Christian mission opened in Mathura and missionaries visited important fairs and festivals in Braj to proselytize. For example, in March 1888, thirty European missionaries and more than a hundred Indian preachers traveled to Vrindavan during the annual Brahmotsav festival at the Rangji temple.<sup>489</sup> It was the procession of this very festival that had led to a bitter conflict between the Rangji and the Gwalior temple. According to missionary reports, during the 1888 festival, "bands of workers preached daily for six or eight hours [...] showing magic lantern at night to great throngs of people."<sup>490</sup>

In 1889, Fannie Sparks, a member of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, purchased a building in Vrindavan to start a Mission, eventually baptizing two Bengali

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<sup>488</sup> APAC, General (Sanitation) Department, North-Western Provinces, Proceedings, P/438/35.

<sup>489</sup> Scott, *Braj*.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

widows. Almost immediately, the *pandas* of the town took the Society to court. The Society lost the case in the subordinate court before an Indian judge; it was then appealed to a higher court and the decision reversed by a British judge. The *pandas* then took the case to the High Court where the latter decision was re-confirmed. Thus, a Christian Mission, with support from the administration, was established in the heart of Vrindavan's sacred space – a space that was considered to be a manifest form of Krishna himself.

It is in this political milieu that a copy of Gerard Lake's 1805 decree banning cow-slaughter was discovered at the house of Lattu Chaube in Mathura. The 1898 discovery of the decree roused a national interest in the cow protection movement in Vrindavan and Mathura. Photographic reproductions of the decree were circulated across the nation as proof that cow slaughter had indeed been prohibited in Vrindavan (Figure 9.3). While the reproducibility of the photograph allowed for a large-scale mobilization in support of the movement, photographs became the locus of politics in a very direct way in the region itself. In the 1900s, Chunni Lall and Bhavani Ram, a Mathura-based photography studio established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, released a *carte de visite* with the image of a cow standing in an expansive field with trees (Figure 9.4).<sup>491</sup>

The printing of *cartes de visite* was a common practice in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The innumerable photography studios established in India between the 1850s and 1890s inevitably produced *cartes de visites* that presented standard motifs which included an artists' palette, brushes, or even referred to views of India by traveling European artists

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<sup>491</sup> For the history of Chunni Lall and Bhavani Ram, see Judith M. Gutman, *Through Indian Eyes: 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Photography from India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

(Figure 9.5).<sup>492</sup> The act of photography was thus presented as an artistic practice. Aesthetics – and thus the tools of the artist – became the appropriate register for the photographer to present himself to a prospective client. Engaging with the religious, Chunni Lall and Bhavani Ram’s *carte de visite* was then quite exceptional. Indeed, the references to Krishna’s cow in the pristine forests of Vrindavan in this *carte de visite* would have been obvious to its contemporary Vaishnava audience.

It is perhaps not a coincidence that Chunni Lall – one of the most prominent photography studios in Braj – strategically changed the printed obverse of its *cartes de visite* at a time when the cow protection movement in Vrindavan was gaining national prominence (Figure 9.6). By moving away from western representation regimes epitomized by the obverse of the firm’s ca. 1880 *carte de visite*, which showed a European woman holding up two paintings of generic western landscapes, the studio reasserted photography as an instrument to create Vaishnava sacrality. It is precisely this sacrality produced through (western) mechanical reproducibility that I described as the counter-aesthetics of modernity in earlier sections of this dissertation. By holding together within the two sides of the same card an innocuous family portrait and an image of a cow labeled in Hindi and Gujarati as *kamadhenu*, the wish-yielding cow, the region’s most popular photography studio very deftly mobilized a complex interplay of signs through a powerful mass-disseminated medium.

In pre-colonial India, the body of the wish-yielding cow had already been established as a valorized space of sacrality. While in the *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, a text

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<sup>492</sup> See Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) for this history.

inserted within the *Mahābhārata*, Krishna powerfully declared, “among cows, I am the *kamadhenu*,” other Puranic texts associated the wish-yielding cow with the fertile earth (the goddess Prithvi), nature, and the sustenance of human life.<sup>493</sup> Krishna’s sacred body and the bountiful earth were thus refigured into the body of the cow. Not surprisingly, innumerable pre-colonial representations of the sacred landscape of Vrindavan inevitably depicted Krishna playing with cows in the forests and groves of the pilgrimage town.<sup>494</sup> Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century chromolithographs and postcards, for example those issued by S.S. Brijbasi, a Mathura-based publisher specializing in Vaishnava imagery, reiterated further the close association between the *kamadhenu*, sacred space, and the body of Krishna.<sup>495</sup>

In a particular 1930s postcard issued by Brijbasi, one sees a painted image of young Krishna, surrounded by cows, playing a flute under a tree by the river Yamuna (Figure 9.7). The owner of the postcard had at some point carefully adorned the image of Krishna, the cows, and the serpent Kaliya with shimmering silver and gold dust. This postcard makes visible early 20<sup>th</sup>-century everyday practices that revolved around the body of the cow imagined as a deity. In Part One, I discussed the importance of clothes and jewelry in Vaishnava ritualistic practices. According to texts such as the *Haribhaktivilāsa* and the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, embellishment through dress and ornament, *prasadhana*, was among the fourteen attributes that stimulated the devotees’ love for the lord. Through embellishment, a personalized act of devotion, the postcard,

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<sup>493</sup> *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, trans. Swami Paramananda (Boston: Vedanta Centre, 1913), 84. For a discussion on the *kamadhenu* as fertile earth, see Antonio Rigopoulos, *Dattātreya: The Immortal Guru, Yogin, and Avatāra: A Study of the Transformative and Inclusive Character of a Multi-Faceted Hindu Deity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 231.

<sup>494</sup> For example, see representations of Krishna and Radha in Vrindavan in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York, especially Acc. No. 70.145.1.

<sup>495</sup> For the history of the Brijbasi press, see Pinney, ‘*Photos of the Gods*’

the landscape, and the body of the cow were thus re-enchanted, made into a votive image to be worshipped. The embellished postcard was hardly exceptional but part of a much larger late 19<sup>th</sup>-century practice of “dressing” postcards and prints of gods and goddesses.<sup>496</sup>

Chunni Lall’s *carte de visite* then has to be situated within this ritualistic remaking of sacrality through liturgical practices. Given Krishna’s declaration that the *kamadhenu*, the wish-fulfilling cow, was an embodiment of his divine self, it is easy to imagine that a devotee, after buying the *carte de visite* in Vrindavan, would carefully take it back to his village where someone in the family would laboriously decorate the image with silver dust. This reterritorialization of space is a theme that I addressed in Section 7. I present the postcard and the *carte de visite* in this section to introduce a larger print culture that revolved around the body of the sacred cow.

In a 1997 essay, Christopher Pinney suggested that representations of the cow in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century print culture allowed for the creation of an exclusionary proto-nation that paralleled the increasingly communalizing nature of the cow protection movement.<sup>497</sup> In the 1890s, a number of prints were released by presses in Calcutta and western India that depicted the cow mother, *gau mata*, providing succor to the diversity of India’s community. A common feature of these images was the presence of numerous deities within the body of the cow and a group of male figures, representative of the Hindu, Muslim, and Christian communities, receiving the cow’s milk. By the early 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> See Indira Chandrasekhar and Peter C. Seel, eds. *Body.City: Siting Contemporary Culture in India* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2003) for more examples of “dressed” prints.

<sup>497</sup> Christopher Pinney, “The Nation (Un)Pictured? Chromolimography and ‘Popular’ Politics in India, 1878-1995,” *Critical Inquiry* 23:4 (Summer, 1997), 834-867.

century, this iconography was further developed with the introduction of a sword-bearing demon (Figure 9.8). The caption above the demon's head reads: "Mankind, look at the meat-eating souls of the Kali Yuga [the age of conflicts, the present age]." The figure confronting the demon beseeches him with the words: "Don't kill the cow, everyone is dependent on it." Identifying the monstrous figure as signifying both the Muslim and Christian beefeater, Pinney suggests: "These lithographs can be seen as mythic charters whose metaphors were instantaneously transformed into an iconic mythopraxis that convulsed northern India."<sup>498</sup> In 1915, the colonial government proscribed the Ravi Varma Press version of this print after a series of complaints by district authorities regarding the circulation of this print to inflame communal violence in rural India. The print was subsequently rereleased after the figure of the demon had been removed from the image.

Yet, this early 20<sup>th</sup>-century image of the body of the cow as the dwelling place of the celestials was hardly new. The origin of this image can be traced back to the *Atharva Veda*, where the *Bhūmisūkta* (Hymn to the Earth) gives a poetic depiction of the earth as the divine cow that offers sustenance from her golden udders.<sup>499</sup> On the one hand, the cow was imagined as the world/body in which celestial divinities reside, while, on the other hand, the cow was a producer of divine milk, the sustenance for all living beings. It was only then natural that the body of the cow became a geo-terrestrial space, an allegorical map, where all sentient and non-sentient beings reside. Visually, this particular representation of the cow mother in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century chromolithographs drew

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<sup>498</sup> Ibid., 841.

<sup>499</sup> C. Sivaramamurti, *Śrī Lakshmi in Indian Art and Thought* (New Delhi: Kanak Publications, 1982), 47.

its source from innumerable pre-colonial cosmological images where the universe was imagined as a sacred cow containing within it both the mortal and the celestial worlds.<sup>500</sup>

This remaking of a pre-colonial cartographic imaginary to conceive an exclusionary Hinduism in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century India should not surprise us. In various sections of this dissertation, I show, over and again, how pre-colonial ideas, visual practices, and theological imperatives were mobilized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Nevertheless, the transition from a pre-modern cosmological representation of the cow as the world to a more modern conception of the cow as the (Hindu) nation was only one of the many ways through which visual practices in colonial India engaged with the body of the cow. The heterogeneities in print culture makes evident disparate epistemological practices that went beyond one committed to the sacralization of a Hindu nationhood. For example, in the 1910s, W. M. Stirling & Sons, a Glasgow-based calico printer and trader in Turkey red dye, used the very same image of a monster attacking the sacred cow while Muslims, Hindus, and Christians drink milk from her udder as labels for boxes of dyes that were sold in India (Figure 9.9).

John Matheson, the director of W. M. Stirling, not only visited India twice but also wrote a book on his experiences in the colony.<sup>501</sup> In his 1870 travel memoir, Matheson provided vivid descriptions of Hindu religious practices such as the worship of cows in pilgrimage towns, for example Varanasi. Matheson writes: “Matters stand, however, and monstrous as the system is, it would be wrong to conclude that the high

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<sup>500</sup> A number of such paintings are in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. For examples, see Pratapaditya Pal, *The Holy Cow and other Animals: A Selection of Indian Paintings from The Art Institute of Chicago* (Chicago: The Art Institute, 2002).

<sup>501</sup> John Matheson, *England to Delhi: A Narrative of Indian Travel* (London: Longmans Green and Company, 1870).



priests and apostles of Brahminism openly claim for their images the attribute of supernatural powers, although evidence is not wanting to show that the poor and ignorant crowd are tacitly permitted, or more likely secretly encouraged, to adopt that conclusion.”<sup>502</sup> Although the polytheism of Hinduism was unpalatable to Matheson’s Protestant ethics, his travels through India made him realize the importance of images, icons, and votive objects in the everyday lives of the “poor and ignorant crowd” in India. Not surprisingly, W. M. Stirling, under the directorship of Matheson, introduced a number of labels with Hindu deities for dyes that were sold in the Indian market.<sup>503</sup>

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a number of British entrepreneurs had also started using images of Hindu deities as labels for commodities sold in India. Not only were these labels actively collected but were often also framed and worshiped by devotees.<sup>504</sup> As Kajri Jain writes: “The choice of mythic themes for many of these labels, particularly by European firms, may have derived from an Orientalist characterization of Indians as ‘superstitious,’ or simply from the ready availability of printed images with proven commercial success, or both. Either way, far from enforcing a post-sacred or secular ideology, or maintaining the divide between ‘this-wordly’ and ‘other-wordly’ realms [...] colonial expansionism served to inscribe a space where the workings of commerce and the sacred were indissociable.”<sup>505</sup> How does one understand the signification of the same image when used in Hindu nationalist processions to foster communal violence and a

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<sup>502</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>503</sup> A W. M. Stirling label with the image of the Pushtimarga icon of Srinathji is reproduced in Kajri Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 127. Other deities used in Stirling labels include a representation of Vishnu and Lakshmi, the river Ganges deified as a goddess, and an image of a generic *sikhara* temple.

<sup>504</sup> For this history, see Pinney, ‘*Photos of the Gods*’ and Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*.

<sup>505</sup> Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*, 132.

British box of Turkey red dye? Kajri Jain suggests that the bazaar – the market of the colonial economy – was that mediatic force that allowed for an easy movement of religious imagery from nationalist politics to British capitalism and back.

It is precisely this fluidity in the circulation of images and meaning making in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century India that makes difficult a reading of all cow protection images through the lens of nationalist political imperative. Certainly, the imperatives that governed W. M. Stirling's use of the image of a beef-eating monster from the Kali Yuga was far removed from the cow protection movement's anti-Muslim politics. Similarly, the use of the image of a *kamadhenu* in Chunni Lall's *carte de visite* has to be situated within a localized politics of resisting the colonial government in Vrindavan and Mathura.

Responding to the uproar because of the circulation of albumen prints of the 1805 decree and the Chunni Lall *carte de visite*, the administration tried to prohibit hunting on land owned by Vaishnavas in Braj in 1905.<sup>506</sup> The attempted legislation, however, fell through and, not surprisingly, in 1909, Bhai Shankar Kanga and Giridhar Lal, solicitors from Bombay, urged the Mathura District Magistrate to ban cow slaughter in Braj.<sup>507</sup> This petition submitted by the solicitors on behalf of Sir Balachandra K. Bhatavdekar (1852-1922), a doctor who made western medicine popular in Bombay, was the first of a number of similar petitions that would be submitted by leading princely states, politicians, and nationalist leaders through the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What had began as a local movement, a direct confrontation between the Vaishnavas of Braj and the district administration over control and management of space, now become

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<sup>506</sup> "Memorial praying for the prohibition of shooting in the Muttra district," UPSA File No. 264/1913.

<sup>507</sup> "Memorial protesting against the cow slaughter," UPSA File No. 507/1909.

imperative for constituencies beyond Vrindavan. The battle was no longer about the inhabited space of Vrindavan. Rather, the town emerged as a symbolic space for a larger Hindu/national constituency.

The 1909 petition, signed by “native princes, members of the Legislative Council, leading merchants, prominent members of the learned professionals, the head priests of the different sects of Hindus,” presented an albumen print of the 1805 decree as proof that cow slaughter had indeed been prohibited by Lake (See Figure 9.3).<sup>508</sup> However, the government rejected the petition by claiming that Lake’s decree was but a temporary order issued to the British Army. And, since cow killing was an old practice in Mathura, the government was unable “to depart from their policy of strict neutrality in matters affecting religious observances or to accord special treatment to any single community in any individual place where such treatment would conflict with their established practice of equal toleration in respect to the observances of all creed.”<sup>509</sup>

Using cow protection riots in Azamgarh and Bareilly as examples, the government read Bhatavdekar’s petition as an anti-Muslim tirade. In his response, the Chief Secretary of the United Provinces compared Bhatavdekar’s petition with an 1894 petition to prohibit cow-slaughter in Bareilly. Much like the Mathura petition’s citation of an 1805 decree, the petition from Bareilly had cited an 1837 British order prohibiting cow slaughter within the city limit. However, the key distinction between the Bareilly and the Mathura petition, which the government did not acknowledge, was that the former was intended to disprivilege a contending Muslim claim to the city’s public

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<sup>508</sup> Ibid.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

sphere, while the latter was aimed towards animal slaughter by the British government and its armed forces. In 1912, the government summarily rejected another petition, this time from Calcutta.<sup>510</sup>

In 1913, Dinshaw E. Wacha, a Parsi politician from Bombay and the President of the Indian National Congress in 1901, was “enlisted” by “his Hindu friends” to write a letter in support of the movement to James Meston, the Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces.<sup>511</sup> Wacha, comparing Meston to the Maurya king Ashoka who had regulated animal slaughter during his reign, suggested that the prohibiting of cow slaughter in Mathura would transform Meston into “a genuine reincarnation of the indigenous one who flourished two thousand years ago.”<sup>512</sup> The appropriation of a renowned Parsi politician to speak for the cow protection movement was of course strategic. If the government slighted the movement for its anti-Muslim bias, the support of Wacha, a Parsi economist, Joint General Secretary of the Indian National Congress from 1896 to 1913 and a member of the Imperial Legislative Council, allowed the movement to go beyond its purported anti-Muslim Hindu nationalist image.

By 1914, pressure groups, ranging from the Tippera People’s Association in Comilla (now in Bangladesh), the Marwari Association of Calcutta, the British Indian Association, and the Hindu residents of Dhaka, also started petitioning the Mathura District Magistrate to prohibit both hunting and cow slaughter in Braj.<sup>513</sup> In July 1914, a group of Vaishnava merchants from Calcutta, the Subarna Banik Samaj, presented a

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<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

<sup>511</sup> Letter to James Meston from Dinshaw E. Wacha, May 13, 1913 in Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

<sup>513</sup>“Memorial protesting against the cow slaughter,” UPSA File No. 507/1909.

memorial to the United Provinces government, asking the authorities to prohibit hunting in Braj. Much like the 1913 petition, the memorial asserted: “The Muhammadan rulers recognized the sanctity of the place and issued Firmans prohibiting destruction of life in the place and there is a like regulation of the British Government. But of late there have been shooting incidents by British soldiers which go to show that the strict enforcement of the standing orders is urgently called for.”<sup>514</sup>

While petitions such as this from across India were sent to the Magistrate’s office in Mathura, eminent political figures, for example Wacha, the Maharaja of Burdwan, and the Maharaja of Jaipur, sent personal letters to Meston. This enormous pressure from various constituencies finally forced the Mathura District Magistrate to prohibit hunting in Braj.<sup>515</sup> In 1915, a law was passed prohibiting the shooting of animals and birds within a one-mile radius of the key pilgrimage towns in Braj. However, the issue of banning slaughterhouses was still not resolved.

If civil suits, petitions, *cartes de visite*, and memorials to the government were some of the registers through which the contours of the cow protection movement emerged in Braj, by the 1910s religious processions in most north Indian cities had become spectacles through which nationalist anti-colonial politics were asserted in the public sphere. In 1911, the Criminal Investigation Department, United Provinces thus crafted a report on the “innovations in recent years” during the annual staging of the

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<sup>514</sup> Memorial cited in *The Advocate* [a Lucknow-based newspaper], July 16, 1914.

<sup>515</sup> “Memorial praying for the prohibition of shooting,” UPSA General Administration Department, Box No. 320, File No. 264/1913, 1913.

Ramlila performance, the dramatic reenactment of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*.<sup>516</sup> Officers from the Criminal Department visited Ramlila performances in Allahabad, Agra, Kanpur, Mathura, and Varanasi among other key north Indian cities. The *Report* thus stated:

In particular, there appears to have been in some places a more or less deliberate attempt to foster seditious and disloyal feelings by the display of figures of pictures representing the Rani of Jhansi [queen of the princely state of Jhansi who died in 1858 fighting British forces], Bharat Mata [Mother India], Tilak, Lajpat Rai and Aurobindo Ghosh [early 20<sup>th</sup>-century nationalist leaders]. It is possible that in some cases the motive may merely have been hero-worship, but this hardly explains the representation at Banda of the Rani of Jhansi riding on horseback with a British soldier transfixed on her spear.<sup>517</sup>

The report provided intricate details on the modes through which Ramlila performances in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century incorporated photographs, tableaux, and even painted images of nationalist leaders, cartographic representations of the nation, and prints of Krishna drinking milk as a reference to the cow protection movement that had devastated north India in the 1900s. Given that the report is one of the very few government documents to pay close attention to the visual practices that framed public political-religious performances in this period, a number of scholars have analyzed the *Report* to suggest that “[t]hese historical figures successfully defended popular values, nationalistic and religious at the same time: all joined a parade that presented itself as a triumphant army defending basic Hindu values. The ease with which activists could

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<sup>516</sup> “Innovations in the Ramlila Processions in Various Districts,” UPSC General Administration Department, Box No. 229, File No. 325/1911, 1911.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*

alternate between an emphasis on a nationalistic message and one more overtly Hindu in its value is equally significant.”<sup>518</sup>

However, according to the *Report*, the Ramlila procession in Mathura was the only one that did not include photographs of nationalist leaders or cartographic representations of the nation. “At Muttra [Mathura] female figures are also included in the procession, and it is suggested that in course of time they will be referred to as the Rani of Jhansi and her attendants.”<sup>519</sup> Unlike the overt nationalist rhetoric that imbued Ramlila spectacles in cities such as Allahabad and Agra, the conspicuous absence of images of anti-colonial leaders in the Mathura Ramlila questions the validity of seeing all Hindu public spectacles through a frame of nationalist/anti-colonial/anti-Muslim frame.

Of course, not all agitations to prohibit cow slaughter in Braj avoided an anti-Muslim rhetoric. For instance, the issue was brought up at the 1921 All India Hindu Conference, an annual meeting organized by the Hindu Mahasabha (Hindu Great Assembly), a Hindu nationalist organization responsible for much of post-1920s anti-Muslim violence in north India.<sup>520</sup> The Sankaracharya, the ascetic leader of the Sringeri Sharada Peetham, one of the most important monasteries in India, asserted:

The government should be given notice that if it does not put a stop the slaughter of cows before the Janam Asthami [annual August festival commemorating the birth of Krishna] four months hence, the Hindus would be obliged to come to a decisive conclusion as Bindraban [Vrindavan] where they would assemble. A

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<sup>518</sup> Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*, 205. For other readings of the *Report*, see Pinney, ‘*Photos of the Gods*’ and Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>519</sup> Innovations in the Ramlila Processions,” UPSA File No. 325/1911.

<sup>520</sup> “Anti-cow killing movement in United Provinces,” UPSA General Administration Department, Box No. 138, File No. 214, 1921.

committee should be formed immediately for propaganda work amongst all classes of the Hindus. It is a duty of the government not to interfere in religious matters and if it fails in this the Hindus will sever all connections with government in order to maintain their dharma [religion], even at the sacrifice of their lives.<sup>521</sup>

Although the Hindu Mahasabha's attempt to convene a Special Hindu Conference in Vrindavan ultimately failed, the Sankaracharya's interest in the prohibition of cow slaughter in Vrindavan makes obvious the immense symbolic value of Braj for a larger Hindu consciousness.<sup>522</sup> Disparate groups and political factions used the rhetoric of cow protection in Braj as a tool to win support of diverse Hindu constituencies. For example, to distance themselves from "movements of an extreme nature" such as the Hindu Mahasabha led by "a band of sadhus [monks]," the Cow Preservation Society of Bombay critiqued the Sankaracharya as politically motivated in a 1938 petition.<sup>523</sup>

Submitted at the end of a decade marked by widespread communal violence, the 1938 petition began by asserting that slaughterhouses in Braj were maintained only for military garrisons. The petitioners then went on to state categorically that "during the long period stretching over 700 years the Musalmans ruled India, cow-killing was an unknown sin. The Hindus had no grievances even against Aurangzeb, who was considered to be the most bigoted of all Muslim rulers."<sup>524</sup> The Mughals had forbidden cow slaughter in order to "live with the Hindus peacefully [...] exercising different faiths

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<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

<sup>522</sup> Richard Gordon, "The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress, 1915 to 1926," *Modern Asian Studies* 9:2 (1975), 145-203, 163.

<sup>523</sup> "Memorial and resolution from Hindus."

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.



but forming one great Indian Nation.”<sup>525</sup> Since cow slaughter had been banned in the region from the time of the Mughal emperor Shah Alam, Muslims in Vrindavan and Mathura could not be the primary consumers of beef. Thus neither the creation and maintenance nor closure of slaughterhouses “has any relation with the policy of neutrality in the matter affecting religious observances or to accord special treatment to any single community in any individual place where such treatment would conflict with their established practice of equal toleration in respect to the observances of all creed.”<sup>526</sup> It was only with the coming of the British that beef eating was introduced in Braj, the Cow Preservation Society declared, further alleging that slaughterhouses were a “political weapon” for creating a Hindu-Muslim schism in India. The government rejected this petition.

The 1938 petition was followed by a series of similar protests in 1938, 1939, and 1945.<sup>527</sup> Each time, the British administration rejected the petitions, claiming that it would not support one religious community at the cost of another. It was only in 1955 – eight years after Independence – that the Uttar Pradesh Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act came into being, prohibiting the slaughter of cows, not only in Braj, but throughout Uttar Pradesh. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, protested the legislation as a “wrong step,” stating that this would only further incite Hindu-Muslim violence in the state.<sup>528</sup> Irrespective of Nehru’s critique, the 1951 establishment of Hindi as the sole official language and the 1955 Cow Slaughter Act were just a few of the many steps

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<sup>525</sup> Ibid.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

<sup>527</sup> “Memorial regarding slaughter houses in Mathura,” UPSA General Administration Department, Box No. 633, File No. 113/1945, 1945.

<sup>528</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 162.

taken by the Uttar Pradesh government in the 1950s to disprivilege the Urdu-speaking Muslim community in the state.

The Uttar Pradesh government's 1955 decision to ban cow slaughter can very easily be read as a legacy of the pre-1947 petitions in Braj. Certainly the government's politics resonated well with the Sankaracharya's 1921 agitations for direct action in Vrindavan. Like the Sankaracharya, Sarvasri Sampurnanand, the Chief Minister of the state from 1955 to 1960, had been closely associated with the Hindu Mahasabha and was known for his anti-Muslim views.<sup>529</sup> Yet, in general, much of the cow protection agitation in Braj from 1805 to the 1940s was never directed against the Muslim community. It remained a contestation between the British and Jaswant Rao Holkar, between the British and the *pandas* of Braj, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, between the British and Hindu pressure groups over the sovereignty and sacredness of Vrindavan's spaces.

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<sup>529</sup> For example, during a controversy over Uttar Pradesh school textbooks, Sarvasri Sampurnanand insisted on introducing Hindu mythology as part of the curriculum while denouncing Muslim rulers as anti-Hindu in school textbooks. Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 221.

## Coda

*First*, that we recognise space as the product of interrelationships; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny. [...]  
*Second*, that we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity.  
[...] *Third*, that we recognise space as always under construction.

- Doreen B. Massey, 2005.<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> Doreen B. Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 9.

## **10. Imagining Space: Remaking Vrindavan in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Much of my dissertation focused on the local of Vrindavan. Through a close study of the material culture produced in the region, I made visible the everyday tactics of space-making through which a modern religion emerged in Vrindavan. Displacing post-Enlightenment dichotomies such as faith/ideology and secular/religious, my dissertation has shown how spatio-visual practices were central in the making of modern subjectivities in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Braj. In my narrative, the space in/of religion became a key liminal socio-political arena where religious and visual practices coincided in resisting the epistemological duality of (western) modernity and (nationalist) tradition. In process, I made an argument for a political Hinduism that was not necessarily embedded within the modern secularizing discourses of a nationalist Hinduism. In my dissertation, the local emerged as key in recuperating practices that resisted the epistemological tyranny of both the metanarrative of the Enlightenment and the exclusionary politics of a nationalist Hinduism.

Yet, this local in Vrindavan was never really an autonomous sphere far removed from the world of nationalist Hinduisms or colonial Orientalist knowledge. How then do we think this assemblage of diverse and dissonant micropractices? Is it possible to think of political Hinduisms as a situated spatial technique that allowed for the creation of an entangled landscape, a landscape that produced contingent constellations of topophilic desires? How then do we think of the space(s) of Vrindavan through the idea of plurality,

in Massey’s terms, “the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality”<sup>531</sup>?

In the summer of 1868, Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1836-1886), the famed mystic saint from Calcutta, spent two weeks in Vrindavan. Before returning to Calcutta, the saint collected dust from the various sacred sites in the town. Scattering this dust in a grove near the Kali temple in Calcutta where he worked as a priest, Ramakrishna is said to have claimed: “Now this place is as sacred as Vrindavan!”<sup>532</sup> Albeit anecdotal, this 19<sup>th</sup>-century attempt to recreate the sacred spaces of Vrindavan beyond itself had historical precedence. In Part One, I discussed 18<sup>th</sup>-century attempts by the Kachhwaha rulers of Jaipur to transform their capital city into a new Vrindavan, “even more beautiful than the original Vrindavan.”<sup>533</sup> By the 1720s, a number of Gaudiya icons from Vrindavan had moved to Jaipur. It was as if through the icons’ inhabitation in the newly built Kachhwaha capital, Jaipur would become as sacred as Vrindavan itself.

While in the 1860s Ramakrishna attempted to make the colonial city of Calcutta “as sacred as Vrindavan” through consecrating the urban metropolis with dust collected from the pilgrimage town, the early 18<sup>th</sup>-century attempt to make Jaipur “even more beautiful than the original Vrindavan” occurred through the movement of the Gaudiya icons to the Kachhwaha capital and court literature that rendered the urban spaces of the city legible within a familiar language of Vaishnava poetic metaphors. In the kingdom of Vishnupur in eastern India, a Gupta Vrindavan, a hidden Vrindavan, was also created in

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 135.

<sup>533</sup> Atmaram, the Kachhwaha court biographer, writes in his 1770 biography of Jai Singh I that “*kinhāū vṛndāvana tāī sarasa vam, dāvana tāī.*” Cited in Thiel-Horstmann, “Govinddevji of Vrindaban and Jaipur.” See Part One for a discussion on the sacralization of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Jaipur.

the 17<sup>th</sup> century through a systematic renaming and consecration of the topography of the region. Religious literature along with the building of temples, artificial lakes, and gardens with plants that were native to Braj allowed for the mapping of the “original” Vrindavan onto this new pilgrimage town. Writing on the making of this “new” Vrindavan, Pika Ghosh suggests: “This strategy not only linked but also legitimated both sites, giving Vishnupur the authority desired and reinforcing the mythic status mapped historically upon Vrindavan.”<sup>534</sup>

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, yet another Gupta Vrindavan was established, this time in Nabadwip, the town in eastern India where Chaitanya was born. Although the precise date for the establishment of this Gupta Vrindavan is not known, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century disciples of Chaitanya started contending that there was no inherent difference between the Gauda Mandala, the thirty-two mile circumambulatory route centered around Nabadwip, and Braj.<sup>535</sup> By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Bengali Vaishnava poets such as Narahari Cakravarti would categorically assert that Nabadwip and Vrindavan were “non-different. In one place, Śri Caitanya Mahāprabhu exhibited His pastimes and in the other place, Lord Śyāmasundara [epithet of Krishna] exhibited His pastimes.”<sup>536</sup>

However, it was only in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that this theological impulse to map the sacred spaces of Vrindavan onto Nabadwip was given physical form with the building of a garden emulating the forests of Braj (Figure 10.1). Built beside the Gauranga

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<sup>534</sup> Pika Ghosh, “Tales, Tanks, and Temples: The Creation of a Sacred Center in Seventeenth-century Bengal,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 61 (2002), 193-222, 194.

<sup>535</sup> For this history, see Tony K. Stewart, *The Final Word: The Caitanya Caritāmṛta and the Grammar of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>536</sup> Narahari Cakravarti, *Bhakti-ratnākara: The Jewel-filled Ocean of Devotional Service* trans. Kuaakratha Das (Vrindavan: Rasbihari Lal & Sons, 2006), 23.

Mahaprabhu temple, the key Gaudiya temple in Nabadwip, the garden was originally part of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century residence-temple of a family of priests who traced their genealogy to an early disciple of Chaitanya.<sup>537</sup> In the 1960s, the garden was significantly altered to simulate Braj's topography. A pilgrim walking through the garden could thus in theory partake in the experience of a Braj *parikrama* in Nabadwip itself. To aid in visualizing the sacred sites of Braj, a number of shrines were built. Each shrine was dedicated to a particular incident from Krishna's life that occurred in Braj. For instance, a small hillock emulated the Govardhan hill while a water tank reminded the pilgrim of Krishna's battle with the serpent Kaliya on the banks of the Yamuna at Vrindavan (Figure 10.2). In certain ways, the spatial imaginary that governed the making of this Gupta Vrindavan drew on representations of the *vanayatra parikrama* that I discussed in Part Two. The garden became an animated primordial space where Krishna still performed divine deeds and danced with the *gopis*. A circumambulation of this Gupta Vrindavan thus allowed for a corporeal experience of Nabadwip as Braj.

The theological structures that allowed for this palpable physical recreation of Vrindavan (which itself was a recreation of the other-worldly Goloka, the world of the cows, the unmanifest world where Krishna sports eternally) in Nabadwip was of course well in place in the pre-colonial period. Each time a new Vrindavan was created – whether it was in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Vishnupur, 18<sup>th</sup>-century Jaipur, 19<sup>th</sup>-century Calcutta, or in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Nabadwip – Gaudiya theology provided a framework to make possible the creation of a heaven/Goloka on earth.

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<sup>537</sup> For a history of the pilgrimage town of Nabadwip, see E. Alan Morinis, *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition: A Case Study of West Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), 122-164.

Not surprisingly, 20<sup>th</sup>-century nationalisms too found this ontological theory of space a liberating concept that allowed for a moral claim to the “state space” of the Empire. If the instances of recreating Vrindavan outside itself that I cite here are examples of localized politics, the idea of Vrindavan entered into nationalist discourses on territoriality and nation-making through very curious ways. Given that Vaishnava theology provided a powerful paradigm for seeing the spaces of Vrindavan as a manifest form of the unmanifest, a space embedded within metaphysical ideals of territoriality, it was not surprising that nationalist imaginaries transformed this space of transcendence into a metaphor of sovereignty from colonial rule.

In this section, I turn to these imaginaries – 20<sup>th</sup>-century nationalist reclaimings of the sacred spaces of Braj. Even as it is undeniable that there were significant moments of influence and overlap between localized and nationalist commitments to the sacred spaces of Braj, I choose to delineate not the moments of coevalness but the moments of disjuncture. In doing so, I hope to further reiterate the resistances that everyday practices of space-making made possible in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries without being subsumed under larger homogenizing claims of the colonial and/or the nationalist. The dissonances in political strategies that were, and still are, spatially configured allows for a recuperation of the differences in everyday enclaves of political strategies. What better place to begin with than Mohandas Gandhi who in the popular imaginary became the Vaishnava saint of modern India?

Gandhi himself, however, had very little to say about Vaishnava temple practice in Vrindavan or western India. Although his family had been followers of



Vallabhacharya for over six generations, Gandhi was known to have written disparagingly about Vallabha.<sup>538</sup> In *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi thus writes: “Being born in the Vaishnava faith, I often had to go to the *Haveli* [Pushtimarga temple]. But it never appealed to me. I did not like its glitter and pomp. Also, I heard rumours of immortality being practiced there, and lost all interests in it. Hence, I could gain nothing from the Haveli.”<sup>539</sup> Yet, given the emphasis on an idyllic rurality and imperatives of social justice and political change that marked the Krishna of Vrindavan, popular imaginaries had no difficulty recuperating the figure of Gandhi as a modern-day Krishna. In Section 6, I discussed a particular 1930s lithograph where Gandhi was depicted as Krishna saving the nation from the poisonous venom of the Empire represented as the serpent Kaliya (See Figure 6.3). Writing on early 20<sup>th</sup>-century chromolithographs depicting Gandhi, Christopher Pinney too suggests: “The individual, physical, body became a new site for an ethicized political practice: the production of khadi (homespun cloth), vegetarianism and other interventions on one’s own body became a new means of performing an ideal vision of community. There was a powerful homology between this Gandhian practice and the Brijbasi’s [Mathura-based publisher] Vallabha imagery.”<sup>540</sup>

Along with Gandhi’s body, the space of the nation-in-making also came to figure significantly in popular nationalist imaginaries. In 1938, the year Gandhi organized the annual session of the Indian National Congress at Haripura in Gujarat, a Marathi-Hindi

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<sup>538</sup> For Gandhi’s views on Pushtimarga practices, see Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics*.

<sup>539</sup> Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of my Experiments with Truth* (New York: Dover Publications, 1983, Reprint of 1948 edition), 28.

<sup>540</sup> Pinney, ‘*Photos of the Gods*,’ 85.

bilingual film was released by the director Keshavrao Dhaiber (1890-1978) on the life of Krishna in Braj.<sup>541</sup> Although this was Dhaiber's first independent production, his earlier films produced under the banner of Prabhat Films (established 1929) were well known for their nationalist rhetoric. Drawing on 20<sup>th</sup>-century western Indian nationalism that drew its mythologies from 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century *bhakti* poetry from the region, a number of films were released by Prabhat in the 1930s that mediated the mythological into a narrative of nationalism through cinema.<sup>542</sup> Not surprisingly, these films on the lives of *bhakti* saints and the miracles performed by Hindu celestial beings were extremely popular with viewers who walked miles to see open-air screenings in rural India.<sup>543</sup> It was the resounding success of *Shree Krishna Janma* (1918, dir. Dadasaheb Phalke), a film on the birth of Krishna, that led to the beginning of this new genre in Indian cinema now known as the "mythological." By the 1920s, films based on Hindu mythological narratives accounted for over seventy percent of the total films produced in the subcontinent.<sup>544</sup> Most of these mythologicals used cinematic tricks and special effects such as double exposure to emphasize and make "real" the miraculous, the magical, and the supernatural. Cinematically, *Nandkumar* [The Son of Nanda], Dhaiber's 1938 film on the life of Krishna, was no different.

However, while earlier mythologicals used visual metaphors and allegoric citations to link the life of Krishna in Braj with the anti-colonial movement that had by

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<sup>541</sup> For the biography of Keshavrao Dhaiber, see Sanjit Narwekar, *Marathi Cinema: In Retrospect* (Bombay: Maharashtra Film, Stage & Cultural Development Corporation, 1995); Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>542</sup> For a discussion on the nationalist intentions of these films, see Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001), 233-264.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>544</sup> B.V. Dharap, "The Mythological or Taking Fatalism for Granted," in Aruna Vasudev and Philippe Lenglet, eds. *Indian Cinema Superbazaar* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1983), 79-83.

now gained significant momentum, advertisements for *Nandkumar* made a direct connection between the mythological spaces of Braj and the space of Gandhian nationalism (Figure 10.3).<sup>545</sup> With a photograph of the young actor Anant Vinayak as the boy Krishna, the advertisement stated:

INDIA's National Place of Pilgrimage...It is HARIPURA Today; It was GOKUL in the Golden Age. GOKUL was the HARIPURA of NAND-KUMAR, the King of Kings! HARIPURA is the GOKUL of India's Leader of Leaders!! You will realise this in NANDKUMAR. Herds of Cows in Hundreds! Gay Gopis in Thousands!! Gopas mad with God-Love!! NANDKUMAR The sweet spectacle of Gokul that was Vithal Nagar. The HARIPURA of Lord Krishna, The Leader of all Leaders is now at CENTRAL Cinema, Bombay.<sup>546</sup>

Published in local newspapers and magazines including the *Haripura Congress Souvenir*, the advertisement thus linked Gokul, the town in Braj where Krishna grew up, to Vithal Nagar, the site at Haripura where the Congress meeting was to be held. The advertisement, however, did not merely allude to the sacred spaces of Braj as a metaphor for an ideal space untouched by the crisis of colonial modernity. Rather, Vithal Nagar became the new Braj – India's "National Place of Pilgrimage."

The making of Vithal Nagar as a (Vaishnava) national pilgrimage site does not, however, imply a secularization of the tenets of Vaishnavism. Rather, Gandhian nationalism was imbued in the popular (Hindu) nationalist imaginary with a Vaishnava

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<sup>545</sup> Writing on *Sant* [Saint] *Tukaram*, a 1936 Prabhat film based on the life of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century *Bhakti* poet Tukaram, Geeta Kapur notes: "[Vishnupant] Pagnis's [the actor who play Tuka in the film] presence extends beyond his fine, nearly beatific countenance, beyond his actor's reverie, beyond even his being, into becoming though discourse a reflective symbol within a political situation already conditioned by a contemporary 'saint', Mahatma Gandhi." Kapur, *When was Modernism*, 242.

<sup>546</sup> Advertisement for *Nandkumar* (1938, dir. Keshavrao Dhaiber). Published in Y. G. Krishnamurti, ed. *The 1938 Haripura Congress Souvenir* (Poona: Ramakrishna Brothers, 1938), unpaginated.

ethos. Vaishnava conceptualization of space, the idea that the unmanifest could be manifested in this world, the idea that the other-worldly could be created in this world through *bhakti*, allowed for the conception of a space for the nation-in-making, a space that was already sovereign. If Vithal Nagar, the township that was to host the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress, was indeed that mythic Gokul where “India’s Leader of Leaders” Krishna spent his childhood, the nation-in-making was a reflection of the divine presence, Goloka on earth.

Haripura, the space of nationalist politics, was then non-different from Gokul, the space of Vaishnava sacrality. The assimilation of the religious into the political, the private into the public, faith into nationalism, created a new space for both Vaishnavism and the nation-in-making. This new Gokul was where the sacred and the secular collided. The making of the site of Haripura as a space of Vaishnava devotion thus enabled a new modern spatial politics. Although the local elite of Braj were known for their anti-nationalist stance, having spoken out against nationalist reformers and actively discouraged local participation in the Indian National Congress, the idea of Gokul, the idea of a Goloka on earth, seeped out of the local to enter into nationalist discourses on territoriality and nation-making.<sup>547</sup>

Gandhian nationalism was, however, merely one of the many nationalisms in the 1930s that appropriated Vaishnava ethics to produce a politics for claiming sovereignty. If films such as *Nandkumar* endeavored to invest the sacred spaces of both Haripura and

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<sup>547</sup> For instance, the senior Vaishnava priests of Vrindavan censored Radhacharan Goswami, a member of the priestly family that maintained the Radharaman temple, for becoming the secretary of the Mathura division of the Indian National Congress in 1888. Goswami was forced to renounce nationalist politics and to return to the traditional *seva*-oriented practices of his family.

Braj with newer mythologies centered on Gandhian ideals of ruralism and pastoralism, Hindu exclusionary movements attempted to wrest Vaishnavism out of the pastoral devotion that was seen as inherent to Krishna worship in Braj. Within the exclusionary discourses of more virulent Hinduisms, the 1930s thus saw the resurrection of a warrior Krishna.

In Section 6, I had referred to the Bengali monk Swami Vivekananda, incidentally a disciple of Ramakrishna, who derided the effeminacy of Krishna worship in Vrindavan. As Vivekananda stated in 1898: “At the present time, the worship of the divine play of Sri Krishna with the Gopis is not good. Playing on the flute will not regenerate the country. Playing on the khol and kartal and dancing in the frenzy of the kirtana [act of praising Krishna through communal singing made popular by Chaitanya] has degenerated the whole people.”<sup>548</sup> This new 19<sup>th</sup>-century Krishna was born through the texts of novelists such as Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) and the nationalist reform movement. Ashis Nandy writes: “[I]t was Bankimchandra’s elegant essay on Kṛṣṇa which provided the missing link— a reinterpreted traditional godhead — to the new model of Hinduism. [...] Bankimchandra did not adore Kṛṣṇa as a child-god or as a playful — sometimes sexually playful – adolescent who was simultaneously an androgynous, philosophically sensitive, practical idealist. His Kṛṣṇa was a respectable, righteous, didactic, ‘hard’ God protecting the glories of Hinduism as a proper religion and preserving it as an internally consistent moral and cultural system.”<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>548</sup> Interview with Swami Vivekananda at Belur Math, 1898. Published in *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 388.

<sup>549</sup> Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 23-24.

The history of the making of this proper religion called Hinduism is by now well known. A number of scholars have delineated the processes through which the 19<sup>th</sup>-century resurrection of the warrior Krishna, a Krishna far removed from the eroticism of Braj, nourished much of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Hindutva politics.<sup>550</sup> The 1930s also saw the popularization of a new iconography of Krishna where he was no longer depicted in the groves of Vrindavan. Rather, a series of devotional lithographs released by printing presses in Calcutta, Kanpur, and Rawalpindi depicted Krishna in battlefield yielding the *sudarshan chakra*, the discus shaped weapon used by Vishnu to defeat evil. In these images, the warrior Krishna replaced the lover Krishna with his flute.

A lithograph published by the Calcutta-based Hindu Mission (established 1935), a religious organization known for its anti-Muslim rhetoric, exemplifies this new iconography of the 1930s. Krishna now stands on a modern globe depicting India while holding a conch and the *sudarshan chakra*, the traditional attributes of the monarchical divinity Vishnu (Figure 10.4). Labeled in Bengali as *partha sarathi*, Krishna as the charioteer of Arjuna (the righteous hero-king of the *Mahābhārata*), the lithograph quoted a passage from the *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā* that stated: “To reestablish the principles of *dharma* (righteousness, religion), I appear age after age.” Further, drawing a direct correlation between the age of the *Mahābhārata*, where Krishna announced that he would appear over and again to save mankind from evil, and colonized India, the text below the image pleaded: “Overwhelmed India is looking towards you, come *sudarshan*-bearing Krishna.”

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<sup>550</sup> See Fn. 2.

The textual and visual rhetoric presented through the lithograph thus made possible a number of strategic maneuvers. The appearance of a martial and powerful godhead was seen as pre-destined. Krishna had himself declared in the *Mahābhārata* that he would appear to restore *dharma* each time a crisis arose. Audiences familiar with the narratives of the text would be well aware that in his form as Arjuna's charioteer, Krishna served as a political advisor to the warrior as he fought against his own brothers for the crown. In comparing the era of the *Mahābhārata* to colonial rule, the lithograph thus reduced the allegories of a battle between good and evil, between the higher and the lower self, into a battle between Hindus and non-Hindus (Muslims, Christians, Adivasis). The lithograph thus implored Krishna to come back in the age on *adharmā* (irreligiosity, injustice) as the *sudarshan* bearing supreme godhead.

Simultaneously, all traces of the Krishna of Vrindavan were systematically removed from both the text and the image. One could no longer see the magical groves of Vrindavan or the flute with which the blue-skinned god seduced the women of Braj. The making of this iconography of violence, an iconography of a wrathful god, went hand-in-hand in the 1930s with Hindu-Muslim riots initiated by the Hindutva in most north Indian cities. Thus, if, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, films such as *Nandkumar* appropriated the Krishna of Braj to create a Hindu-centric, but inclusionary, anti-colonial national space, the Hindutva resurrected yet another Krishna, a vengeful god who would usher in the apocalypse. While we are today all too familiar with many Krishnas – the pastoral Krishna of Gandhian nationalism or even the martial Krishna of Hindutva discourses –

my dissertation attempted to delineate yet another history, the history of the Krishna in/of Vrindavan as embedded in a localized world of politics and piety.

It is in this contradiction and slippage of meaning that the fragmentary tactics of resistance in smaller towns, the *qasbas* of colonial India, become discernable as a differentiated form of knowledge that operated beyond nationalist/colonialist frames. Today, we have become accustomed to thinking of the nationalist project as one that was entwined with the universalism of western modernity. However, this dissertation allows me to think the local as an analytical category that arose in conjunction with, but equally importantly, in differentiation from this dominant conceptual norm. How then do we hold these narratives together?

Space and narratives of space are “always under construction,” always in the process of being made.<sup>551</sup> For Doreen Massey, this open-ended politics of space makes possible a more challenging political landscape. As she writes: “That cosmology of ‘only one narrative’ obliterates the multiplicities, the contemporaneous heterogeneities of space. It reduces simultaneous coexistence to place in the historical queue. And so again: what if? [...] What if we open up the imagination of the single narrative to give space (literally) for a multiplicity of trajectories? What kinds of conceptualisation of time and space, and of their relation, might that give on to?”<sup>552</sup>

What if we opened up the imagination of the single narrative of colonial modernity and its nationalism to give space for a multiplicity of trajectories? What if we opened up the imagination of the single narrative of Vrindavan and its Hinduism to give

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<sup>551</sup> Massey, *For Space*, 9.

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

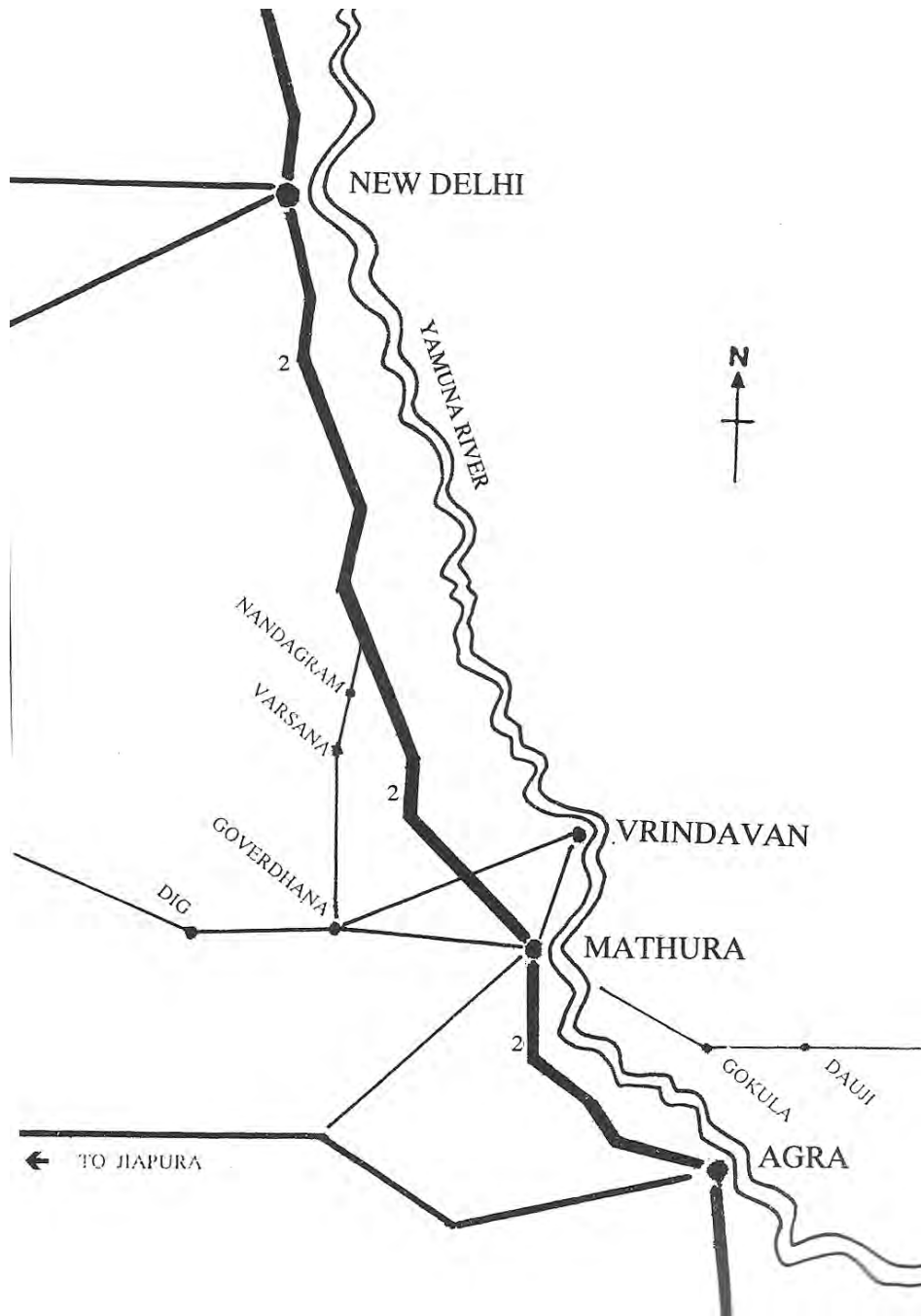


space for a multiplicity of trajectories? Could we imagine a space in/of religion that was and continues to be open-ended, unfinished, and forever transgressing its own limits? “For the future to be open, space must be open too.”<sup>553</sup> This dissertation, then, is only a gesture in making possible space(s) for the future.

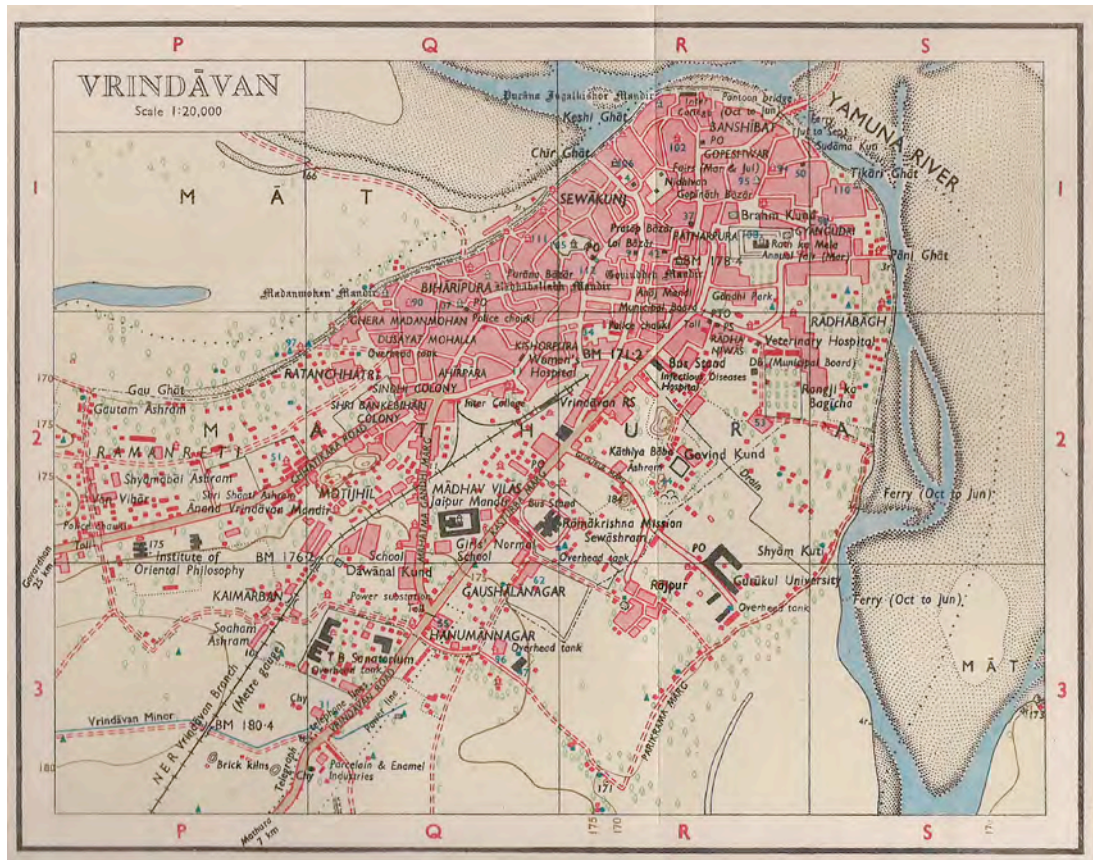
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<sup>553</sup> Ibid., 12.

# Maps



Map 1 Map of Braj



Map 2 Map of Vrindavan

## Illustrations



1.1 Govind Dev temple, Vrindavan, 1590 (See Figure 1.3 for interior view)



1.2 Diwan-i Khass (Private Audience Hall), Fatehpur Sikri palace complex, Agra, ca. 16<sup>th</sup> century





1.3 Interior view, Govind Dev temple, Vrindavan, 1590 (See Figure 1.1 for exterior view)



1.4 Madanmohan temple, Vrindavan, ca. 1580



1.5 Gopinath temple, Vrindavan, ca. 1580-1585





1.6 Jugal Kishore temple, Vrindavan, 1627





1.7 Artist Unknown, *Raja Worshipping Krishna*, Bilaspur, ca. 1680, Opaque watercolor on paper, 23 X 17 cm.



1.8 Artist Unknown, *Radha and Krishna*, Guler, ca. 1760-1770, Opaque watercolor on paper, 22.4 X 17.4 cm.



1.9 Artist Unknown, Pichhwai for *Gosainji Ka Utsava* [Birthday of Vitthalnatha], Nathadwara, ca. 1830, Cotton painted with pigments and gold, 186 X 148 cm.





1.10 Bichitr, *Shah Jahan Receiving His Three Eldest Sons Asaf Khan During His Accession Ceremonies*, ca. 1630, Watercolor on Paper, 81.5 X 101.5 cm.



1.11 *Jharoka* in the Diwan-i 'Amm (Public Audience Hall), Agra Fort, Agra, ca. 1628  
(See Figure 3.3 for interior)



2.1 Dr. John Murray, *Great Temple at Bindrabund* [Govind Dev temple, Vrindavan], 1857, Salt print mounted on card, 36.3 X 45.6 cm.





2.2 Krishna on doorway of *mandapa*, Govind Dev temple, Vrindavan, 1590 (See Figure 2.4 for detail)



2.3 Trailokyavijaya, ca. 10<sup>th</sup> century





2.4 Detail of desecrated sculpture of Krishna on doorway of *mandapa*, Govind Dev temple, Vrindavan, 1590 (See Figure 2.2 for full view)



2.5 Sculpture of devotee on exterior wall, Govind Dev temple, Vrindavan, 1590



3.1 General view of Kanak (golden) Vrindavan near Jaipur with gardens and Govind Dev temple, ca. 1713



3.2 Govind Dev temple, Jaipur, 1735





3.3 Diwan-i 'Amm (Public Audience Hall), Agra Fort, Agra, ca. 1628 (See Figure 1.11 for interior)



3.4 Gopinath temple, Jaipur, ca. 1730s



3.5 Nagina mosque, Agra Fort, Agra, ca. 1630



3.6 *Jharoka* in the Diwan-i 'Amm (Public Audience Hall), Shahjahanabad palace complex, ca. 1648





3.7 Nihal Chand, *A Courty Paradise*, Kishangarh, ca. 1735-1757, Watercolor on Paper, 29.20 X 37.4 cm.

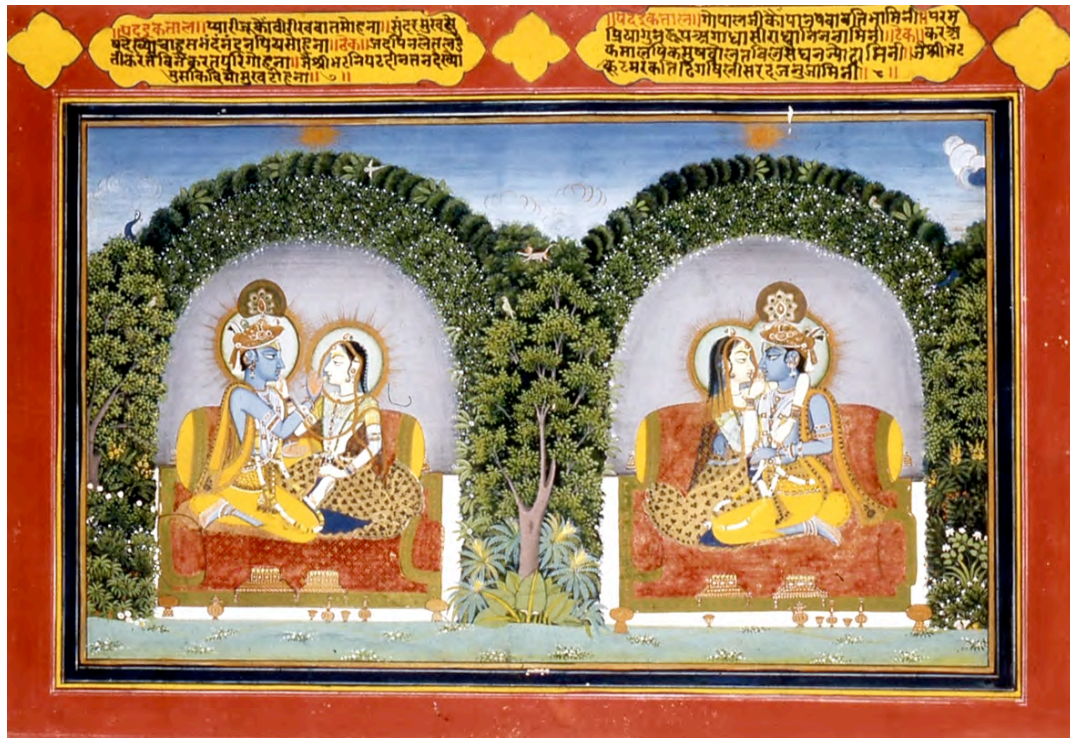


3.8 Gangamohan Kunj, Vrindavan, ca.1750s



3.9 Chandramanohar temple, Jaipur, late 18<sup>th</sup> century





3.10 Artist Unknown, *Illustration to Poems by Shribhatta*, ca. 1800, Pigment on paper, 20 x 28.9 cm.



3.11 Dativali Kunj, Vrindavan, ca. 1740s





4.1 Artist Unknown, *The Banks of the River Yamuna at Vrindavan*, ca. early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Opaque watercolor on Paper, 20.80 X 13.4 cm.



4.2 Krishna Chandrama temple, Vrindavan, 1810



4.3 Radhaballav temple, Kandi, ca. 1788 with 19<sup>th</sup>-century restorations



4.4 Charles D'Oyly, *Temple of Ganga Gobind Singh, Banian of Warren Hastings, at Kandi, at the meeting of the Bhagirathi and Jalangi rivers*, Watercolor on Paper, 11.6 X 16.7 cm.





4.5 Vishnupad temple, Gaya, 1787



4.6 Durga temple, Varanasi, 1760



4.7 Front façade, Krishna Chandrama temple, Vrindavan, 1810





4.8 Narasimha on west wall, Krishna Chandrama temple, Vrindavan, 1810

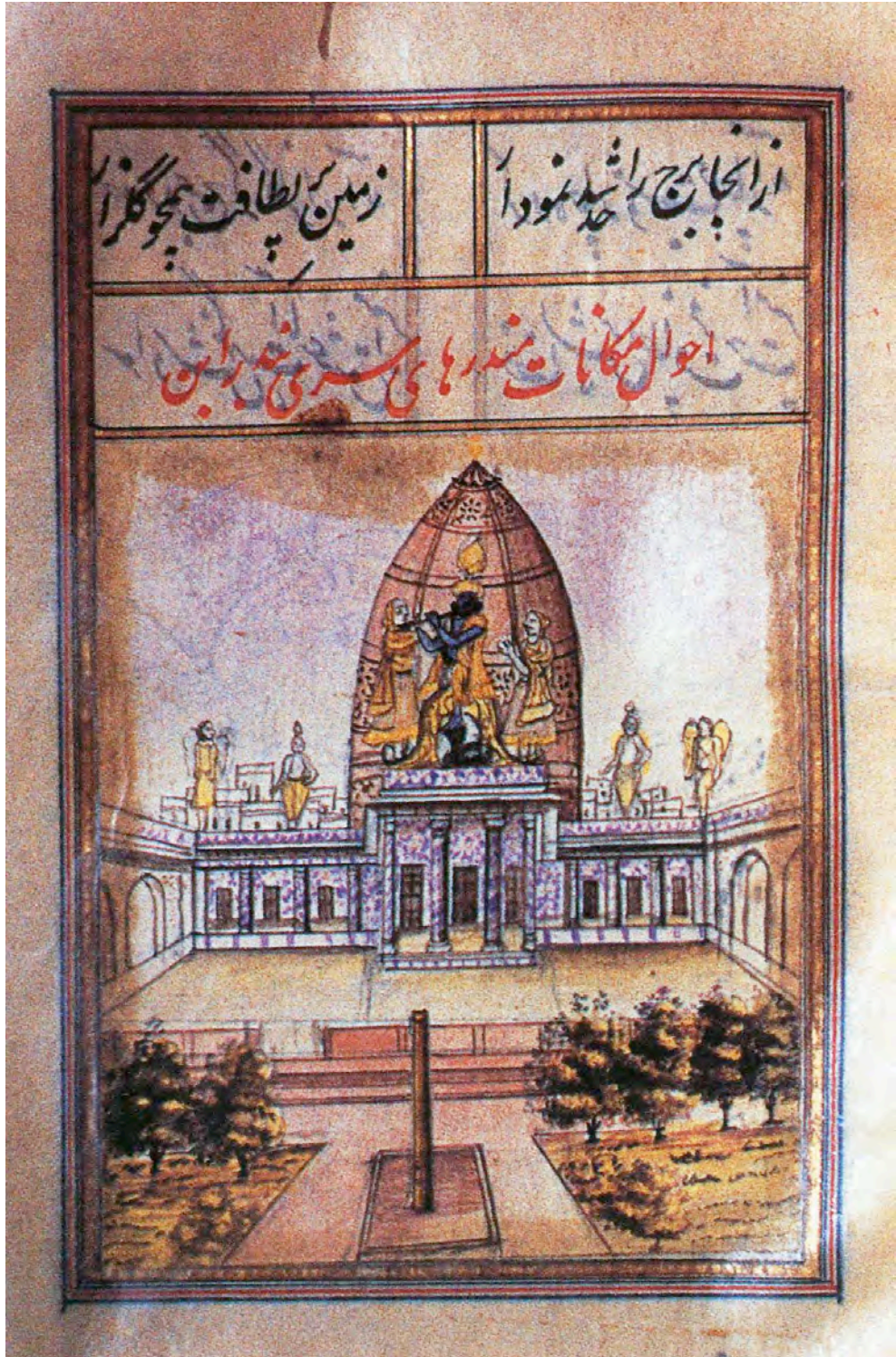


4.9 *Sikhara* of the Krishna Janmasthan temple, Mathura, ca. 1968



4.10 Habib Rahman, Gandhi Ghat, Barrackpore, 1949



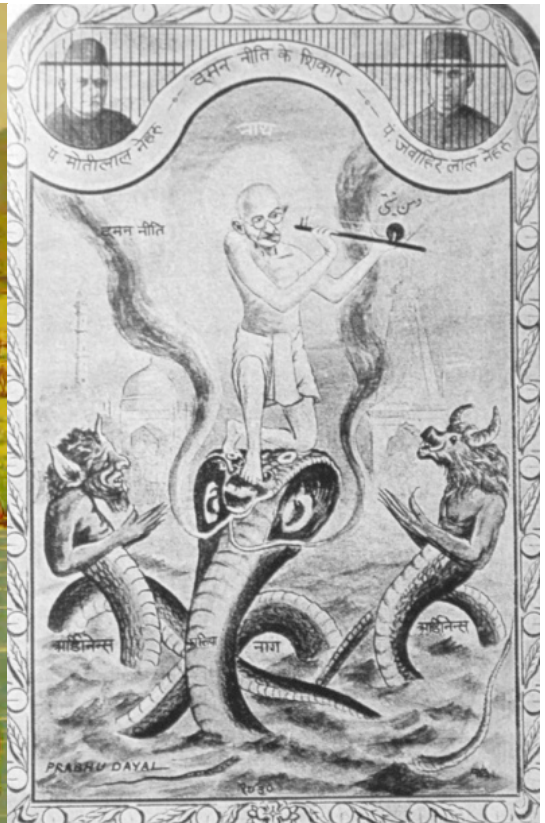


6.1 Artist Unknown, Temple in Vrindavan in Manik Chand, *Zib-ut tāwārīkh*, 1850, Watercolor on Paper, Size not known



6.2 Shahji temple, Vrindavan, 1868





6.3 Ravi Varma Press, *Krishna killing the serpent Kaliya*, Chromolithograph, ca. 1900,  
Size not known (left)

Shyam Sunder Lal, *Daman Niti ki Shikar* [Victim of Repressive Policies], 1930, Lithograph,  
Size not known (right)



6.4 Sobhabazaar nat mandir, Calcutta, 1840



6.5 Radharaman temple, Vrindavan, 1826





6.6 Mansion in Shahji complex, Vrindavan, 18<sup>th</sup> century



6.7 Rumi Darwaza, Lucknow, 1784

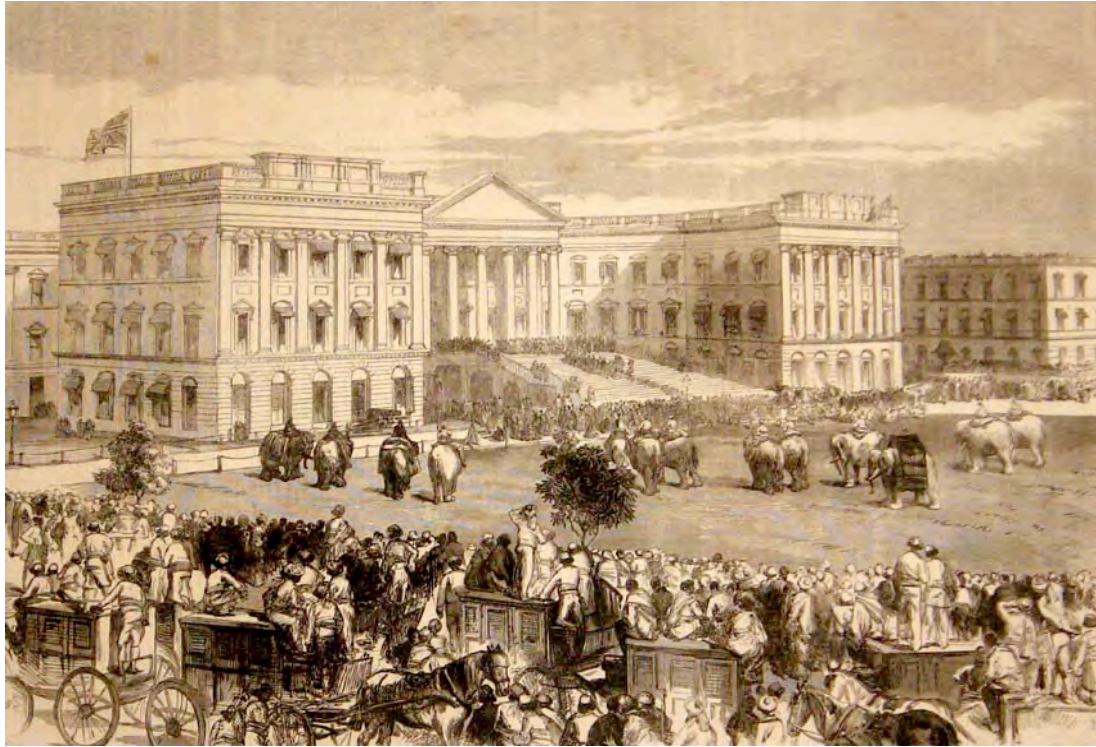


6.8 Gateway to Shahji temple, Vrindavan, 1868





6.9 Gateway to Qaisarbagh Palace, Lucknow, ca. 1850



6.10 Government House, Calcutta, 1803



6.11 Interior, Shahji temple, Vrindavan, 1868





6.12 Wajid Ali Shah dressed as a cowherd girl, Shahji temple, Vrindavan, 1868



6.13 Basanti Kamra, Shahji temple, Vrindavan, 1868

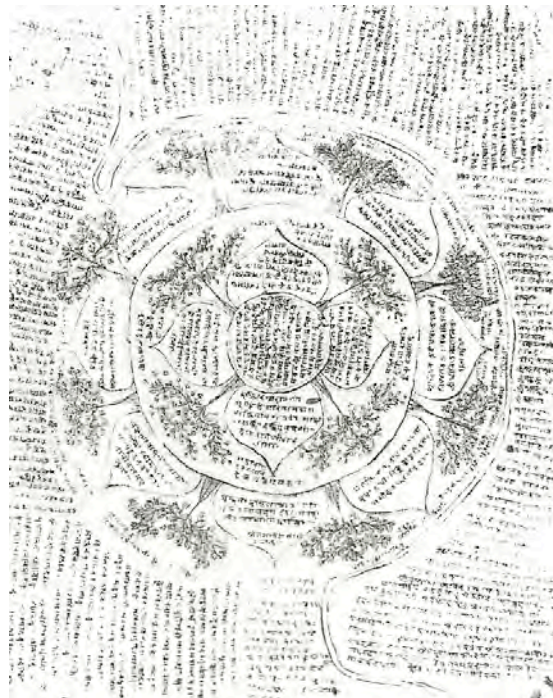




6.14 Husainabad Imambara, Lucknow, 1837

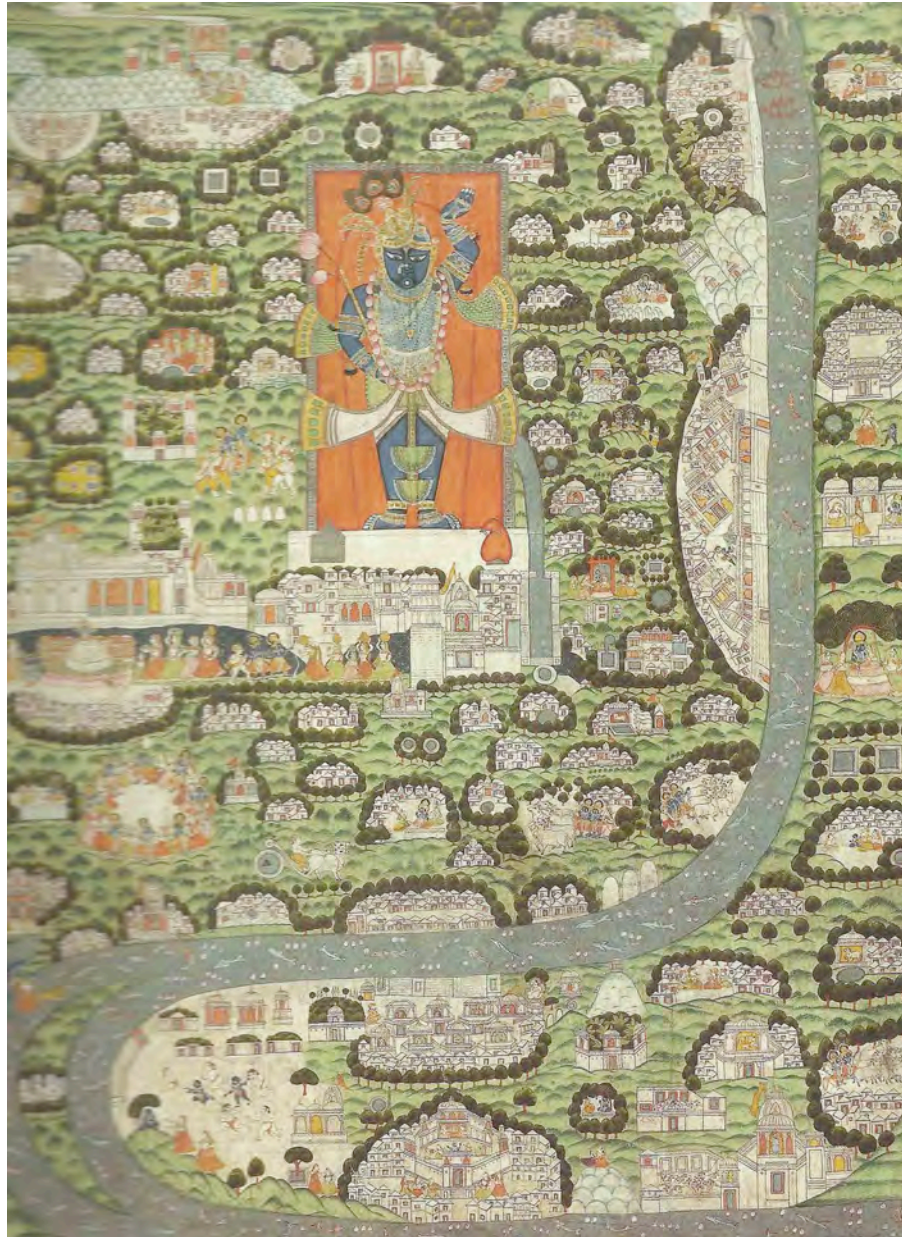


7.1 Artist Unknown, *Pichhwai* for Braj *vanayatra* [Circumambulation of Braj], Nathadwara, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Cotton painted with pigments and gold, 256 X 325cm.



7.2 Artist Unknown, *Caurāsī kos kī Parikramā* [Circumambulation of Braj], Braj, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Paint and ink on paper, 57 X 44 cm.





7.3 Artist Unknown, *Pichhwai* for Braj *Vanayatra* [Circumambulation of Braj], Nathadwara, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Cotton painted with pigments and gold, 165 X 116 cm.



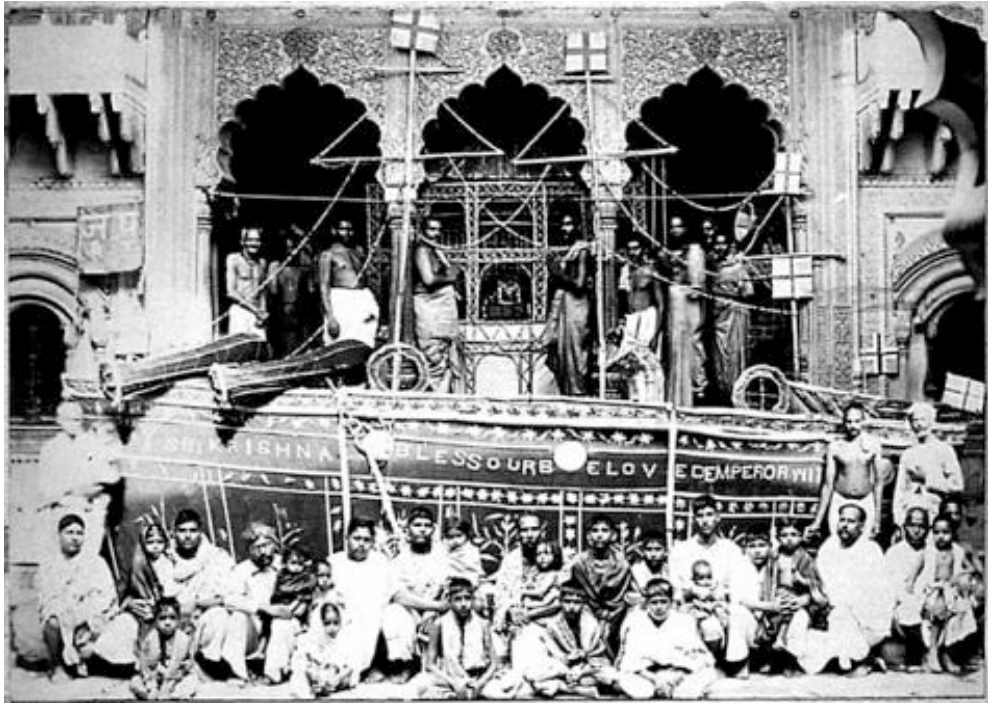
7.4 Worship of stones at the base of the Govardhan hill, Govardhan.



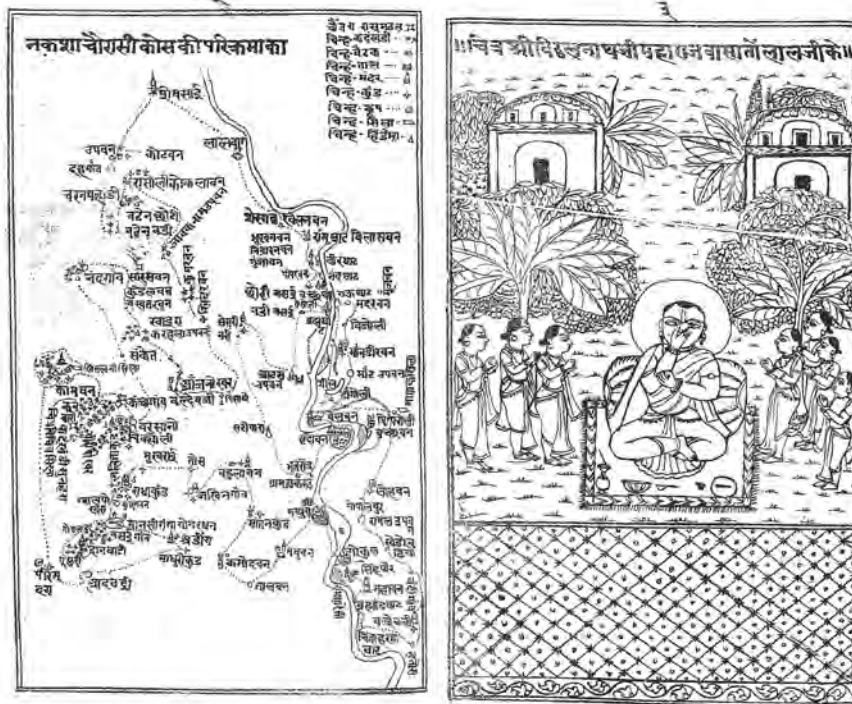


7.5 Bolton Fine Art Litho Press Tardeo, Bombay, *Brij Kshetra* [Pilgrimage center of Braj], early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chromolithograph, Size not known. (See Figure 7.9 for detail).





7.6 Radharaman temple as a battleship, Vrindavan, 1916, Albumen Print, Size not known.

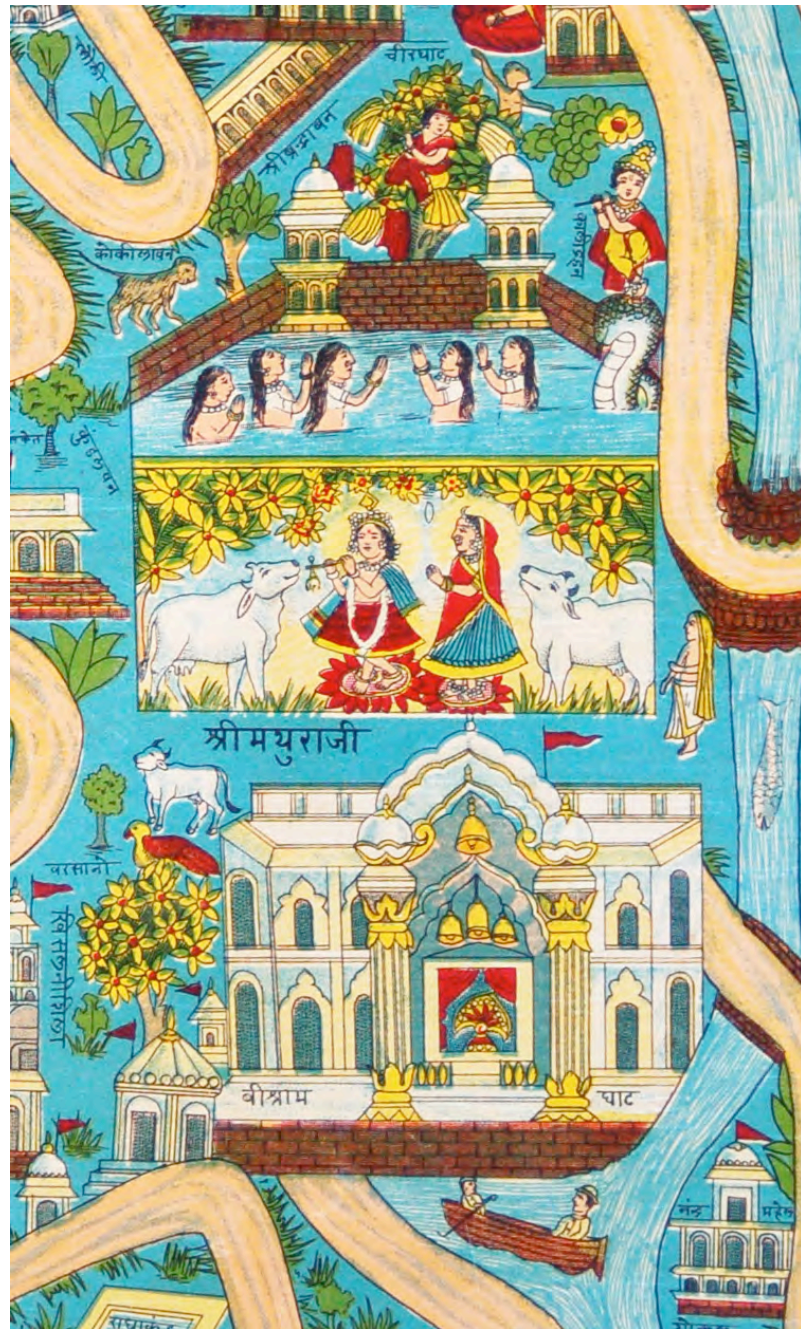


7.7 Artist Unknown, *Naṁsha Caurāsī kos kī Parikramā* [Map of circumambulatory route of Braj].



7.8 Roger Broders, *Visit India Muttra*, ca. 1930s, Chromolithograph, 99 X 60 cm.





7.9 Detail of Bolton Fine Art Litho Press Tardeo, Bombay, *Brij Kshetra* [Pilgrimage center of Braj], early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chromolithograph, Size not known. (See Figure 7.5 for full view)





8.1 Chir Ghat with 20<sup>th</sup>-century restorations, Vrindavan



8.2 Rangji procession in Vrindavan, ca. 1890, Albumen Print, 15 X 10 cm.





8.3 Jami Mosque with 20<sup>th</sup>-century restorations, Vrindavan



8.4 Chiman Lal, Darogah of Raj Imarat, Jaipur, Madho Bilas temple, Vrindavan, ca. 1904



8.5 Chimam Lal, Darogah of Raj Imarat, Jaipur, Jaipur temple, Barsana, ca. 1914





8.6 Chiman Lal, Darogah of Raj Imarat, Jaipur, Mubarak Mahal, Jaipur, 1900



8.7 Swinton Jacob, Director of the Jaipur Public Works Department, Albert Hall, Jaipur, 1887

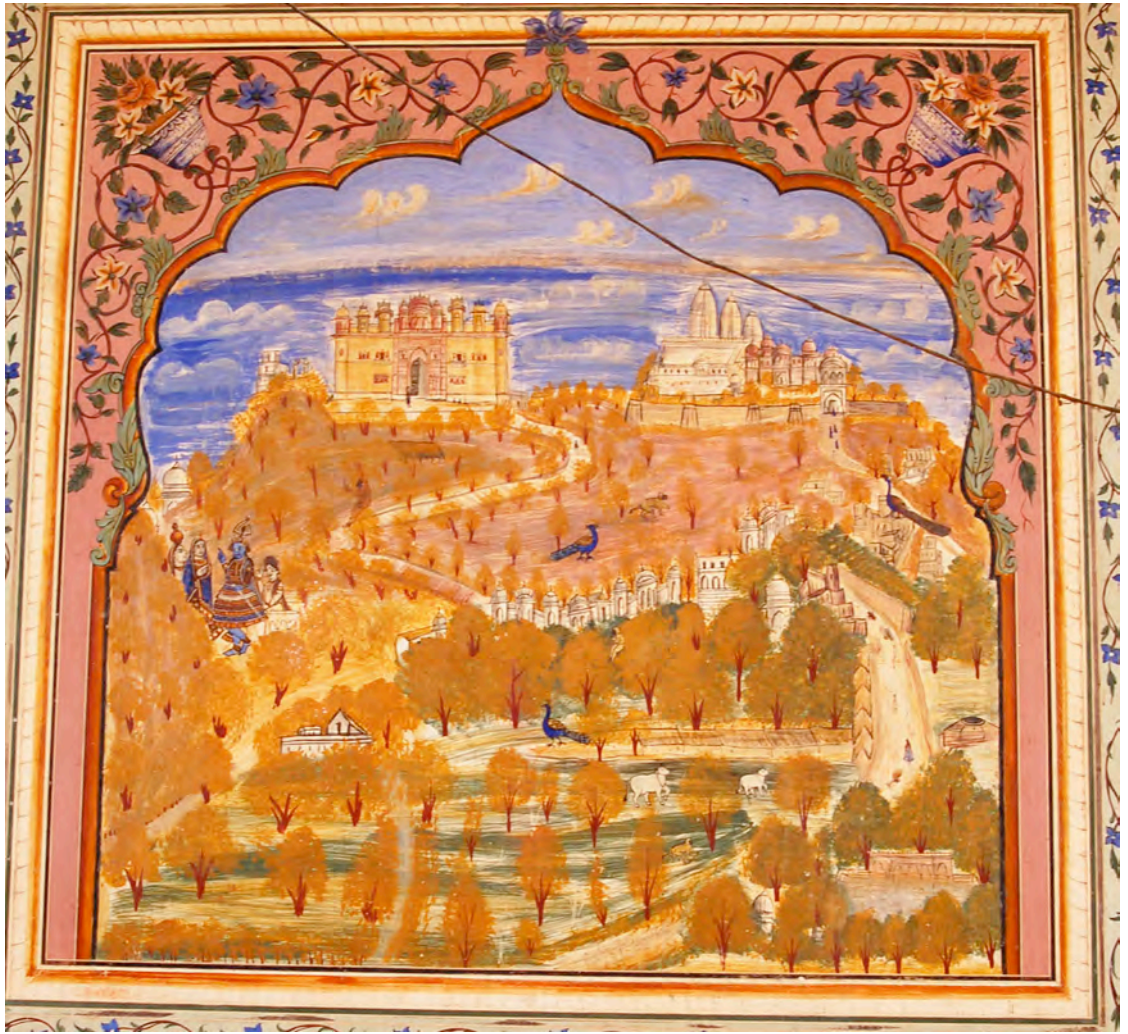


8.8 Lariji temple, Barsana, ca. 19<sup>th</sup> century



8.9 Aerial photograph of Barsana, 2011



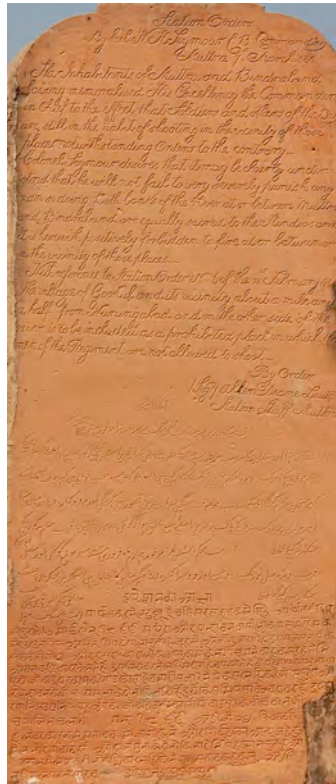


8.10 Artist Unknown, Wall mural on Jaipur temple, Barsana, ca. 1914

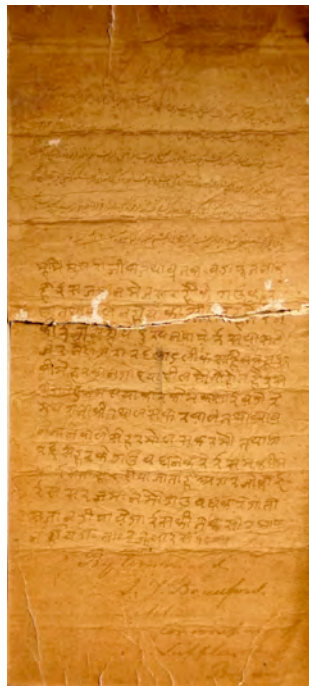


9.1 Cenotaph of Suraj Mal, Govardhan, ca. 1763 with 1866 stone plaque in front





9.2 Detail of 1866 stone plaque banning animal slaughter in Braj in front of the cenotaph of Suraj Mal, Govardhan, ca. 1763



9.3 Decree issued by Gerard Lake banning cow slaughter in Vrindavan and Mathura, July 3, 1805, Albumen print, 1898, Size not known



9.4 Chunni Lall & Bhawani Ram, Photographers Mathura, *Carte de visite*, ca. 1900, Size not known



9.5 S. C. Sen, Calcutta, Obverse of *carte de visite*, ca. 1870, Size not known



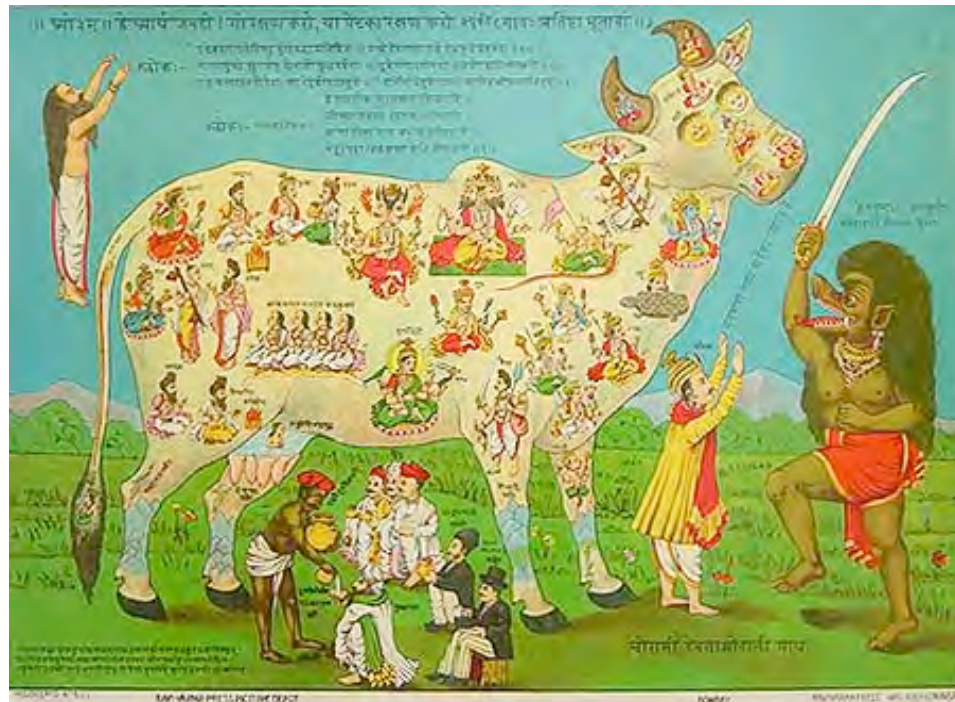


9.6 Chuni Lall & Bhawani Ram, Photographers Mathura, Obverse of *carte de visite*, ca. 1880s, Size not known



9.7. S. S. Brijbasi, *Shiam Sunder* [Shyam Sundar, an epithet of Krishna], ca. 1930s, Postcard decorated with silver and gold glitter, Size not known





9.8 Ravi Varma Press, *Chaurasi Devatawali Gau* [Cow with Eighty-four Deities], ca. 1912, Chromolithograph, Size not known



9.9 Label of cow being worshipped issued by W. M. Stirling & Sons, Glasgow, ca. 1910s, Chromolithograph, Size not known





10.1 General view of Gupta [Hidden] Vrindavan, Nabadwip, ca. 1960s



10.2 Govardhan Hill, Gupta [Hidden] Vrindavan, Nabadwip, ca. 1960s



INDIA'S National Place  
of Pilgrimage.....

It is HARIPURA Today;  
It was GOKUL in the Golden Age

GOKUL was the HARIPURA of  
NAND-KUMAR, the King of Kings!

HARIPURA is the GOKUL of  
India's Leader of Leaders!!

You will realise this in

## NAND KUMAR

JAYASHREE FILMS' PRESTIGE PICTURE.

Herds of Cows in Hundreds!  
Gay Gopis in Thousands!!  
Gopas mad with God-Love!!!

## NAND KUMAR

The sweet spectacle of Gokul that  
was Vithal Nagar

The HARIPURA of Lord KRISHNA,  
The Leader of all Leaders, is now at

# CENTRAL

CINEMA, BOMBAY

10.3 Artist Unknown, Advertisement for *Nandkumar* (1938, dir. Keshavrao Dhaiber).  
Published in Y. G. Krishnamurti, ed. *The 1938 Haripura Congress Souvenir* (Poona:  
Ramakrishna Brothers, 1938), unpaginated.





10.4 Universal Art Gallery, *Partha Sarathi* [epithet of Krishna], ca. 1930s, Chromolithograph, Size not known. Publisher: Hindu Mission, Calcutta

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Records of the Education, Health, and Land Department  
Proceedings of the Home Department (Political Branch)

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Board's Collection  
Proceedings of the Home Department (Miscellaneous)  
Proceedings of the Judicial (Criminal) Department, Bengal  
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