



WHEN THE (HINDU) NATION EXILES ITS QUEERS*

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Current social science debates on postcolonial nationalism have constituted themselves as useful oppositional sites for understanding the place, and the modalities of deployment, of gender in the construction of nations.¹ Some works on the British Empire have extended these analyses to sexuality thematics.² The social science scholarship produced in both contexts, often by positioning itself in previously ignored spaces of social/political/symbolic tension, has challenged gender and sexual relations of power that have informed nationalist knowledges, unraveled theoretical and methodological assumptions on which studies of nationalism rest, and opened areas for pushing critical inquiry further. Yet the study of the postcolonial nationalisms of the so-called Third World continues to be quasi-uniformly based on the presupposition of an unexamined totalizing signifier: universalized heterosexuality.³

This essay is an attempt to open up a space for a discussion of the place of queers, queerdom, and queerphobia in postcolonial nationalism. The focus here is on Hindu nationalism. Briefly stated,

* I would like to thank Geeta Patel, and Kanchana and Lawrence Cohen for generous discussion on or relating to the subject of this article. [Editor's note: this text was originally published in *Social Text* 61 (Winter 1999) 17, 4, pp. 141-166.]

¹ Jayawardena, K., *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, London, Zed, 1986; Chatterjee, P., *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1994; Nandy, A., *The Intimate Enemy*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1983; Spivak, G. "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: Mahasweta Devi's 'Stanadayini,'" in Spivak, G., *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, New York, Routledge, 1987; Van der Veer, P., *Religious Nationalism: Hindu and Muslims in India*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994.

² McClintock, A., *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, New York, Routledge, 1995; Lane, C., *The Ruling Passion: British Colonial Allegory and the Paradox of Homosexual Desire*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 1995.

³ Indeed, this peculiar block in critical circulation has other points of departure and disrupted arrivals, for, as Geeta Patel remarks, "queer theorists have consumed postcolonial theory without much in the way of critical commentary when they have attempted to marry subaltern and queer." See Patel, G., "Home, Homo, Hybrid: Translating Gender," *College Literature* 24 (February, 1997), p 139.



Hindu nationalism is an extremist religious micronationalism of elites, in which elites make strategic political use of elements drawn from one religion to construct an exclusive, homogenized, Other-repressive, “cultural” nationalist ideology and practice to retain and increase elite power. Unlike their territorial nationalist counterparts (from the Congress Party to the Communist Party), Hindu nationalists ultimately propose to eliminate all non-Hindus from the citizen-body: Indian Muslims primarily, but also Indian Christians, Parsis, Buddhists, Jews, and Hindus (including other elites) who do not conform to the Hindu nationalist definition of Hinduism. Historically, Hindu nationalists have proposed multiple means to do this: from physical expulsion of its Others⁴ to their assimilation through “religious” recruitment.⁵

Discussion of forms of Hindu nationalist exclusion has become more urgent since April 1998, when a Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was voted into state power. This act extended Hindu nationalism from the domain of constructing an imagined community⁶ to the domain of ordering, regulating, and representing that “community” through the state’s apparatus and institutions, thereby potentially directly affecting India’s entire population of over 950 million people. The ramifications are much more extensive, certainly, if one considers Hindu nationalism as a variant of broader categories of nationalism, such as Van der Veer’s “religious nationalisms” or Nikki Kheddi’s nationalisms of “new religious politics,”⁷ or if one were to consider the operations of queerphobia in the construction of the overall category *nationalism* itself (see concluding remarks).

Two relevant, inconclusive sets of debates among social scientists and historians alike might concern us here: first, the question as to whether Hindu nationalism can be understood as a form of fascism⁸; and second, for those on the “yes” side of the first debate,

⁴ Golwalkar, M. S., *We, or Our Nation Defined*, Nagpur, Bharat, 1939. Hereafter cited as *ND*.

⁵ Golwalkar, M. S., *Bunch of Thoughts*, Bangalore, Vikrama Prakashan, 1966; Bangalore, Sahitya Sindhu Prakashana, 1980 and 1996. Hereafter cited as *BT*, with date of edition specified.

⁶ Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities*, London, Verso, 1991.

⁷ Van der Veer, P., *op. cit.*; Keddie, N., “Fundamentalist’ New Religious Politics and Women Worldwide: A Comparative Study,” *Journal of Women’s History* 10 (winter 1999), pp. 11-34.

⁸ For an excellent discussion of this subject see Vanaik, A., *Communalism Contested: Religion, Modernity, and Secularization*, New Delhi, Vistaar 1997, pp. 237-95.



whether fascism is an expression of male homosexuality.⁹ The “fascism equals homosexuality” position is reflected in scholarship on Hindu nationalism in a number of ways, one of which is the scholarly reliance on queerphobia to explain Hindu nationalism itself. Perhaps a most pertinent example is *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* by Des Raj Goyal,¹⁰ a book that has been heralded in a collective volume by some of the otherwise most perceptive and politically engaged anti-Hindu-nationalist scholars as “one of the few critical accounts” of India’s most extensive Hindu-nationalist organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).¹¹ Goyal’s analysis of Hindu nationalism as fascism is based on the binary oppositions center/periphery and normative/perverse, and it relies on a metaphoric construction in which the personal stands in for the political and vice versa. For Goyal, the RSS is a political aberration in relation to mainstream politics, born in the perverted mind of its founder, Dr. Hedgevar. As evidence of Hedgevar’s perversion, Goyal cites his preference for celibacy and exclusive association with other unmarried men over a normal (heterosexual) married life. This is curious, for celibacy was highly valued by Hedgevar’s contemporary, Mahatma Gandhi, leader of the Congress, whom Goyal himself positions in the mainstream. If Hedgevar is queer because he is celibate and homosocial, other RSS members are queer because they are homosexual. The particular model of homosexuality that Goyal assigns to RSS members is the

⁹ The notion that fascism is an expression of homosexuality predates Hindu nationalism and is found in the work of some authors of the Frankfurt School. See Adorno, T. W., Frenkel-Brunswick, E., Levinson, D. J., and Nevitt Sanford, R., *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York, Harper, 1950; Adorno, T. W., *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, London, New Left, 1974; Adorno, T. W., “Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda,” in Arato, A., and Gebhardt, E. (eds) *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, New York, Continuum, 1982; Adorno, T. W., *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, New York, Continuum, 1987; Horkheimer, M., “Authority and the Family Today,” in Anshen, N. R. (ed.) *The Family: Its Function and Destiny*, New York, Harper, 1949; Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York, Continuum, 1987; see also Hewitt, A., *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism, and the Modern Imaginary*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996, pp. 38-78.

¹⁰ Goyal, D. R., *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, Delhi, Radha Krishna Prakashan, 1979.

¹¹ While I feel it is important to include this quote, I see no valid reason to reference it. This article’s aim is to engage a constructive debate on queerphobia and queer exile in Hindu nationalism and elsewhere, and not to denounce committed anti-Hindu-nationalist scholars. Though the quoted scholars express approval of Goyal’s analysis, their own analyses do not rely on queerphobia. Naming the authors would serve no constructive purpose, but instead could potentially derail the terms of this necessary wider debate.



hypermasculine/pederastic one.¹² Part of Goyal's supporting data is an anonymous letter accusing *pracharaks* (full-time, supposedly celibate RSS workers) of "unnatural sex crimes of which juvenile swayamsewak (*sic*) have been the victims" and maintaining that the RSS has homosexually "spoiled many teenaged boys."¹³ Here, Goyal's argumentative strategy is based on the presupposition that the anti-Hindu-nationalist reader will also be a homophobic reader; he or she will automatically endorse the perverse-politics/perverse-sexuality (and vice versa) equation. Such an argument can only work via operations of forgetting, about Hindu nationalism and about queers. Some of the forgotten items are: that from its inception the RSS has equated those whom it identifies as gender and sexual deviants with anti-(Hindu)-national Otherness, and has persecuted these queered people when it could; that many Indian queers, like Goyal, actively oppose Hindu nationalism; that Indian queers carry out anti-Hindu nationalist activities, unlike Goyal, in a wider environment where out queers are subject to state legal repression and potential civil violence.¹⁴ In that sense, the anti-Hindu-nationalist queerphobic confinement of queerness in Hindu nationalism can only result in reinforcing a wider queerphobic stance. I regret that for the purposes of this particular essay, I will not be able to enter into a full review of the fascism-as-queers assumptions revived in otherwise critical work on Hindu nationalism. I would, however, like to simply mention that I will be arguing that, if anything, Hindu nationalism is an expression not of queer sexualities or mentalities but rather of queerphobic ones.

¹² The subtext to Goyal's model was posited earlier in the queerphobic antifascist writing mentioned in endnote 9 herein.

¹³ Goyal, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

¹⁴ These operations of forgetting, similarly, were at work in queerphobic, antifascist writing. They entailed the forgetting of the Nazi construction of the internal (German) queer as antinational and the trajectory and destination of that construction in Nazi practice, that is, that Nazis marked hundreds of thousands of queered bodies with pink triangles and marched them into gas chambers. See Lauretsen, J., and Thorstad D., *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)*, New York, Times Change, 1974. For an account of the situation of gays, lesbians, and hijras in India see AIDS Bedbhav Virodhi Andolan, *Less Than Gay*, New Delhi, Offset Printers, 1991.



Arguments, Definitions, Data

In what follows, I will present three interrelated arguments. First, queerphobia is one of the pillars of Hindu nationalism. Second, the constructions of queer genders and sexualities, which appear in Hindu nationalism, are largely effects of Hindu nationalist reworkings of misogynist notions of gender and heterosexist notions of sexual normativity imposed through colonialism. These effects are manifested in a binary in which qualities of virile, militaristic masculinity combined with obligatory asexuality (for Hindu nationalist leaders) and forced heterosexuality (for Hindu nationalized masses) are valorized and placed in opposition to queer gender and sexuality (assigned to all Others). In this scheme, queer gender and sexuality are constructed as already outside the Hindu nation; when queerness reenters, it must be immediately exiled. Finally, my third argument is that the primary Othered queer is the non-Hindu nationalist Hindu but, by extension, Hindu nationalists assign queer gender and sexuality to all the (queer and unqueer) Others of the Hindu nation, especially Indian Muslims.

Integral to my arguments are what I will posit as dual operations of xenophobic queerphobia and queerphobic xenophobia. By *xenophobic queerphobia*, I mean a particular form of queerphobia that justifies itself by constructing the self-identified Indian queer as originating outside the self-same nation. In this logic, Hindu nationalists claim that queerness is “not Indian” and that the British brought homosexuality to India.¹⁵ This claim reverberates with yet another xenophobic queerphobic operation, in which the colonial British designated British homosexuality as the oriental vice, the result of excessive British immersion in India. In turn, *queerphobic xenophobia* will signify a particular type of xenophobia in which queerness is assigned (often metaphorically) to all the designated Others of the nation regardless of their sexual identity. The primary objects of Hindu-nationalist, queerphobic-xenophobic operations have been Muslim men. The self-identified queer Muslim (or other Other) stands at the intersection of xenophobic queerphobia and queerphobic xenophobia.

¹⁵ Andolan, *op. cit.*



Some additional points of precision, again in the form of definitions, are in order, perhaps beginning with terms I elect not to employ (much): *homosexual*, *lesbian*, *gay*. Foucault, Lauretsen and Thorstad, Weeks, Somerville, and others have demonstrated that the identitary term *homosexual*, and by extension *lesbian* and *gay* in current usage, are recent inventions in Western languages, with their genealogy in the nineteenth-century shift from the notion of same-sex sexuality as a genital act requiring repression, to the idea that same-sex acts are a function of specific identities or personality types.¹⁶ Similarly, Thadani, Kanchana, Khan, and Rao-Kavi have all remarked that equivalent identitary terms to *homosexual* are currently absent in Indian languages,¹⁷ though Indian languages include the term *hijra* (transgender and/or transsexual male-to-female [mtfl self-organized into kinship networks with their own religion, symbolic system, and lifestyle]). Recently, a number of activists and academics have attempted to forge, recuperate, or revive terms relevant to specific queer identities, such as *kbush* (happy, gay), *bhagini* (vaginal sister), *sakhi* (woman friend of a woman), *samlingkami* (desirous of the same sex), *dost* (male friend of a male), *jankha* (effeminate gay man, mtf transvestite), *gandhu* (insulting term: one who is done up the ass), *zenana* (effeminate gay man), *chay number* (number six: outrageous flaming gay man).¹⁸ All these terms are still under debate for various reasons. As yet, no term has surfaced or been invented under which could be united the whole range of queer practices, lifestyles, and identities. In light of the present state of research, as a transient measure I adopt the term *queer* (here, dissident-gendered subjects, and the subjects of f + f and m + m same sexuality and *hijras*), for *queer* is currently posited as most inclusive in the language I am writing in, English. The term *queer* (in its various incarnations as subject, adjective, verb, and root), albeit always already inad-

¹⁶ Foucault, M., *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, New York, Vintage, 1980; Lauretsen and Thorstad, *op. cit.*; Weeks, J., *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, New York, Quartet, 1997; Somerville, S., "Scientific Racism and the Invention of the Homosexual Body," in Lancaster, R. N., and Di Leonardo, M. (eds), *The Gender and Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy*, New York, Routledge, 1997.

¹⁷ Thadani, G., *Sakhiyani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India*, London, Cassell, 1996, pp. 77-78; Kanchana, untitled, unpublished paper circulated among lesbians and gays in Delhi (1988); Shivananda Khan in Pratibha Parmar, *Kbush* (film, 1991); and Ashok Rao-Kavi in Geeta Saxena, *An Evening with Bombay Dost* (film, 1990).

¹⁸ Thadani, *op. cit.*; Cohen, L., "The Pleasures of Castration," in Abramson, P., and Pinkerton, S. D. (eds), *Sexual Nature/Sexual Culture*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995.



equate in the South Asian context, seems a tentative possibility for several reasons.¹⁹ *Queer* has a complicated trajectory; it circulates with multidirectionality in gender and sexuality discourse. Though *queer* was first imposed as an insult to gender and sexual dissidents in normalizing discourse, self-identified queer subjects have adopted and reconfigured the term as a useful collective oppositional site (wherein many oppositional positionalities coexist) to those same normalizing discourses. Notwithstanding these rationales, I deem it important to “out” my adoption of *queer* to avoid what Geeta Patel has insightfully called “dichotomized fluency,” wherein the reality of a local discourse is translated/reframed in the terms of a dominant universalized discourse without acknowledgment of the process, resulting in two very different representations, with the dominant effacing the local.²⁰ Indeed, perhaps one way to attempt to circumvent such effacement will be to confront the dominant discourse, be mindful of contextualization, and refractationalize and reunify the term *queer* itself in the text where relevant.

My data are drawn from the internal publications of two Hindu nationalist organizations: the RSS, which was founded in 1925 and now has about 2.5 million members, and an additional two hundred affiliated organizations; and the BJP the RSS’s electoral wing founded in 1980. To a lesser extent I will also draw from the public discourse of the separate but related Hindu Shiv Sena. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, there are gendered differences, and even incompatibilities, between Hindu nationalist men’s and women’s discourses and practices.²¹ Thus, I should clarify that the object of the present essay is exclusively Hindu nationalist men’s discourse (configured by male ideologues for male addressees) and practice (of male actors), and will thereby reflect male subjectivity to the exclusion of women. Further, the RSS, and most specifically its major ideologue M. S. Golwalkar, will provide the bulk of my data. This is because the RSS is the central organ for the production of Hindu nationalist men’s ideology, with its own network of publishing com-

¹⁹ I would like to thank Geeta Patel for generous discussions with me on this subject. Any inadequacies here are my own.

²⁰ Patel, G., “Home, Homo, Hybrid,” cit., pp. 135-39.

²¹ Bacchetta, P., “Hindu Nationalist Women as Ideologists: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Rashtra Sevika Samiti, and Their Respective Projects for a Hindu Nation,” in Jayawardena, K., and de Alwis, M. (eds), *Embodied Violence: Communalizing Women's Sexuality in South Asia*, New Delhi, Kali for Women; London, Sage, 1996.



panies, bookstores for distribution, and mechanisms for enforcing ideological conformity among members and affiliates.²² I also draw from orientalist discourse, British colonial administrative discourse, and British and Indian law.

I begin with a first section on the traffic in forms of queerphobia that later surface in Hindu nationalism, from the sender (Britain) to the receiver (India). In the second section, I will discuss the place and forms of queerphobia in Hindu nationalist discourse; and in the third, the paradoxical reinsertion of queerness in Hindu nationalism, in both the symbolic and material dimensions. In a fourth section, I will posit some questions about the translation of xenophobic queerphobia and queerphobic xenophobia into national policy, before arriving at some concluding remarks.

The Traffic in Queerphobia: From Precolonial to Colonial Times

Indian repression of dissident gender and sexuality certainly predates colonialism, as is evident below. But precolonial repression differs from current forms in extent and in content. Precolonial queer repression occurred in local, limited time/spaces and coexisted with queer acceptance elsewhere within the borders of the space currently delineated as India; today Indian queer repression is temporally eternalized and territorially generalized through inscription in national laws. Where precolonial queer conduct was punished, sanctions did not necessarily include permanent exile; today, queers are discursively exiled as Others and materially exiled through permanent deprivation of citizenship rights.

Briefly stated, current forms of queerphobia have their genealogy in two areas: orientalist discourse²³ and colonial law. A future, more spirited unraveling of both areas, and Indian queer modes of resistance to them, would certainly illuminate this and other analyses. But for the purposes of this essay and in the interests of brevity, here I will only be able to outline a few relevant points.

²² For a detailed discussion on this see Bacchetta, P., *The RSS and the Nation: Gendered Discourse/Gendered Action*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, forthcoming.

²³ Said, E., *Orientalism*, London, Routledge, 1978; see also Sprinkler, M. (ed.), *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1992.



As Gyan Prakash has remarked, orientalism was a completely European enterprise, embedded in colonial relations of power, from its inception.²⁴ Orientalism, which began in 1757, operated to reconstruct “knowledge” of India. While this reconstruction was multifaceted, what concerns us here is the fact that orientalism operated to condemn or marginalize what now are designated as dissident genders and sexualities, as it reconstituted and redefined the Hindu symbolic. To make sense out of the multitude of Hindu sacred texts, oral traditions, and practices, orientalists divided them into two categories that are still operative today in some circles: a “Great Tradition” (comprised of texts of the Brahmin elite, or 3 percent of the Hindu population) and a “Little Tradition” (Hinduism of the masses). Orientalists selectively translated “Great Tradition” works and left “Little Tradition” works by the wayside. As Uma Chakravarty and Ashish Nandy have argued, orientalist selectivity centered texts in which male subjectivities could be understood in conformity with British notions of masculine virility, and where femininity and women could be marginalized;²⁵ they thereby put in place forms of misogyny that would underlie postcolonial queerphobia. Some examples are the epics *Mahabharata* (eighth to fifth century B.C.) and *Ramayana* (second century B.C.), where wars provide a backdrop for interpretations of virile masculinity.

However, the same “Great Tradition” texts that circumscribe “proper” gender also marginalize, condemn, or propose punishment for queerdness. This, for instance, is the case of the two epics, and some of the *dharmashastras* (law books) such as the *Manusmriti* (second century A.D.). Orientalists ignored the vast array of sources that celebrate queerdness and that would otherwise be arrangeable in both their “Great Tradition” and “Little Tradition.” Some examples are: the *Kamasutra* (fourth to fifth century A.D.), which includes a chapter entitled “Auparishtaka” (Oral Congress) valorizing same-sex relations; f + f same-sex folktales from Himachal Pradesh;²⁶ practices such as *maitri karar*, meaning friendship

²⁴ Prakash, G., “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Indian Historiography is Good to Think,” in Dirks, N. B. (ed.), *Colonialism and Culture*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1995, p. 355.

²⁵ Chakravarty, U., “Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?” in Sangari, K., and Vaid, S. (eds), *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1989; Nandy, *op. cit.*

²⁶ Thadani, *op. cit.*



agreement, a form of marriage between women;²⁷ and the exquisite same-sex iconography in the Tara-Taratini temple of Orissa.

Orientalist selectivity preceded, yet coincided with, administrative efforts to maintain colonial rule, for they were based in a common grid. As Nandy has amply demonstrated, to sustain their rule the British had to discredit Brahmins (who held symbolic power), co-opt *rajās* of princely states (who held material power), and form a class of Indian collaborators for the army and civil service.²⁸ To this effect, the British constructed Brahmin men as effeminate²⁹ and created a category of Indian “martial races” as the ideal of Hindu masculinity based on *kshatriya* (warrior and princely caste) manhood.³⁰ To justify colonialism to their own countrymen in England, the British framed their colonial presence in terms of a civilizing mission, a notion that rested in part on the construction of Indian men as sexually promiscuous. The construction was part of a wider colonial grid in which the colonizers conceptualized the colonies as what Anne McClintock has called the “porno-tropics,” or “a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears.”³¹

Colonial administrative policy toward queer sexuality was an exemplary Foucauldian operation involving surveillance, deterrence, repression, and punishment of men’s queerness, albeit in a reworked order.³² Women, considered passionless and sexually passive in the dominant Victorian grid and thus without sexual subjectivity, were not encompassed in these operations. The first targets of what we might call queer cleansing were the British themselves, beginning with the Imperial Army. For instance, as Kenneth Ballhatchet notes, British administrators officially organized a prostitution apparatus, with Indian women as prostitutes, specifically to prevent same-sex acts between British soldiers.³³ It seems the administrators preferred that their men engage in interracial extramarital hetero sex instead of intraracial homo sex. When the prostitu-

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Nandy, *op. cit.*

²⁹ Sinha, M., *Colonial Masculinity*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1997.

³⁰ Nandy, *op. cit.*

³¹ McClintock, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

³² Foucault, *op. cit.*, vol. 1.

³³ Ballhatchet, K., *Race, Sex, and Class under the Raj*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980, note 10, p. 162.



tion solution proved ineffective to deter their peers' queer practices, British administrators passed the Army Act of 1850, which punished British m + m same sex with imprisonment of up to seven years.

It was not until 1861, with the imposition of the British legal system in India, renamed Indian Penal Code (IPC), that sodomy, and thus same-sex acts (again, among men), were outlawed among Indians across the whole of British-held subcontinental territory, via IPC article 377. This act marks the supplanting of local time/spaces of queer acceptance, as evidenced in texts and practices mentioned above, with generalized male homosexual repression. After IPC 377 was in effect, British repression of Indian queerness was extended to the organized surveillance of upper-class Indian men with whom the British were in frequent contact. As Ballhatchet remarks, Lord Curzon, viceroy from 1899 to 1905, "had grimly drawn up a list of princes with homosexual tastes," and attempted to dissuade them.³⁴

With that brief introductory background in mind, let us explore the resurfacing of colonial queerphobia in Hindu nationalist discourse and practice.

Hindu Nationalism and Queer Exile

The Hindu nationalist citizen-body, and the individual Hindu man, are two major sites of queer panic and queer exile in Hindu nationalist men's discourse.

The Hindu Nationalist Citizen-Body: A Collectivity of Men

The RSS describes the Hindu people rather consistently in masculine terms: "the men born in the land of Bharat" (BT 1980, p. 107) and "sons of the soil" (BT 1980, p. 208). Where RSS ideologues insert neutral terms, they too signify the masculine.³⁵ Thus, the citizen-body is a male hom(m)osocial entity, in the sense of

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

³⁵ Irigaray, L., *Sexes et genres à travers les langues*, Paris, Grasset, 1990, p. 12; Spender, D., *Man Made Language*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 145.



Luce Irigaray, to the exclusion of women.³⁶ It is, in the sense of McClintock's gendered interpretation of Anderson's formulation, "a fraternity of men" characterized by "deep horizontal comradeship."³⁷ In the words of M. S. Golwalkar, major RSS ideologue but also the RSS's *sarsangbhalak* (supreme leader) from 1940 to 1973 (BT 1980, p. 291):

Let us approach every son of this soil with the message of one united nationhood and forge them all into a mighty, organized whole bound with ties of mutual love and discipline. Such an alert, organized and invincibly powerful national life alone can hope to stand with its head erect in the present turmoils of the war-torn world.

Read at the connotative level, the united Hindu nationalist men are a metaphor for the Hindu nationalist phallus: mighty, alert, invincibly powerful, and, of course, erect. The ideal bond of "love" rests on Hindu male repression of hom(m)osexuality. But, as Christopher Lane argues in another context, drawing on Derrida's notion of friendship as *philia* (and its oppositional relation to *homonomia*) and distinguishing *philia* from *eros*, heterosexuality is also a threat because it risks disrupting male to male hom(m)osocial intimacy.³⁸ Thus, the operative sexuality binary here is not so much hetero versus homo; rather, it is asexuality versus both heterosexuality and homosexuality. In this logic, the most committed of Hindu nationalist men must avoid all sexual contact in order to remain faithful to the collectivity of Hindu men. Accordingly, the self-proclaimed celibate *sarsangbhalak*, *pracharak*s, and *swayamsevak*s (RSS members), who have permanently renounced *garbhashtya* (the life of the married household), are the most ideal of all Hindu men. The BJP's highest-level leaders are also self-proclaimed celibates.

According to the RSS, the Hindu people were in a glorious state in the period of *satyuga*, the ideal past and future. The current period, *kaliyuga*, is one of degradation and corruption. To construct this particular notion of time, the RSS draws the *yugas* from the Brahminical symbolic, where they consist in four cycles. The RSS, in a binary operation, collapses the *yugas* into two, mirroring a Christian notion of heaven and hell. For the RSS, the transition from *satyuga* to *kaliyuga* began when the leaders of princely states began to think along individual lines and engaged in wars with each other. Then came Islamic invaders, who were able to take advantage of the situation and take control of India. They were followed by the British,

³⁶ Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Paris, Minuit, 1977, pp. 167-68.

³⁷ McClintock, *op. cit.*; Anderson, *op. cit.*

³⁸ Lane, *op. cit.*, p. 21; Jacques Derrida, "The Politics of Friendship," *Journal of Philosophy* 85 (November 1988), pp. 632-48.



who sealed India's sad fate by colonizing the Hindu people's minds (ND, pp. 9-15). The solution to all of India's problems, according to the RSS, is to revive *satyuga*, the golden age of Hinduism, through each Hindu man's effort at self-transformation to reach the ideal. To this effect, the RSS provides paramilitary training and ideological indoctrination for members in RSS *shakhas* (neighborhood cells).

Units of the Citizen-Body: Individual Hindu Man

The central unit of the Hindu people is the ideal Hindu man in *satyuga*. The RSS describes him as a virile, chivalrous warrior along *kshatriya* lines (BT 1980, p. 588); celibate along Brahminical *sannyasin* (wanderer detached from material world) lines, and "respectful of women" (ibid., p. 449). This model actually disrupts heterosexual normativity because it posits asexual virility as ideal but reinserts heterosexual normativity at the level of gendered identity, insofar as virility itself rests on a hetero gender-sex-sexuality continuum. Several operations underlie this construction: (1) RSS resistance to colonial constructions of the Brahmin as effete through positing Hindu male virility, which coincides with (2) the RSS reproduction of the colonial *kshatriyahood* model; and finally (3) RSS resistance to the colonial notion of Indian hypersexuality through its opposite, asexuality, which intersects with (4) RSS selectivity of the *sannyasin* model of asexuality in the Hindu symbolic.

The RSS assigns the unacceptable Hindu male in *kaliyuga* the negative characteristics it splits off and rejects from the RSS ideal Hindu male. Thus, the unacceptable Hindu man is antinational, sexually promiscuous, materialistic, Westernized (ibid.), and worse: he embodies physical and mental characteristics readable as feminine in modern bilingual elite discourse informed by Western notions of gender and sexuality. The virility versus effeminacy binary is central here.

For the RSS, all Hindu men could be ideal if they would peel away the layers of *maya* (illusion) that blind them to their essential Hindu nationalist selves. This processual concept of achieving the ideal identity resides at the intersection of Brahminical Hindu discourse on spiritual realization as a process of unknowing the mater-



ial world. It also represents a reversal of the linear movement proposed in Western supremacist discourses, from Enlightenment to developmental narratives of Third World “progress”;³⁹ for the RSS, the ideal is to be achieved through a linear movement back to a point in time prior to colonialism.

M. S. Golwalkar presents this processual transformation toward the ideal in his major text, *Bunch of Thoughts*, through the use of analogy under the subheading, “How ‘Woman’ Became a Soldier!” (*BT* 1996, p. 372):

Sometimes people have no idea as to what a decisive influence the garment would have on the mind. There is an interesting incident in the days of the First World War. The English, who were ruling here, promulgated an emergency order recalling all the old and retired soldiers to join the army at once. There was a soldier who had no desire to go back to the army. He remained in his village. The police came with a search warrant to take him away. When the soldier came to know of this he put on a woman’s clothes and hid himself in the house. When the police came, his wife told them that he was not in the house and that she and her sister alone were in the house. But the police suspected deception. They called out that “sister,” found out the truth and took him away. The soldier was sent to his old platoon. He was then given the army dress and made to join the ranks. When he stood there with the soldier’s dress on, he was asked whether he would like to return home. He replied with a new resolve in his voice that he was now a soldier, that there was no question of his going to the house; he would now only go to a battlefield. Indeed the dress had made all the difference!

In this passage Golwalkar presents the figure in the following linear progression: soldier to husband, to a man in feminine drag, and back to soldierhood again thanks to proper dress. The gender and sex trajectory is made to be dependent on clothing. The achievement of the ideal via shedding feminine clothing parallels the notion of peeling away *maya* for self-realization; but, in addition, masculinity requires an inverted movement of reclothing (as the before and after soldier) through self-effort. Thus both femininity and masculinity are associable with *maya*. The RSS puts the principle of gender as costume and performance into practice with the uniform that is obligatory for *swayamsevaks* and for *shakha* training. Also in the passage, Golwalkar associates *garbasthya* with the failure of masculinity: the truly masculine Hindu man leaves his wife and home to

³⁹ Shanin, T., “The Idea of Progress,” in Rahnama, M., and Bawtree, V., (eds), *The Post-development Reader*, London, Zed, 1997, pp. 65-72; Escobar, A., “The Making and Unmaking of the Third World through Development,” in Rahnama and Bawtree, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-87.



become (again) a soldier. Here a certain dichotomy is reproduced: on the one hand, there is ideal asexuality (soldier); on the other, an unacceptable hetero and queer combine (here, a man's relation to his wife requires being in drag).

Today, RSS notions of ideal male virility and processual transformation are translated into practice in the BJP policies for youth. The BJP espouses "promotion of a robust sports and physical culture."⁴⁰ This includes making "physical education and sports coaching compulsory up to the +2 stage," holding sectorial sports meets annually (annual Rural Sports Meets, Tribal Sports Meets in each village, *taluka*, district, and state), allocating state funds for Olympic Games preparation, and requiring one year of rigorous "national" service from all Indian youth (*EM*, p. 41).

The Other as Queer/The Queer as Other

The ideal Hindu-nationalist citizen-body rests on the exclusion of Others who embody, albeit differentially, improper gendering, sexuality, and nationalization.

Muslim Men

In an operation based on autoreferentiality, in the sense of Pierre-André Taguieff,⁴¹ the RSS projects the gender of the overall collectivity of Muslims as masculine, parallel to the Hindu-nationalist hom(m)osocial citizen-body. The RSS divides Muslim men into three categories:⁴² (1) Muslim-as-Foreign-Invader, which designates upper-class and political leadership; (2) Muslim-as-ex-Hindu-Convert, as lower-caste; and (3) the Hindu-Muslim, a new invention, designating the hypothetical assimilable Muslim whose conduct would be consistent with Hindu nationalism's nationalist, gender, and sexual normativity. Underlying the first two categories are three common characteristics: hypermasculinity, hypersexuality, and anti-(Hindu) nationalism. The RSS maintains that Muslim men engage in "riots, rapes, looting, raping and all sorts of orgies" as they seek to undermine the Hindu nation (*BT* 1980, pp. 234-35).

⁴⁰ Bharatiya Janata Party, *Election Manifesto 1998*, 41. Hereafter cited as *EM*.

⁴¹ Taguieff, P. A., *La Force du préjugé*, Paris, Decouverte, 1987.

⁴² Bacchetta, P., "Hindu Nationalist Women as Ideologists" cit. See also Bacchetta, "Communal Property/Sexual Property: On Representations of Muslim Women in a Hindu Nationalist Discourse," in Zoya Hasan (ed.), *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and Nations*, New Delhi, Kali for Women; Boulder, Westview, 1994, pp. 188-225.



The notion of Muslim men as hypermasculine and hypersexual resides at the intersection of two sources: orientalist discourse on Muslims and British discourse on Hindu men as promiscuous. Hindu nationalists shift Hindu promiscuity onto Muslim men and connect it to sexual aggression. The RSS draws its notion of Muslim antinationalism from the nineteenth-century British idea that Hindu and Muslim “communities” are incompatible, which, as historians Bipan Chandra, Gyanendra Pandey, and others have amply demonstrated, served Britain’s official divide-and-rule policy.⁴³

Further, the RSS states about Muslims: “Times without number we had to gulp down insult and humiliation at their hands” (*BT* 1980, p. 413). Here, the RSS portrays active-hypermasculine Muslim men rendering Hindu men passive-effeminate in a not-so-disguised homosexualized relation. In an elaboration of the relational thematic, Golwalkar puts forth under the subtitle “Appeasement Whets Appetite” (*ibid.*, p. 147) that

the more our leaders tried to appease the Muslims, the more their separatist and aggressive appetite was whetted. The British too, set about to sharpen their separatist teeth and claws in a bid to set them against nationalist forces. The Muslims were placed in a position in which they were wanted by both the British and the nationalists and their price was rising higher and higher.

In this passage, the RSS describes Muslims as hypermasculine (“aggressive”) to the point of animality (with sharp “teeth and claws”) and as subjects of both British and Congress Party men’s attraction. Yet the terms of the homoerotic relationship are displaced; in this new threesome, Muslim men are positioned as male prostitutes whose price rises higher and higher as the British and Congress men bid for their favor. Here, RSS men are positioned as voyeurs.

⁴³ Chandra, B., *Communalism in Modern India*, Delhi, Vani, 1984; Pandey, G., *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992.



Western Men

Hindu nationalists similarly construct the nations and citizen-bodies of the West in hypermasculine and hypersexual terms (*ibid.*, pp. 14-15):

The insatiable hunger for physical enjoyment does not allow one to stop within one's own national boundaries. On the strength of its state power, the stronger nation tries to subdue and exploit the other in order to swell its own coffers. ... Moral bonds are all snapped.

This passage carries a binary inversion of the colonizer's version of the "porno-tropics." Here, the RSS assigns a "porno-West" unleashed sexuality that threatens to feminize and engulf the Hindu nation in a scenario that reads like rape.

Today, this notion of the porno-West continues to serve Hindu nationalists as a backdrop for constructing a chaste, orderly, heterosexual, virile Hindu nation. A clear example is in the Hindu-nationalist response to Deepa Mehta's film *Fire*, in which two sisters-in-law in a joint family develop a lesbian relationship. In December 1998, after *Fire* was released in India, Hindu Shiv Sena activists protested by trashing the cinemas in which it was shown. The RSS declared that

the Shiv Sena chief Bal Thakeray may be accused of using force and "lumpen methodology" to suppress the voices that do not suit his cultural worldview. But the attack on the indigenous value-system by the ultrawesternised elite, who regard the nation as not more than a piece of land with a bundle of cultural and political rights, is more appalling than the action of the Shiv sainiks.⁴⁴

Further, the RSS maintained that this "ultra-westernized elite" had

resort[ed] to explicit lesbianism and other perversities to challenge the traditional setup. That way one day all the pornographic flings of Mona (*sic*) Lewinsky-Clinton duo may become the role model, if the aim is to disintegrate the family à la western society. The method may not appeal to the female fraternity in general[,] but Deepa Mehtas and Shabana Azmis of the day must have their fling even when western feminist prophets like Germaine Greer, the writer of *The Female Eunuch*, are re-

⁴⁴ Sinha, R., "West's Cultural Laboratory," *Organiser*, 10 January 1999, p. 17.



turning to sober, civilized, domesticated ways, accepting even male superiority as a natural course of things.⁴⁵

In that sense, the RSS constructs the West as simultaneously perverted (Clinton-Lewinsky), and as leading the fight against its own perversion (Greer). In this scenario, the RSS links proper monogamous heterosexual normativity with “male superiority as a natural course of things.”

Congress Men and Their Queer Nation

The RSS constructs its Indian political opponents, especially of the Indian National Congress Party, as internal Others who are queer because they are improperly (Hindu) nationalized. Congress men “woo and appease the anti-Hindu communities thus encouraging them in their aggressive designs” (*BT* 1980, p. 231). If in the passage above the RSS feels that “Muslims were placed in a position where they were wanted” by Congress secular nationalists, here the RSS constructs Congress men as seductive effetes who actually encourage their own rape by Muslim men. In an operation that links queer gender, sexuality, and secular nationalism, the RSS locates Congress effeteness in Congress politics: “The concept of territorial nationalism has verily emasculated our nation and what more can we expect of a body deprived of its vital energy?” (*ibid.*, p. 197). Here, the “body deprived” is the citizen-body as a collective (now potentially missing) phallus.

For the RSS, the Congress’s secular territorial nationalism signifies nation-miscegenation because it promotes queer relations between Muslim and Hindu men. Golwalkar describes territorial nationalism thus (*ibid.*, pp. 197-98):

It is like attempting to create a novel animal by joining the head of a monkey and the legs of a bullock to the main body of the elephant! It can only result in a hideous corpse. ... If at all some activity is seen in that body it is only of the germs and bacteria breeding in that decomposing corpse. And so it is that we see today the germs of corruption, disintegration and dissipation eating into the vitals of our nation for having given up the natural living nationalism in the pursuit of an unnatural, unscientific and lifeless hybrid-concept of territorial nationalism.

In this passage, Hinduism and Islam are racialized into biological categories. For the RSS, the cohabitation of “incompatible” religions in the same nation-space implies metaphoric sex reassignment: the surgical segmentation of the citizen-body into parts; the

⁴⁵ Bhatia, V. P., “Raise Tempers, Lacerate and Raise the Whirlwind: The Philosophy behind Deepa Mehta’s Kinky Film ‘Fire,’” *Organiser*, 27 December 1998, p. 13.



discarding of some body parts; and the imposition of Muslim body parts onto Hindu parts. In this scheme, the surgical knife is reinforced by the Muslims as disease eating into the RSS's "vitals." Thus, territorial nationalism spells the simultaneous end of Hindu masculinity and of the Hindu collective phallus; it spells death itself ("the decomposing corpse"). The RSS calls territorial nationalism an "unnatural ... hybrid nationalism" because its citizens, the products of queer national miscegenation, are intersexed and internationalized. These metaphors are located at the intersection of nineteenth-century constructions of race and the homosexual, wherein, as Siobhan Somerville has remarked, via the term *intermediate sex* homosexuals became the "half-breeds" of sexology.⁴⁶ Here, territorial nationalism forces the Hindu male to become the "intermediate sex" of nationalism.

Hindu Queers

Finally, the metaphoric queerness of all the Hindu nationalists' Others relies on the queerness of Hindu queers, as the ultimate signs of the degraded Hindu nation. In the RSS biography of Dr. Hedgevar, the RSS founder (called Doctorji by RSS members), we find that

Doctorji had bought from an exhibition a couple of fans made of palmleaves and bamboo. ... One of them carried a picture of Chatrapati Shivaji, and on the other was a picture of the famous actor Balgandharva in a female role. ... Doctorji explained, "I intentionally brought these two just to show the contrast between the condition of Maharashtra some 300 years ago, and our present times."⁴⁷

Shivaji Bhonsla (1627-1680), a multisemic historical figure, is for the RSS an exemplary Hindu nationalist man who defeated the ruling mogul Empire and built a "Hindu Empire." The RSS constructs Balgandharva (1888-1967), a celebrated male actor renowned for playing romantic female roles, as a queer signifying the Hindu nation's downfall. Here, Shivaji as a great Hindu nationalist warrior becomes a trope under which are condensed all the desirable attrib-

⁴⁶ Somerville, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-52.

⁴⁷ Seshadri, H. V. (ed.), *Dr. Hedgevar the Epoch-Maker*, Bangalore, Sahitya Sindhu, 1981, pp. 203-4.



utes of the ideal Hindu male in *satyuga*; he is juxtaposed to Balgandharva the queer who, for Hindu nationalists, embodies all the undesirable characteristics of the Hindu male in *kaliyuga*.

In the current period, the queer continues to serve as a trope for all Otherness. Again, a very recent example is in the RSS declarations in the RSS newspaper, *Organiser*, following the release of the film *Fire* mentioned above:

Secularism can not be served, supported and sustained unless the Hindu mindset is maligned and the Hindu tradition traduced. Funnily enough, if secularism means debunking ancient Bharat, lesbianism means upholding ancient Greece. For it was in the ancient Greek city of Lesbos that for the first time the ladies teaching at a school for girls taught homosexuality to their pupils. What does that prove? It proves that modern India wants to become as modern as ancient Greece. And for those who think that this is going backward the answer is simple – West is best, and nothing coming from the best, ancient or modern, can ever go out of fashion for us. In other words, ancient Hindus are bad for secularism, but not so ancient Greeks. Finally Thakeray asks, “Has lesbianism spread like an epidemic that it should be portrayed as a guideline!” That, Sir, is exactly the point. So far, alas, it is only an occasional aberration, but if secularism is to spread like a plague, lesbianism must spread like an epidemic, no? So, how about a visit to Lesbos, Shabanaji? It could add some fancy fuel to the Fire burning in your secular heart.⁴⁸

Here, the RSS links queerness to secularism, to the West, to Islam, and to Congress. (To understand this it must be noted that Shahbana Azmi, who played one of the lesbian sisters-in-law in *Fire*, is simultaneously a renowned actress, a Muslim, and a Congress Party Member of Parliament.) Further on in the same article is a longer rant linking queers to secularism, to Congress, to the Left, to those who protested India’s May 1998 nuclear tests, and the list goes on.

⁴⁸ Unsigned, “Shabana’s Swear, Rabri’s Roar, Teresa’s Terror? The Three Which Sustain Secularism” *Organiser*, 10 January 1999, p. 8.



Symbolic and Material Queer Reinscription in Hindu Nationalism

Paradoxically, at certain points, Hindu nationalists reinsert into their own discourse forms of what they themselves identify elsewhere as dissident gender and sexuality. Gender and sexuality are objects of continual negotiation because of their centrality to, and variation within, the differential discourses on which Hindu nationalist ideologues draw. Here, I will point to two sites of RSS queer reinscription: in RSS discourse on the most ideal Hindu nationalist men; and in the practice of violence toward Muslim women and men.

Symbolic Reinscription: Hindu Nationalist Leaders, Queer Gender, and Asexuality

Hindu nationalists reinscribe queer gender to only the topmost Hindu nationalist leaders, on condition that they supersede their status as individuals to become wider symbols of the Hindu nation. This location in the symbolic is important, for it is here that Hindu nationalist ideologues can circumvent colonial secular narratives to draw most heavily on Hinduism itself, wherein bigenderism is often a sign of saintliness. But this RSS operation requires that the subject be endowed with extraordinary, unquestionable power, and that he be indisputably asexualized, through the body's death or through the supposed asexual state associated with old age.

We could begin with Dr. Hedgevar, the deceased RSS founder. M. S. Golwalkar describes Dr. Hedgevar as “the Hindu ideal of man in flesh and blood” (BT 1996, p. 477). Yet unlike the ideal, hypermasculine, Hindu nationalist male who traverses all the RSS literature, in Golwalkar's post-mortem portrait Dr. Hedgevar is “irresistible” (p. 471), “childlike” (p. 476), and full of “sweet words which appeal to the heart” (p. 469), such that “the more one came near him the more one would love and adore him” (p. 469). Golwalkar comments further:

What an ocean of love he was to us! Words fail to describe the depth of that pure and selfless love. The boundless affection of the mother's heart, the sleepless care and diligence of the father and the inspiring



guidance of the guru found their culmination in that single bosom. I for one feel it my proud privilege to worship him as my ideal. The worship of such a soul transcends the worship of an individual and becomes the worship of the ideal itself. He is verily my chosen deity. (p. 473)

In this passage, the bigendered Hedgevar (“mother’s love” and father’s “diligence”) is guru, and finally a divinity (“my chosen deity”). Paradoxically, this ideal reverberates with representations of other bigendered figures the RSS despises: Mahatma Gandhi, whom Hindu nationalists murdered, is a case in point.

Similarly, the current public image Hindu nationalists have constructed for India’s prime minister from the BJP, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, might be read as bigendered. A central example is the 1998 biography by BJP member Chandrika Prasad Sharma, entitled *Poet Politician: Atal Bihari Vajpayee*.⁴⁹ Sharma presents Vajpayee’s defiance of characteristics Hindu nationalists otherwise construct as properly Hindu male: Vajpayee is sensitive. He learned as a child that he had “the right to cry,” and that lesson was “permanently etched on his mind” (*PP*, p. 25). He loves children and “becomes a child amongst them” (*ibid.*, p. 49). Like all other Hindu nationalist top-most leaders, Vajpayee decided not to marry but rather to dedicate himself to the nation. He is the first Indian prime minister to be a bachelor, and rumors circulate about whether or not he is gay.

In the title of Sharma’s book, the term *poet* (associated in colonial discourse with dreamy femininity in contrast to valorized male rationality, and in many upper-caste Hindu discourses with the valorized Brahmin) functions to modify the term *politician* (associated with British rule in colonial discourse and with the *kshatriya* in Hindu nationalist discourse). While the book is primarily about Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s political exploits, Sharma positions a poem at the beginning of every chapter, and weaves the Vajpayee-the-poet thematic throughout.

In a predestination narrative typical of Hindu nationalist hagiography of leaders,⁵⁰ Sharma states that when Vajpayee was still a young man “his contemporary poets agreed that Atal was a talented poet with high potential” (*PP*, p. 63). Sharma declares that Vajpayee’s poetry has always been Hindu nationalist, and quotes him thus: “My first poem was on Tajmahal. But there was less about the

⁴⁹ Sharma, C. P., *Poet Politician: Atal Bihari Vajpayee*, Delhi, Vikas, 1998. Hereafter cited as *PP*.

⁵⁰ Bacchetta, *The RSS and the Nation* cit.



beauty of the Taj and more on how it was constructed and how much was spent on building it” (*ibid.*, p. 59). Sharma relates that this particular poem was lost. Yet the presentation of its hypothetical existence correlates with the Hindu nationalist representation of the Taj as simply a symbol of Muslim rule, Muslim “financial exploitation” of Hindus, and the “enslavement” of 20,000 Hindu workmen for the twenty-year duration of its construction.

Sharma uses the correlation of Vajpayee’s political and poetic life as a mode of deploying Vajpayee as a *rishi* (seer, sage) endowed with divine inspiration. Vajpayee thus constructed is able to legitimately predict the inevitable renaissance of the Hindu nation. And here, we find an analogy with other extremist right-wing representations of their own “visionaries”: images of Hitler as a sensitive artist who wished to make the world vegetarian;⁵¹ Mussolini as “artist” molding the people;⁵² or Maurras the renowned creative writer. Poetry authorship has contributed a great deal to Vajpayee’s popularity. Recently, the publicity around one of his poems deploring the human destruction caused by the atom bomb helped to circumvent critique for his May 1998 unprovoked militaristic testing of nuclear bombs (discussed below). The BJP presented the nuclear tests as an Indian scientific victory unconnected to the possibility of human destruction.

In these representations of Dr. Hedgevar and Vajpayee, qualities that could be read as queer in a colonial grid are instead read through the Hindu symbolic as saintly. Otherwise queered gender is acceptable when it can be read in a powerful subject, thus unconnected to weakness, who is also an asexual subject, thus unconnected to queer sexuality. In contrast, Balgandharva’s femininity is unacceptable to Hindu nationalists because it is linked to queer sexuality through love scenes he enacts on stage.

⁵¹ Nolte, E., *Three Faces of Fascism*, New York, Mentor, 1965, p. 370.

⁵² Falasca-Zamponi, S., *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997, pp. 15-17.



Material Reinscription: Hetero Gender and Queer Sexuality

Hindu nationalists reinscribe queer sexuality in their own conduct in violent anti-Other events.⁵³ Queerphobic xenophobia supplies the motivating energy for their behavior.

The riot, as a liminal space of panic that stretches the present seemingly onward forever,⁵⁴ is an exemplary locus for this acting-out operation. In riots, Hindu nationalists have forcibly re-ordered Muslim gender, sex, and sexuality under the surgical knife as weapon. Hindu-nationalist-inspired men have cut off Muslim women's breasts, and then gang-raped them.⁵⁵ By laying the Hindu nationalist mark onto a Muslim woman's flesh, they physically and metaphorically transform her into a eunuch. They then use the eunuch as a conduit for their own male sexual bonding through gang rape. Hindu nationalist men have castrated Muslim men in riots. This dismemberment is the cathartic reversal of the phantasmic Muslim-as-hypermasculine-hypersexual. Dismemberment frees up the now sexless Muslim ex-male body for a deferred religious reassignment and gender and sexual reordering that cannot take place. These crimes mark the *passage à l'acte* in queerphobic xenophobia: in that moment Hindu nationalists move from the metaphorical-discursive queering of Muslims to their material queering. Paradoxically, far from guaranteeing Hindu nationalist males asexual normativity, these crimes queer the perpetrators as makers and rapists of eunuchs.

Hindu Nationalist Policy: Heterosexual Normativity and Queer Repression

While asexuality is the supposed ideal for ideal Hindu nationalist men, Hindu nationalists reinscribe forced heterosexual normativity for the rest of Hindu nationalized society. The BJP inherited state-

⁵³ I analyze riots and other events from a somewhat different, albeit complementary, point of view in "Communal Property/Sexual Property" cit.

⁵⁴ Patel, G., "Time Talled" (paper presented at Harvard University, November 1998); Blum, A., "Panic and Fear: On the Phenomenology of Desperation," *Sociological Quarterly* 37 (fall 1996), pp. 673-98.

⁵⁵ Menon, R., and Bhasin, K., "Borders and Boundaries," in Menon, R., and Bhasin, K., *Borders and Boundaries. Women in India's Partition*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1998.



sponsored xenophobic queerphobia, but it has already proposed more extremist queer repression.

The formerly ruling Congress allowed queer repression introduced by the British to stand and even prolonged it. For example, despite gay activist attempts to remove IPC 377 since 1991, it still stands. Postindependence legislation passed in the 1950s, modeled on British law, continues to outlaw homo sex in the army, navy, and air force. Homosexual domestic partnership, and hijra kinship, has not been legally recognized. Thus, queers and hijras have had no rights to inheritance, adoption, custody, hospital visits, or to the bodies of their deceased partners or kin. It has been perfectly legal for employers to refuse to hire, or once hired to fire, someone simply because he or she is queer. Doctors have been able to refuse to treat queers with impunity. And the list of queer deprivation of basic citizenship rights goes on. In that sense, queers have been outside the Indian nation since prior to its inception, and the situation has not changed. Was Independence for heterosexuals and asexuals only?

The BJP entry into power marks a shift in two areas: the further xenophobic queerphobic extension of queer repression into additional socio-political-symbolic domains, and the queerphobic xenophobic extension of queerness to all non-Hindus and all Hindus who do not conform to Hindu nationalist notions of Hinduism.

In a clearly xenophobic queerphobic move designed to further exile queers, the BJP's current family policy sets up the hetero (joint and nuclear) family as "the main guarantor of India's civilizational continuity. Hence the importance of protection and nurturing of family values" (*EM*, p. 42). This hetero family narrative was translated into practice in December 1998, when related Shiv Sena activists violently protested the film *Fire*, mentioned above. Queerphobia is also reflected in current BJP media policy in general. In the BJP's own words, it is based on the "consensus of the majority" on a "normative moral code" (*ibid.*, p. 47). This code reflects the "promotion of family values and extended family relationships to preserve its character as a basic socio-economic and socio-cultural unit" (*ibid.*). The BJP sees "entertainment as an embodiment of the traditional Indian view of 'Navarasa' so that it does not degenerate into a source of amoral living" (*ibid.*). In light of RSS and BJP queerphobia examined above, and the BJP media policy in general,



it is not unreasonable to posit that J. B. Goyal, Shiv Sena local president in Delhi, following the recent anti-*Fire* violence, summed up a general Hindu nationalist position on queers when he stated that *Fire* is “a direct attack on what Hindu culture stands for.”⁵⁶ Indeed, for Hindu nationalists, “what Hindu culture stands for” is asexuality or forced heterosexuality, both of which are based in Hindu nationalist queerphobia.

Queerphobic xenophobic extension is further exemplified in the educational policy the BJP introduced in October 1998 to the State Education Ministers Conference in New Delhi. It stipulates (1) obligatory instruction in Hindu sacred texts and Sanskrit; (2) changes in the constitutional rights of minorities to run their own educational institutions; and (3) obligatory home management courses for girls. This policy, which links forced Hindu nationalization with rigid gender boundaries, had to be forcibly withdrawn following massive protests against (not the repression of queered gender, but) Hinduization. Yet the proposal has a history in queerphobic xenophobia. In 1982, reacting against India’s National Council for Education Research and Training guidelines banning references to non-Hindu Indians as “foreigners,” the RSS passed a resolution to rewrite (Hindu) “national history.”⁵⁷ In the RSS’s first such history book, *Kings and Kingdoms* by Sriram Sathe, “Hindu Kings” valiantly struggle to ward off hypermasculine, hypersexual Muslims-as-foreign-invaders who risk placing Hindu men in a feminine position.⁵⁸

Finally, Hindu nationalist queerphobic xenophobia and xenophobic queerphobia are reflected in the BJP government’s nuclear tests of May 1998. Only twenty-two days after assuming office in April 1998, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the first unmarried man to assume that office, formally approved the tests and sent about one hundred scientists and engineers to Pokhran, Rajasthan, where, on 11 May, India exploded six bombs. The nuclear tests exemplify the type of cooperation and solidarity that exists among all Hindu nationalist organizations, and demonstrate the strong ideological role the RSS plays in relation to the BJP. Indeed, in 1966, fourteen years prior to the founding of the BJP, RSS leader M. S. Gol-

⁵⁶ BBC interview, 4 December 1998.

⁵⁷ Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (of RSS), “Resolution 88: Rewriting National History,” (internal document, March 1982).

⁵⁸ Sathe, S., *Kings and Kingdoms*, Madras, Bharatiya Itihasa Sankalana, 1989.



walkar had written that “the government should appeal to all the industrialists, scientists and technicians and with their cooperation manufacture, at the earliest, weapons superior to those available to the enemies” (*BT* 1966, p. 313). These exact words are repeated in later editions of the same text, in 1980 (p. 428-29) and 1996 (p. 327). More recently, the 1998 BJP election manifesto had proclaimed openly that, if elected, the BJP would carry out the tests. The BJP’s coordinating efforts with the RSS were evidenced by the early release of the RSS newspaper, *Organiser* (issue destined for 17 May 1998), as a Pokhran anniversary special to coincide with the tests. Significantly, one of the articles in that issue was entitled “Time to Tame Pakistan,” a reference to the supposed wildness of the Muslim male phallus unleashed in Partition, bashed up in the Babri Masjid affair, and now challenged in the competition for what Madhu Kishwar has called “wargasms.”⁵⁹ Further, xenophobic elements are apparent in the BJP presentation of the authors of the tests themselves. Of the four men cited as major players in the development and testing of the bombs, three are Hindu, and one is Muslim, but the Muslim was given a Hindu code name for the purpose of the operation. Thus, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, chief of Defense, Research, and Development Organization (DRDO), was renamed General Prithiviraj to enable him to pass incognito to and from the test site. Prithiviraj, a twelfth-century Hindu hero, is most renowned as the last king of Delhi. He conquered Delhi from Muslim rulers and constructed the fort of Indraprastha in 1180, but was defeated by Muhammad Ghûrî in 1192. The irony of the Muslim Kalam in Hindu drag, and in particular portraying a Hindu who eventually gets defeated by a Muslim “invader,” is tremendous. But we must remember that for Hindu nationalists Muslims are always antinational, and Kamal could only be incorporated into the nation as a Muslim in Hindu drag. And that Hindu drag had to be characterized by virile Hindu masculinity capable of defeating the so-called Muslim phallic threat to Hindu masculinity. Indeed, Bal Thackeray perhaps summed up Hindu nationalist xenophobic queerphobic and queerphobic xenophobic logic, and exposed its roots in colonial constructions of proper masculinity, when he declared to the Indian press: “With these explosions we have shown

⁵⁹ Kishwar, M., “BJP’s Wargasm,” *Manushi*, May-June 1998.



the world that we are not eunuchs.” (The only “we” that Thackeray recognizes is composed of Hindus.)

Some Concluding Remarks to Open a Debate

In India, progressive peoples of many political persuasions, faiths, genders, and sexualities have consistently and skillfully resisted every Hindu nationalist anti-Muslim action through time. Moreover, the same people do daily anti-Hindu-nationalist work across the country: building bridges, solidarity, and modalities of inclusion. There has also been considerable protest against the Hindu nationalist actions against the film *Fire*, which indicates that queer and unqueered resisters are uniting to defend the rights of self-identified Indian queers as a dimension of the larger struggle against Other repression and exclusion (Hindu nationalist or otherwise).

Within and beyond India, queerphobia is certainly operative in citizen-body notions of a range of nationalisms. Hopefully, further research on queerphobia and nationalisms will identify queerphobia’s extent, and the forms it takes across the rest of the globe, so that modalities of resistance and alternatives can be formulated. For now, I will point to only a few examples: witness, in the old South Africa, the 1966 Forest Town police raid of a queer party in a white suburb of Johannesburg. The white (xenophobic queerphobic) media equated white queers with the decline of white civilization, thus arranging supposed hetero blackness and white queerdom under the same rubric.⁶⁰ The Forest Town raid was followed by new legislation further depriving queers of citizenship rights. Witness also the Winnie Mandela trial, and the now infamous (queerphobic xenophobic) slogan “homosex is not Black sex,” which racialized black queers into an equation with the white colonizers,⁶¹ thus exiling black queers from their communities and producing them as hostile Others. Indeed, in an exemplary act of political justice, in opposition to all forms of othering and oppression, the new

⁶⁰ Gevisser, M. and Cameron, E. (eds.), *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*, London, Routledge, 1995.

⁶¹ Holmes, R., “Winnie Mandela and the Maffies,” *Social Text*, 52 and 53 (fall-winter 1997), pp. 161-80.



postapartheid South Africa became the first country in the world to include provisions for queer citizenship rights in its constitution.

Witness also the (xenophobic queerphobic and queerphobic xenophobic) series – homosexuality/ decadence/disease/contagion/immigration – reerected in the 1980s by the right-wing Front National (FN) in France.⁶² Recently the FN discourse has been tempered by the left-to-center representation of acceptable queerness contained in proposals for hetero and homo domestic-partnership rights. In France, indeed, queers who can be constructed in conformity to shifting heteronormativity models, and immigrants who can be constructed in conformity (in dress and conduct) to French civilizational models are considered arrangeable, like the RSS Hindu-Muslim I mentioned earlier, as simple variants within a supposedly inclusive normativity-based nation. Yet these conformity-assimilation schemes often involve dividing the passing Othered from the unpassing or unpassable Othered; if the former can be assimilated, it is to further exile the latter.

More borders? Wouldn't a political strategy expansive enough to undo Other-exile in all forms, from multiple fronts, be most effective for all?

⁶² Lesselier, C., "L'Extrême Droite et l'homosexualité," *Cahiers du féminisme*, 54 (1990), pp. 12-16; Kofman, E., "When Society Was Simple: Gender and Ethnic Divisions and the Far and New Right in France," in Charles, N., and Hintjens, H. (eds), *Gender, Ethnicity, and Political Ideologies*, New York, Routledge, 1998.