

**The United States of India**  
**South Asian Translations of America, 1905-1974**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(English Language and Literature)  
in The University of Michigan  
2011

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For Ba and Bhai

# Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to my committee members – Jennifer Wenzel, Alan Wald, Susan Najita, and Christi Merrill – whose sustained engagement with my writing pushed me to understand the conceptual value of the work beyond what I initially envisioned. Many others have seen this project evolve over the years, and I'd especially like to thank Sunil Agnani, Meg Sweeney, Lee Schlesinger, Eleanor Zelliot, Madhav Deshpande, Anil Sapkal, and Gangadhar Pantawane for encouraging and aiding my research before this dissertation took its current shape. I'd also like to thank Tahsin Siddiqi, Keith Taylor, Eric Leigh, Tish O'Dowd, Peter Ho Davies, and Nick Delbanco whose encouragement early in my education is what got me here.

While working on the dissertation, I benefited enormously from the American Institute of Indian Studies Marathi Program and the patient instruction of Shantanu Kher, Sujata Mahajan, and Meenal Kulkarni. My peers at the Sweetland Dissertation Writing Program and the B.A.G. writing group lent their feedback at critical moments in the writing process. My colleagues at the South Asian American Digital Archive have never failed to remind me of the joys of historical research.

Reflecting on the time it took to get to this stage, I'm overwhelmed thinking about the unfailing support I've received from friends and family here, in India, and in between, all these years. Thank you all.

# Table of Contents

Dedication . . . . .	ii
Acknowledgments . . . . .	iii
List of Figures . . . . .	vi
Abstract . . . . .	vii
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction: “The United States of India” . . . . .</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction . . . . .	1
1.2 Indian Americas . . . . .	5
1.3 Nation, Narration, Comparison . . . . .	13
<b>Chapter 2 Nationalist and Analogist: Lala Lajpat Rai’s <i>United States of America</i>, 1905-1919 . . . . .</b>	<b>24</b>
2.1 Mr. Rai Goes to Washington 1905 . . . . .	24
2.2 Westward Bound 1914 . . . . .	31
2.3 Black, Brown, and White . . . . .	38
2.4 An American Raj? . . . . .	49
2.5 Conclusion . . . . .	59
<b>Chapter 3 Uncle Sham’s Mother: Shifting Racial Frameworks in the <i>Mother India</i> Controversy, 1927-1934 . . . . .</b>	<b>62</b>
3.1 The Indian and the American Grotesque . . . . .	62
3.2 Race Across Empires . . . . .	65
3.3 Race in the Metropole . . . . .	79
3.4 Conclusion . . . . .	94
<b>Chapter 4 Provincializing America: The Historical Critique of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, 1944-1946 . . . . .</b>	<b>96</b>
4.1 The New Old World . . . . .	96
4.2 American Empires . . . . .	102
4.3 American Subalterns . . . . .	107
4.4 Conclusion . . . . .	119

<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Your Obedient Nephew: The Recolonized National Subject in Saadat Hasan</b>	
	Manto's "Letters to Uncle Sam," 1951-1954 . . . . .	121
5.1	"Dear Uncle" . . . . .	121
5.2	Nationalist Subjection . . . . .	125
5.3	Becoming the National Allegory . . . . .	131
5.4	From One Colony to Another . . . . .	135
5.5	Conclusion . . . . .	147
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Caste in Black and White: The Translation of America in Dalit Literary</b>	
	<b>Criticism, 1965-74</b> . . . . .	148
6.1	Introduction . . . . .	148
6.2	Earlier Intersections . . . . .	153
6.3	Recasting Whitman's Democracy . . . . .	157
6.4	Whiteness, Mirrors, Invisibility . . . . .	161
6.5	Conclusion: Reimagining the Black-Dalit Past . . . . .	172
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Afterword: American History Through an Inverted Telescope</b> . . . . .	176
<b>Bibliography</b>	. . . . .	179

# List of Figures

## Figure

1.1	Illustration from <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i> (April 24, 1918) diagramming the deaths of Ram Chandra Bharadwaj, Ghadar Party leader, and his assassin, Ram Singh. . . .	9
2.1	<i>The Apotheosis of Washington</i> . . . . .	25
2.2	“Hindus in Oregon” from Rai’s <i>The United States of America</i> . . . . .	39
2.3	Image from March 26, 1910 issue of <i>Collier’s Weekly</i> . . . . .	40
2.4	Manila School in Lajpat Rai’s <i>The United States of America</i> . . . . .	55
2.5	Filipino laborers in Lajpat Rai’s <i>The United States of America: A Hindu’s Impressions and Study</i> . . . . .	56
2.6	Letter from Lajpat Rai to American publisher B.W. Huebsch, dated June 6, 1919 . . . . .	61
3.1	(a) The Indian (Lahore: Times Publishing Company, 1929) and (b) American (New York: Claude Kendall, 1929) covers of <i>Uncle Sham</i> . . . . .	88
6.1	Still from the film <i>Dr. Babasabeh Ambedkar</i> (2000) . . . . .	172

# Abstract

This dissertation examines an understudied history of the Indian encounter with America. Drawing from an archive of ethnographies, histories, and cultural criticism written by Indian travelers who came to the U.S. in the years preceding wide-scale migration, my research describes how the U.S. was a site for rich analogical thinking and for the examination of questions of race, caste, nationhood, and empire. Indian nationalists in the early 20th century found ways of interpreting America's anti-British revolution as a symbolic model for Swaraj, even as they later perceived in the nation's colonial project in the Pacific something akin to the East India Company. Likewise, the country's history of racial inequality and class struggle would turn up throughout Indian representations of the U.S., as analogues to both the caste and colonial question. These narratives of American nationhood offered a lens through which to see Indian society anew, and today allow us to consider the global meanings of America circulating beyond the national borders of the U.S. in the 20th century.

The study covers three broad periods in the 20th century which witnessed shifts in the cultural and political meaning of the United States in relation to the Indian subcontinent: the emergence of anticolonial Indian nationalism within the United States (1914-1928), the formation of the global Third World subject against the backdrop of World War II and the Cold War (1944-1955), and the explosion of subaltern political movements worldwide, including the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. and the concurrent development of Dalit politics in India (1963-74). Overall, what this study attempts is to consider the way in which the dominant narratives and ideologies of the United States were engaged with the emergent political discourses of 20th century South Asia – namely nationhood, anti-colonialism, and caste reform. This largely forgotten history of



South Asian and U.S. contact, thus offers a critical lens to consider the politics of comparison and translation that were so central to 20th century anti-colonial and postcolonial projects, and to reconsider the terms of South Asian American history itself.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction: “The United States of India”

“India and America are located on opposite sides of the earth; therefore it is natural for America to think that we walk upside down, and for us to think that Americans walk upside down.”

---

Pandita Ramabai  
*The People and Travels of the United States* (1889)

### 1.1 Introduction

Narratives of the Indian encounter with the United States tend to point toward a fairly recent history, starting with two moments in the late 20th century. The first came in 1965, when Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Hart-Celler Act, lifting the decades-long restrictions against immigrants from the regions of Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe. One of the act’s loudest supporters, a young Senator Ted Kennedy, reassured his constituency that the color of America’s cities would not change hue, that the new immigrants would not “upset the ethnic mix of our society,” when in fact, the Act did just that – waves of migrants from the Third World, who, after earlier dispersals into the corners of the old metropolises and their colonies, began to settle in the metropolitan centers of the U.S.<sup>1</sup> Though constituting only a small proportion of the American population, Indians – and South Asians more broadly – were among the most visible members of those migrations. As

1. Bill Ong Hing, *Defining America Through Immigration Policy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 95.

scholars like Vijay Prashad and Sunaina Maira have pointed out, 1965 proved to be a watershed moment in the changing racial demographics of the United States, and South Asians, primarily those hired and handed visas on account of their professional status, were unwittingly pushed to the front lines of the national conversation on race.<sup>2</sup> Ever since, the Indian American story has been swallowed up by larger narratives of the American immigrant. Stories celebrating the success of technical workers and their spelling bee-winning children have filled a convenient script for the “model minority” myth of the U.S., while troublingly glossing over reports that are far more dissonant with narratives of the American dream. Instances of racism and xenophobia against ethnic enclaves, for instance, have been a steady occurrence since the 1980s, while the racial profiling of South Asians, particularly Sikh and Muslims, by state and non-state actors have become rampant after 9/11.<sup>3</sup> In a more academic vein, the Indian American story appears in studies of labor activism among New York City taxi drivers, diasporic fundamentalism funded by wealthy and middle-class Hindus, the entrance of second generation into American politics (the rise of Bobby Jindal or Nikki Haley among the ranks of the G.O.P., for instance).<sup>4</sup> In the world of the arts, the fiction, drama, and poetry of the Indian diaspora has become a consistent, if sometimes contentious, presence, chronicling it all.

The other heavily cited moment of Indian-American encounter begins in 1991, describing a rapidly “Americanizing” India, borne out of neoliberal reforms in India’s economy that opened the country’s markets to American goods, products, franchises, and generally speaking, its cultures of consumerism. These narratives, which contribute to the larger discussion about the effects of globalization, trace primarily the movement of American capital overseas to India. And just as the fiction from the diaspora captured the stories of migrants, this encounter has also registered in

2. See Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Sunaina Maira, *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

3. In 2010, the non-profit organization South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) published an important report titled “From Macacas to Turban Toppers: The Rise in Xenophobic and Racist Rhetoric in American Political Discourse,” which documents the rising xenophobic discourse aimed at South Asian, Muslim, Sikh American communities that paints them as threats to national security.

4. See Biju Mathew, *Taxi! Cabs and Capitalism in New York City* (New York City: The New Press, 2005); Monisha Das Gupta, *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism, and Transnational South Asian Politics in the United States* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

cultural productions, spanning from Indian and American films (*My Name is Khan*, *Slumdog Millionaire*), sitcoms (*Outsourced*), and novels both middlebrow and high, from Indian pulp writer Chetan Bhagat's fiction of I.T. India to recent Man Booker winners like Arvind Adiga and Kiran Desai's novels of globalization. These two moments of "transnational connectivity," as Inderpal Grewal calls it, – serialized by the years '65 and '91 – essentially hinge on the travel of capital and labor, from America to India, and India to America, which leaves cultural historians and anthropologists, novelists and journalists to trace all the complex cultural and social transformations that have been left in the wake.<sup>5</sup>

This dissertation aims to tell a subtler story about the Indian encounter with the American – a story about reading, writing, interpreting, and assembling the United States as a complicated, multivocal text, which takes its cue from Pandita Ramabai's witty observation that opens this chapter. Traveling to the United States at the end of the 19th century, Ramabai wrote a Marathi travelogue, *The People and Travels of the United States* (यूनाईटेड स्टेट्सची लोकस्थिति आणि प्रवासूत, 1889), detailing, with an ethnographer's eye, her experience of the culture and institutions of the United States. "It is natural for [Indians] to think Americans walk upside down," Ramabai wrote, in a rare moment of jest, describing the role of the subcontinental perspective in inverting the view of America.<sup>6</sup> As the book's translator Meera Kosambi writes, Ramabai "subjected the American continent and culture to an Indian – albeit internationalized and eclectic – gaze."<sup>7</sup> But there is another gaze, twinned but hidden, in Ramabai's quip: that is, the view of India that the vantage point of the U.S. afforded her. As if caught in a transnational camera obscura, Ramabai's perspective from America turned the image of India upside down, and in so doing, loosened the entrenched understandings of practices, structure, and narratives of the country. In a way, then, Ramabai's travelogue from the late 19th century, was an earlier iteration of what the Indian-American writer Amitava Kumar observed in the 21st: "to come to America means to discover anew what had till now been

5. Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

6. Pandita Ramabai, *Pandita Ramabai's American Encounter: The People of the United States (1889)*, trans. Meera Kosambi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 136.

7. *Ibid.*, 4.

home.”<sup>8</sup> This dissertation traces the history of that way of seeing, specifically through a series of case studies of Indians interpreting America in comparative ways, which in turn enabled a new, critical lens of the place they considered home. Part of the aim of this dissertation is to show that these narratives of the U.S. inaugurated, to turn a phrase from the nationalist canon, a renewed “discovery of India.”<sup>9</sup>

For Indian travelers like Ramabai who came to the U.S. as political exiles, students, and self-described “nationalist ambassadors” in the decades before 1965, the story of America was dramatically different than that of the migrants of a later generation. These travelers did not necessarily imagine themselves as an extension of a broader diaspora, nor did they imagine America as a frontier to chase prosperity or a haven from economic, cultural, and political distress. Instead, the U.S. was a site for comparison, a society constructed by social relations that were alien to colonial India but not indecipherable either. America was a place whose history seemingly had little to do with colonial India but still benefitted from the circulation of goods (and occasionally people) extracted by the British Raj.<sup>10</sup> Metropolitan, but (crucially) not the metropole. Indian nationalists in the early 20th century, for instance, found ways of interpreting America’s anti-British revolution as a symbolic model for swaraj, even as they later perceived in the nation’s colonial projects in the Pacific something akin to the British Raj. Likewise, the country’s history of racial inequality and struggle would turn up throughout Indian representations of the U.S., as analogues to both the caste and colonial question. These narratives of American nationhood, as experienced on the ground or imagined from abroad, offered a lens through which to see Indian and Pakistani society anew. Their writings reveal not only the role of “America” as a discursive site for comparison and for rethinking Indian society for these Indian writers, but allow us to consider the global meanings

8. Amitava Kumar, *Bombay-London-New York* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 8.

9. Jawarhalal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New York: John Day Company, 1946).

10. One of the more interesting histories that reveal the interconnectedness of India and the U.S. economies takes place during the American civil war. By the late 19th century, Britain’s primary source of cotton was the U.S. With the Civil War practically ending American cotton export, in the 1860s Britain relied on Indian cotton, which led to the rapid commercial development of the Bombay and a proposal for the Back Bay reclamation project, famously described in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (New York: Knopf, 1981), 93: “and then off they went, with their Fort and land-reclamation, and before you could blink there was a city here, Bombay.” In truth, the end of the Civil War in 1865 burst the cotton bubble, and halted plans for land reclamation for another five decades. See Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 22-23.

of the U.S. that circulated beyond America's national borders.

To illustrate, I begin with two stories set at the bookends of the 20th century. Two men born in vastly different Indias – Ram Chandra Bharadwaj (b. 1886) and Namdeo Dhasal (b. 1949), the former a revolutionary nationalist residing in the San Francisco Bay Area in the early 20th century, and the latter a revolutionary Dalit poet writing from the working class districts of Bombay in the early 1970s – turn an Indian political question upside down by viewing it through the prism of American history.

## 1.2 Indian Americas

Ram Chandra Bharadwaj was sitting in a San Francisco courthouse in February 1918, arrested on charges of conspiracy. Known for his anti-British editorials published in American papers, Bharadwaj was at the center of what would later be known as the Hindu-German conspiracy trial. His trajectory was a unique one. After editing nationalist newspapers in Peshawar and Delhi, Bharadwaj, then recently-married, made his way eastward with his wife, first moving to Hong Kong, Japan, Seattle, where he briefly worked behind the counter of a Parsi-owned export store, before finally settling in the Bay Area. In San Francisco, he ran a news service from 436 Hill Street under his penname Ram Chandra (the letterhead for “Ram Chandra's India News Service” promised “The Truth About India - India for the Indians - Uncensored - Exclusive - Authentic”).<sup>11</sup> Chandra's news service was connected to his role as the editor of *Gadar*, the weekly organ of the San Francisco-based Ghadar Party – a radical anti-colonial organization, whose membership included Punjabi lumberyard workers and politicized Indian students from the universities on the West coast.<sup>12</sup> The organization's leaders and rank and file were caught in a conspiracy with Ger-

11. Letterheads, South Asians in North America Collection, BANC MSS 2002/78 cz, Box 4, Folder 33, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

12. The circulation of the *Gadar* newspaper spread all over the globe. In a booklet titled “India Against Britain,” Chandra claimed that there were “nearly one million readers” of the newspaper outside of India and the British colonies. The paper had penetrated India, Persia, Turkey, Afghanistan (where they were distributed to Afghan soldiers fighting against the British on the frontier) and even to British Indian soldiers in France. See Mark Naidis, “Propaganda of the Ghadar Party,” *Pacific Historical Review* 20 (3 1951): 241–260.

man forces, including a plot to send two ships loaded with arms to Punjab and incite an armed insurrection against the British in the spirit of the 1857 mutiny. The plot was discovered, and eventually thirty-five Ghadar party members were charged with conspiracy and violation of U.S. neutrality laws, after the British applied diplomatic pressure on the U.S. to quash the nationalistic activities of Indians in America. With the case clearly tilting towards a guilty verdict, Ram Chandra decided to write none other than Woodrow Wilson, his third and last open letter to the Head of State, eventually published in a pamphlet circulated by the Ghadar Party.

Mr. President: Your own dear country, the United States of America, became a free nation by an act of rebellion against the British. And the [...] tyranny inflicted by the British upon the Americans in 1776 is far exceeded by the indescribable things which have been perpetrated upon the devoted Hindus.<sup>13</sup>

Placing Wilson in the same pedigree of Washington and Lincoln, Chandra continued: “In every shop window of the nation one sees their portraits, linked together [...]. It was Washington, the first President and your most illustrious predecessor, who led the war for American liberty and the rebellion against the tyranny of the British king. It was Lincoln, the sixteenth President, who broke the shackles of a downtrodden race and set the negro free.” Bringing that lineage into the present, Chandra added one more point on the teleological line of American progress: “Yourself, Mr. Wilson, the noble successor of these great men, have brought this peaceful nation into the world’s most terrible war in order that weaker nations may be saved, and the ‘world made safe for democracy.” Referring to Wilson’s “Fourteen Points” speech delivered just a month earlier, Chandra underscored the American President’s demand for a “free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims,” one which weighed the interests of “populations concerned” against the “equitable claims” of the colonial government.<sup>14</sup> In the letters, Chandra collapses three narratives of American history into one single story of freedom, one which led to his conclusion that if Wilson would simply “free India from the clutches of the British, then India

13. Ram Chandra, *The Appeal of India to the President of the United States* (San Francisco: Hindustan Gadar), South Asians in North America Collection, BANC MSS 2002/78 cz, Box 1, Folder 30, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

14. Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 40.

would be ready to live up to the very principles which you have laid down better than any other people in the world.”

In Chandra’s estimation, the independence of India would be another node along the telos of history inaugurated by the American settler-colonial revolutionaries – from the establishment of thirteen colonies declaring “freedom” from England, to the slaves who were granted freedom after the Civil War, to the portentous freedom of other British colonies, like India, who lived under the “fog of slavery.”<sup>15</sup> Such rhetorical flourishes were not uncommon for Chandra, who, according to his wife, Padmavati Chandra, recited the slogans of Patrick Henry at home and spoke with members of the Ghadar party of the dawn of a “United States of India” free from British rule.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Ghadar Party pamphlets regularly referenced American history and literature, emphasizing the incongruity of colonial “enslavement” and the modern era. One such broadsheet quoted from Lincoln – “A country cannot live half slave and half free” – before including an excerpt from the Fireside poet James Russell Lowell’s “Stanzas of Freedom.”

Is true Freedom but to break  
Fetters for our own dear sake,  
And, with leathern heart, forget  
That we owe mankind a debt?  
No! true Freedom is to share  
All the chains our brothers wear,  
And, with heart and hand, to be  
Earnest to make others free.

They are slaves who fear to speak  
For the fallen and the weak;  
They are slaves who will not choose  
Hatred, scoffing, and abuse,  
Rather than in silence shrink  
From the truth they needs must think;  
They are slaves who dare not be  
In the right with two or three!<sup>17</sup>

15. Ram Chandra, *The Appeal of India to the President of the United States* (San Francisco: Hindustan Gadar, 1918).

16. Padmavati Chandra. New York City. Interview May 1974. South Asians in North America Collection, BANC MSS 2002/78 cz, Box 4, Folder 1, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

17. “An Open Letter to the People at Large.” Handbill, 7 x 10 ½ in. San Francisco: Hindustan Gadar Party, 2 pp. Undated, South Asians in North America Collection, BANC MSS 2002/78 cz, Box 2, Folder 30, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley



Recirculating Lowell's poem, which was originally written as an abolitionist and women's suffrage plea, for the cause of Indian independence expanded the poem's concept of freedom in ways that Lowell could not have anticipated. And yet, reading the poem in the context of India's anti-colonial struggle fit into the spirit of Lowell's verse – "true Freedom is to share / All the chains our brothers wear." What was Chandra trying convey to Woodrow Wilson in his plea for anticolonial empathy other than the shared enslavement of a world that was "half slave and half free"?

The metaphor of the Black slave, however, would prove to be more rhetorical trope than sustained analogy for Chandra, who focused on the slave trade's logic of subjugation rather than its logic of racial difference. Drawing from the racial typologies of the day, Chandra wrote, "The Hindus belong to the Indo-Aryan Caucasian race. They are not behind any race or any nation in ability."<sup>18</sup> This problematic racial comparison was not only the grounds for claims to American citizenship (discussed at greater lengths in Chapters 2 and 3), but for Chandra, the grounds for inclusion as the "free" democratic subject of the modern world.

Wilson never responded, and Chandra didn't survive the trial. On April 23, the last day of court, as Chandra walked across the courtroom he was gunned down by Ram Singh, another Ghadar party member. The motives for Chandra's killing have been cloudy: the proceedings revealed that Chandra had siphoned off Ghadar funds for personal use, while others have suggested Singh's loyalties lay with another rival leader.<sup>19</sup> Whatever the case may be, the scene was an early, sensationalist moment in Indian American history, and newspapers nation-wide offered several dramatic accounts. An eyewitness, later quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, described the scene: "[A] black turbaned Hindoo zealot [...] sneaked his way, with head down, toward Ram Chandra. I thought Ram Singh was ill and fainting until I saw him ram his revolver into Ram Chandra's side and heard a sharp pop. [...] As the first bullet tore through Chandra's left side a little to the back, Chandra shuddered and turned away. With his head lowered and his body waving, Singh

18. Chandra, *The Appeal of India to the President of the United States*.

19. Maia Ramnath, "Two Revolutions: The Ghadar Movement and India's Radical Diaspora," *Radical History Review* (92 2005): 16.

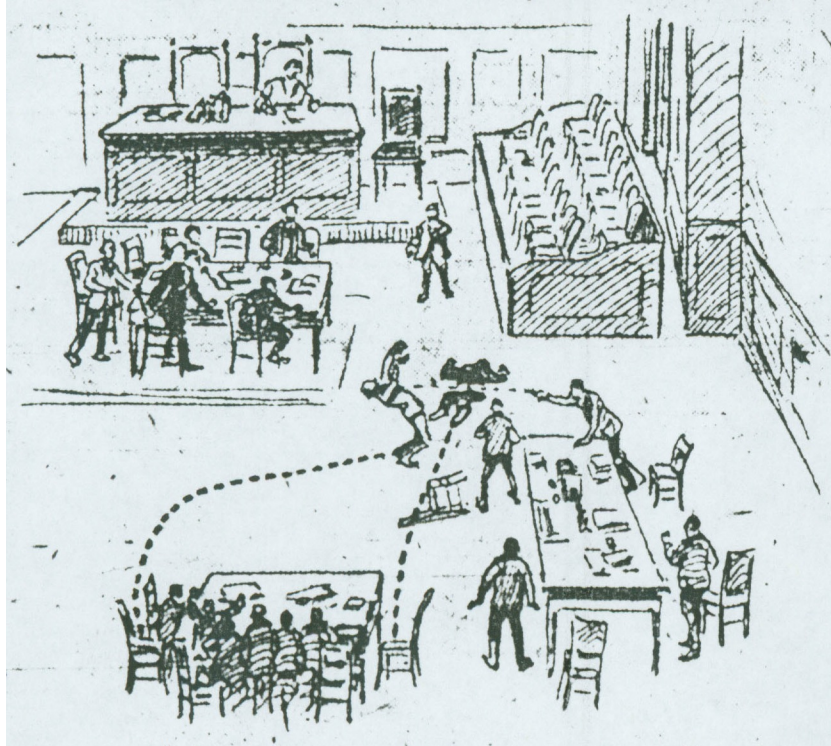


Figure 1.1: Illustration from *San Francisco Chronicle* (April 24, 1918) diagramming the deaths of Ram Chandra Bharadwaj, Ghadar Party leader, and his assassin, Ram Singh.

pulled the trigger three times more.”<sup>20</sup> Within seconds a court marshal shot over a table and into the neck of Singh, in a swift movement that the *Chicago Tribune* later compared to an overhand tennis serve.<sup>21</sup>

\*\*\*

Five decades after Chandra’s letter and nearly three after India’s independence, Namdeo Dhasal, a young Marathi poet, wrote of a vastly different version of the United States from a dramatically different India. Born as a Mahar, of “untouchable” or Dalit caste status in western India, Dhasal had made a splash in the Marathi literary world for his complex and highly scatological poetry collection *Golpitha* (1972), which incorporated the language of Bombay’s central red light dis-

20. “Ram Singh Kills Ram Chandra; U.S. Marshall Holohan Kills Slayer,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 24, 1918, 1.

21. “Hindu Kills Co-Conspirator in U.S. Court,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 24, 1918, 1.

trict from which it owes its title, and the Mahar dialect of the Pune district.<sup>22</sup> Political notoriety was soon to follow Dhasal's poetic fame. Frustrated by an older guard of Dalit politicians in the Republican Party of India, who advocated parliamentary means for Dalit political representation, Dhasal and fellow writer and activist Raja Dhale founded an organization that called themselves the Dalit Panther in April 1972, an echo of the Black Panthers in the U.S. From the organization's inception, the Dalit Panther were largely involved in symbolic street politics and political rallies throughout the city, which, as Anupama Rao has argued, formed "a crucial axis of political subject-formation."<sup>23</sup> One such example of these symbolic protests occurred on August 1972, when the Dalit Panther celebrated "Black Independence Day," unfurling a black flag to commemorate India's Silver Jubilee.<sup>24</sup> Just a year after forming, Dhasal issued the Dalit Panther manifesto, which explained the intention behind the organization's peculiar name:

Due to the maddened plot of American imperialism, today all of the Third Dalit World, meaning oppressed nations and Dalit people, is suffering. Even in America, a handful of reactionary whites are exploiting Negroes. To meet the force of reaction and remove this exploitation, the Black Panther movement grew. From the Black Panthers, Black Power was established. We claim a close relationship with this struggle. Vietnam, Cambodia, Africa, etc. The mirror is before our eyes.

अमेरिकन साम्राज्यवादाच्या पिसाट कारस्थानाने आज सर्व तिसरे दलित जग म्हणजे उत्पीडित देश आणि दलित जनता होरपळली आहे. खुद्द अमेरिकेत मूठभर प्रतिक्रियावादी गोरे निगरोंवर जुलूम करीत आहेत. या जुलमास जशास तसे उत्तर देण्यास ब्लॅक पॅन्थर चळवळीतून ब्लॅक पॉवर (काळ्या लोकांची सत्ता) निर्माण झाली. संघर्षाशी आमचे नाते आहे. व्हिएतनाम, कंबोडिया, आफ्रिका इ. आदर्श आमच्या डोळ्यांपुढे आहे.<sup>25</sup>

The Panther's use of Black iconography reflected the expanding global reach of Dalit politics, and also demonstrated the organization's media savvy – within a year both the *New York Times*<sup>26</sup> and *The Guardian*<sup>27</sup> picked up the story, and reported on the activities of the Black Pan-

22. Dilip Chitre, "Poetry of the Scum of the Earth," in *Namdeo Dhasal: Poet of the Underworld*, ed. and trans. Dilip Chitre (Chennai: Navayana, 2007), 7–31.

23. Anupama Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 185.

24. Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1992), 267–268.

25. Sharankumar Limbale, *Dalit Panthar* (Pune: Sugava Prakashan, 1989), 260.

26. Bernard Weinraub, "Bombay's Counterparts of the Black Panthers Fume and Plot," *New York Times*, January 9, 1974, 8.

27. Darryl D'Monte, "The Dalit Panthers," *The Guardian*, March 2, 1974, 9.

ther's "Bombay counterparts." Dhasal's reference of African American political icons was not uncommon at the time, and made up part of the range of allusions that emerged from the Dalit literary movement of the 1960s and 70s (a history traced in greater detail in Chapter 6).<sup>28</sup> But the act of comparison was itself, I would argue, another crucial axis of political subject-formation. More than a passing citation, Dhasal's allusion to the United States collapsed several competing political narratives onto the invented signifier "Third Dalit world" (तिसरे दलित जग). On one hand, Dhasal compares the history of untouchability to the history of racism within the United States, describing the treatment of "Negroes" by a "handful of reactionary whites" (मूठभर प्रतिक्रियावादी गोरे). On the other, Dhasal alludes to the anti-imperialist struggle of the Viet Cong against the United States, a reference which also carries with it the Bandung-era configuration of the Third World.<sup>29</sup> If the Dalit subject, the "we" (आम्ही) of Dhasal's manifesto, is somehow forged in contrast to the "maddened plot of American imperialism," then the caste-marked subject imagined in the Dalit Panther Manifesto begins to be formed by a set of oppositional, and occasionally contradictory, histories. In a way, the Dalit Panther manifesto's appropriation of Third World symbolism resembles what Edward Said terms "adversarial internationalizations," imagined alliances intended to challenge continued imperial structures, even while the category of the Third World was borne out of the same bourgeois-led, anticolonial nationalism that the Panthers opposed.<sup>30</sup> Fissured though it may have been, Dhasal's invocation of the iconography of the Black Panthers forged another analogy with the United States, claiming "close relationship" with, and I would argue, a comparative reading of the Black Power movement. Once again, narratives of the United States offered a reconceptualization of an Indian subject; for Dhasal, the U.S. was the imperialist

28. Bal Khairmoday, an associate of the Dalit Panther, explains, "Way before the Panther was formed Raja Dhale, Namdeo and I would chat for hours about the Black Panther Movement in America. Raja wanted me to translate *Soul on Ice* into Marathi. He gave me a copy of the book. I remember telling the story of Eldridge Cleaver to Namdeo who could not read English and he listened raptly. It was Namdeo who gave the name of Panther to the organization." In Neera Adarkar and Meena Menon, *One Hundred years, One Hundred Voices: The Millworkers of Girangaon: An Oral History* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2004), 320.

29. According to Lata Murugkar and Sharankumar Limbale, the drafting of the Dalit Panther Manifesto was also aided by the Naxalite acquaintances of Dhasal, which further complicates the ideological currents that move through the document. The Naxal movement, drawing from Maoist thought, also subscribed to the "convergence theory thesis," which pitted American and Soviet powers as duelling imperialisms.

30. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 244.

and anti-Black antagonist, the Indian nation to the Dalit subject.

Ram Chandra and Namdeo Dhasal wrote worlds apart, from physical and temporal locations dramatically different. And yet, there is something unmistakably similar in both their appeals. In Chandra's petition written from San Francisco and Dhasal's manifesto written from Bombay, an Indian political question passes, however momentarily, through the prism of American history. For Chandra, India's movement towards decolonization was framed by the emancipation of the eighteenth century settler-colonist cutting ties with the English throne, *and* simultaneously (however paradoxically) the nineteenth century slave emancipated from his white master. For Dhasal, the caste question tapped into a broader set of histories in which the U.S., as the embodiment of white supremacist imperialism, became the antagonist: the African American nationalists of the Black Power movement, the Viet-Cong guerillas fighting the American military, and the Third World defined in opposition to the cold war American juggernaut. Surely, these comparisons were more moments of rhetorical maneuver than sustainable and hermetically-sealed analogies. Even a cursory set of questions, for instance, could dismantle Chandra's analogy of settler-colonialist to slave. But my point is less about the plausibility of either analogy, as it is about how analogies to the U.S. facilitated a creative imagining of a new subject of history. Invoking America, and its central status as a hegemonic presence on the globe, invoked a kind of worldliness for both writers.<sup>31</sup> But Chandra and Dhasal's petitions also point towards an imaginary that seems unique to the signifying powers of the U.S. This dissertation shows how comparisons to the U.S. from Indian writers had a dual function: they facilitated the imagining of new political and historical Indian subjects, by unsettling the national and regional boundaries of political subjectivity in India. At the same time, as readers located in the American academe, we see how these comparisons loosen entrenched American narratives of race, nation, and empire. The figure of the African American could signify both the colonized upper caste *and* the post-independence Dalit subject. America, as a sign, could be read as both revolutionary beacon and imperialist power. The power of these

31. The more recent example of Dalit activists efforts to join the World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2000 also speaks of broadening the cause of caste discrimination into the framework of racism, a framework far more legible to Western industrial nations.

Indian-American analogies, then, was not only the power to reframe the subject (the Indian, Dalit) but also to resignify its object, the U.S.

In discussing South Asian American writers, scholar Rajini Srikanth explains that their “contribution to American imagination is the delineation of narratives and spaces that enable the conception of a nation as simultaneously discrete *and* entwined within the fold of other nations.”<sup>32</sup> The same might be said about the writers who concern this study, writers like Chandra and Dhasal, who entangled the signifiers “India” and “America” into complex narratives of political subjectivity. These were not South Asian American writers as traditionally defined – novelists and short story writers like Dhan Gopal Mukerji in the first half of the 20th century, whose roots lie in the subcontinent and residency in the U.S. Instead, the writers I examine in this study are those of South Asian intellectuals and travelers who wrote about America through travelogues, historical monographs, essays, and letters as they visited the U.S. in exile, in travel, or, in some later cases, simply imagined the country from abroad. As a result, this study traces a largely forgotten history of South and U.S. contact, which precedes the large-scale immigrations after 1965, before the ethnic mix was “upset.” It also attempts to examine how these multiple “Americas” were constructed and engaged with the emergent political discourses of 20th century India – namely nationhood, anti-colonialism, and caste reform.

### 1.3 Nation, Narration, Comparison

Part of the work of this dissertation is recuperative. Stories like Chandra and Dhasal’s of an earlier South Asian presence in the United States (and an earlier American presence in South Asian letters) have largely fallen under the radar of Asian American and Postcolonial scholarship. Recent scholarship focusing on the transnational circuits of South Asians as well as the textual circulation of between South Asia and the U.S. have offered a necessary corrective to this absence in the

32. Rajini Srikanth, *The World Next Door: South Asian American Literature and the Idea of America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 11.

scholarship.<sup>33</sup>

But historical recovery is not this project's sole aim. This dissertation attempts both to reconsider the relationship between "nation and narration" and to respond to Ann Stoler's call for more critical reflection on "the history and politics of comparison."<sup>34</sup> In examining South Asian writings on the U.S., I want to consider the role that both the project of comparison and the confrontation of difference had historically in aiding these actors to imagine new subject formations in both the colonial and decolonized world. I write "confrontation of difference," but one should also keep in mind the imbalance of power that characterizes the difference that marked the Indian subject who "wrote" the United States. This was not a relationship between the colonized and colonizer (though arguably in the case of Pakistan, it was). Nevertheless, South Asian constructions of the U.S. were characterized by a subversion of a certain kind of western gaze. In passages like Dhasal's, the West was held under scrutiny by the East, rather than the usual and the well-studied Orientalist gaze in the opposite direction.

And scrutinize, they did. The America that emerges in their writings was bound by no single master narrative, but rather, was pluralistic, a compendium of narratives and counter-narratives, characterizing American history and defining "American character" in a myriad of ways. Several of the key historical narratives, which the writers in this study focused on, were predictable – the sort of events of U.S. history that would turn up in most American high school history textbooks. But the writers' treatment of these narratives was far from typical. The American Revolution and the Civil War, as Chandra's example shows, were reconstructed into events that could signify a larger anti-imperialist, liberatory vision. Alongside the valorized narratives of U.S. history were others that emphasized America's imperialist and racist legacy: for example, narratives of the Atlantic

33. See Seema Sohi, "Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Empire, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America," PhD diss., University of Washington, 2008; Dohra Ahmad, *Landscapes of Hope: Anti-Colonial Utopianism in America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Kris Manjapra and Sugata Bose, eds. *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). A forthcoming title, which will surely add to this growing body of knowledge is Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012)

34. Ann Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 23.

slave trade, the colonization of the Philippines, the colonization of the Americas, the genocide and displacement of Native Americans, America's post-war "dollar" imperialism, and its wars with Third World Asia were mobilized by South Asians to signal the continuing presence of colonial subjectivity and white supremacy. Discussing these narratives of American history was, of course, only half the story. This dissertation looks at how these narratives of the U.S. were written as a kind of reflective surface, upon which the Indian subject saw him or herself, or in other cases, saw the exact opposite.

But let's jettison the physical metaphors of "prism" and "mirror," momentarily, and work through a metaphor of inscription. We might consider how these comparative writings operated as a kind of "translation" of the U.S. Insofar as a figure like Chandra or Dhasal was invoking the history of the U.S. from an Indian perspective, their act of writing might also be interpreted as an act of translation, transforming the signs of America into existing signs available imaginatively in the Indian context. If we consider translation more literally – the transfer of one sign from one linguistic system to another – then we can think of the analogous operation of the comparatist. What are the basic features of the U.S. and India that allowed them to think of similarities? Who in India corresponds to the American revolutionary, the liberated slave, the Black power activist? From that perspective, this process of translation might reveal what, in abstract algebra, is called an isomorphism. Douglas Hofstadter explains that the term is used to describe when "two complex structures can be mapped onto each other, in such a way that to each part of one structure there is a corresponding part in the other structure, where "corresponding" means that the two parts play similar roles in their respective structure."<sup>35</sup> Mapping one "part" onto another – the singular subject of the U.S. onto another singular subject in India – a larger structural comparison reveals itself: i.e., the U.S. is to India as the American revolutionary is to the Indian nationalist, as the "Negro Problem" is to the "Caste Question," and so on.

But, as the writings of Chandra and Dhasal reveal, neither neatly mapped one subject onto the other without raising contradictions. Moreover, Chandra did not see himself simply as the

35. Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 49.



American Revolutionary, or the liberated slave, and Dhasal did not imagine himself as the Black subject of 1970s America, exactly. Each used the history of the U.S. to reframe his respective subject-position. And most importantly, the process of comparison did not just map already existing Indian signs onto the America context, but facilitated the imagining of new signs, of new political subjects. The Ghadar party member became more than just an Indian nationalist in Chandra's appeal, just as the Dalit subject became more than just the nationally-bound, caste-marked "untouchable" for Dhasal. As Craig Calhoun reminds us, "translation adequate to comparative analysis requires an interpretation of a whole organization of activity, not just the matching of vocabulary"<sup>36</sup> Likewise, Dhasal and Chandra weren't matching vocabulary, but interpreting, translating a whole set of frameworks in order to, in essence, rewrite their narratives and their political subjectivity into a new idiom.

Interpreting is the key word here. What Chandra, Dhasal, and the other writers in this study were up to was more than simply assembling and constructing their own idiosyncratic images of the U.S. They were also reading the U.S., practicing a kind of transnational hermeneutics. The scholarship of Jodi Kim, in *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* offers a useful way to think about the relationship between American critique and interpretation. Kim introduces the useful term "unsettling hermeneutic" to describe the critique, in Asian American cultural productions, of the Manichean frameworks of the Cold War and the political unconscious of American exceptionalism. Kim writes, "conceptualizing Asian American critique as an *unsettling hermeneutic* generates a new interpretive practice or analytic for reading Asian American cultural productions [...] [and] thus critically defamiliarizes the "United States of America" and the contemporary formation of "Asian America(n)."<sup>37</sup> What is useful about this concept for this particular project – aside from sharing a similar kind of geographical, and historical landscape – is that Kim underscores the "unsettling" effect of an interpretative practice.

An "unsettling hermeneutic" might better describe what I meant earlier by the dual function

36. Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory: Culture, History, and the Challenge of Difference* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 59.

37. Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 5.

of these comparison. In imagining anticolonial Indian nationalism or Dalit subjectivity as related to politics in the U.S., these writers de-provincialized the politics of home. In claiming the “United States of America” as a signifying space for questions of anticolonial nationalism or caste politics, Chandra and Dhasal defamiliarize or “unsettle” the entrenched meanings of race and nation in the United States for those of us, positioned in the U.S. In reading these interpretations, I hope not only to contest the discourse of American exceptionalism, but to also complicate the history of American images abroad. Meanings of the U.S. in the 20th century, as will become clear, exceeded their intended significations.

This “dual function” of comparison is operative in the title of this dissertation. “The United States of India” was a phrase used by several Indian writers and political actors, many of whom visited America in the years preceding Indian independence in 1947. Most literally, “The United States of India” facilitated the imagining of an independent Indian nation-state in the years before Indian and Pakistani independence in 1947. One of its earliest evocations was from the Ghadar Party, where the phrase eventually replaced *Gadar* as the title of the party newspaper in the 1920s. Today, a framed map of South Asia from 1925, labeled “The United States of India” greets visitors at the Ghadar Memorial in San Francisco, its margins printed with the slogans “In Union There Is Strength,” “Our Enemy is Organized We Must Do Likewise.” Elsewhere, “The United States of India” appeared throughout political science reports as the name for the hypothetical independent Indian nation-state.<sup>38</sup> Bhagat Singh Thind, a U.S. veteran of World War I originally from Punjab, whose case for citizenship reached the U.S. Supreme Court (elaborated upon in Chapter 3), also used the term in a political broadside titled “Political Prophecy Based on Truth of Life.” “India will be fully free to evolve according to her own ideals, her destiny, unfettered from within, unmolested from without,” Thind wrote, concluding optimistically that “Burma will voluntarily join the United States of India.”<sup>39</sup> The term appeared in an essay by Taraknath Das (another fellow

38. See V.K. Gorey, *The United States of India: A Constructive Federal Solution* (Baroda: Padmaja Publications, 1946); J.S. Hodge, “The United States of India,” *The North American Review* 214 (791 1921): 450–460.

39. From a handbill by Bhagat Singh Thind titled “Political Prophecy Based on Truth of Life,” described as “Extracts from a lecture on India and the European War delivered on December 18, 1938, Auditorium hotel, Chicago.” Bhagat Singh Thind, “Political Prophecy Based on Truth of Life,” bhagatsinghthind.com, 19 June 2011.

traveler of the Ghadar party), who wrote in 1923 that “responsible Indian nationalists are working for a Federated Republic of the United States of India.”<sup>40</sup> Some decades later, drawing heavily on the American constitution, Dalit leader and Constituent Assembly member B.R. Ambedkar – who had studied at Columbia University between 1913 and 1916, and whose story appears intermittently throughout the dissertation – used the term for the proposed preamble of the Indian constitution:

We the people of the territories of British India [...] with a view to form a more perfect union of these territories do – *ordain* that the Provinces and the Centrally Administered Areas (to be hereafter designated as States) and the Indian States shall be joined together into a Body Politic for Legislative, Executive and Administrative purposes under the style *The United States of India* [...]<sup>41</sup>

The language of “We the people” and “a more perfect union” clearly echo the American constitution, and force us to consider the influence that ideas of American democracy might have had on Ambedkar as a visiting student. The term’s afterlife, however, did not last long after independence.

On one hand, these writers’ choice of phrase – refiguring “The United States of America” – for the purpose of imagining an independent India, may seem somewhat trivial to scrutinize. After all, the Republic of India eventually inherited the colonial infrastructure of governance that was laid down by a century of British rule, rather than adopt any formal governmental structure of the U.S. Nevertheless, the term evoked a particular way of seeing and imagining, viewing India through the mediating narratives of the United States. To name an independent India “the United States” was a strategic, rhetorical cutting of India’s umbilical tie to British Empire, and signified an anti-British, anticolonial legacy, which diasporic subjects before 1947 especially used to appeal to their American readers. For me, the term encapsulates the unsettling function that comparisons to the U.S. by Indians had. Like a trick by the colonial mimic, the term “United States of India” unsettles the naturalized sign of America, as well as its exceptionalist character. And with a switch of possessive markers, it signifies another perspective on America: *The United States of India*, i.e.,

40. Taraknath Das, *India in World Politics* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1923), 78.

41. Kurukundi Raghavendra Rao, *Babasabheb Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1993), 52.

India's United States. For our purposes, it also conveniently brings to American history a context that is often kept separate in academic disciplines.

And here, a note on academic interventions: In the spirit of this dissertation's title, this project attempts to bring together two disciplines that are not often conversant with each other: Asian American and Postcolonial studies.

By choosing to focus on these comparative narratives, which are rarely included in any canon of Asian American, let alone South Asian American, cultural texts, I hope to unpack our own stated assumptions of what constitutes the object of Asian American studies. What would be the value of shifting attention away from the nationally-bound narratives that often pose as the central object in Asian American studies? What would it mean if the the end point of the "subjectification" for the protagonists of this study was not to become the racialized other of America, but to become the nationalist or subaltern subjects of India? This is not to diminish the role that studies on immigration in Asian American studies, and in fact, as it will become clear in the chapters to come, anti-Asiatic immigration politics were critical sites for Indian travelers to consider larger questions of racial injustice in the U.S. and the racial logic of Western imperialism. But, as a whole, the historical figures and writings in this dissertation do not easily conform to the narratives of successful or failed assimilation into U.S. citizenship. In this way, I hope to depart from what I perceive as the political unconscious of Asian American, and for that matter American, studies, which at their most uncritical repeat the script of the nationalist narratives of the U.S. This political unconscious either co-opts the South Asian American subject into its own multicultural, assimilationist narrative (*we are American, we are multicultural America*), otherwise, it becomes the master narrative to which South Asian American texts must respond. A recent example of this is Anupama Jain's *How to Be a South Asian American*, which cogently underlines the shifting ideals of the categories "South Asian" and "American" to critique racialized identity formation in the U.S., but nevertheless, in its readings uses assimilation as its central axis.<sup>42</sup> So, even as our studies of Asian American subjectification regularly do take the time to critique the discourse American

42. Anupama Jain, *How to Be South Asian in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

exceptionalism or the racial unconscious of American citizenship (and this study is no different, in both regards), we are still responding to the terms that American nationalist discourse produce for itself. Such studies are important and provide a vigilant critique of the constantly transforming racial logic of American nationhood, but are other approaches possible? As Sucheta Mazumdar has argued, “Asian American has been located within the context of American Studies and stripped of its international links.”<sup>43</sup> More recently, Kandice Chuh’s *Imagining Otherwise* charts a similar course in more explicit terms, explaining how the application of postcolonial and transnationalist methods “radically destabilizes the subjective, nation-oriented politics that historically anchored Asian American studies.”<sup>44</sup> Part of what I hope to do is to examine South Asian and American encounters, which are not so easily folded under the bounded space of the American nation. The recent scholarship of Eiichiro Azuma, Mrinalini Sinha, and Vivek Bald have already begun to chart, through rich archival research, stories of Asian American contact that challenge these well-traveled concerns of Asian American cultural production.<sup>45</sup>

Postcolonial studies, and particularly the South Asian variety, has its own lacunae, one of which is its long standing tradition of ignoring the United States. There are, of course, historical reasons for this. Compared to Britain, France, and Germany, the historical exchange between India and the U.S. has been a relatively limited one. But the problem is disciplinary as well, as Kamala Visweswaran recently argued in *Un/Common Cultures, Racism and the Rearticulation of Cultural Difference*: “What [...] are the intellectual fields of inquiry that can help map the conjunctures and disjunctures between communities and social movements in India and the United States, between histories of racism and histories of casteism, between the neoliberal Indian state and the ‘liberal-democratic’ state? Scholarship on caste tends to remain entrenched within area studies, becoming difficult to track within African or South Asian diaspora studies, while scholar-

43. Sucheta Mazumdar, “Asian American Studies and Asian Studies: Rethinking Roots,” in *Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives*, ed. Shirley Hune (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1991), 30.

44. Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 114.

45. See Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007); Vivek Bald, “Overlapping Diasporas, Multiracial Lives: South Asian Muslims in U.S. Communities of Color, 1880-1950,” *Souls* 8 (4 2006): 3–18.

ship on race also tends to be nation-bound.”<sup>46</sup> In bringing to narratives of the U.S. certain frameworks like caste, which nearly all of the historical actors in this study did, I hope to respond to Visweswaran’s call for what she terms “affiliative interdisciplinarity.” Moreover, by focusing on narratives of exchange between the United States and South Asia, this project tries to rethink the common transnational frameworks in postcolonial studies, which focus primarily on circuits between metropole and colony, between England and India.

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The dissertation covers three broad periods in the twentieth century which witnessed major shifts in the cultural and political meanings of the United States in relation to the Indian subcontinent: the emergence of anticolonial Indian nationalism within the United States (1914-1928), the transition of the U.S. into a new phase in imperialism in the backdrop of World War II and the Cold War (1944-1955), and the explosion of subaltern political movements worldwide, including the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. and the development of Dalit politics in India (1963-68).

The narrative arc of this project begins by tracing the travels of the formative Indian nationalist figure Lala Lajpat Rai to the U.S., first for a short visit in 1905 and for a second, longer trip, from 1914 and 1919, where he founded the India Home Rule League of America. During that latter visit, Rai wrote *The United States of America: A Hindu’s Impressions and Study* (1916), a monograph that captured his views on the United States before its involvement in World War I. Like Ram Chandra, Rai often attempted to prop the Indian nationalist struggle onto the same symbolic platform of the American Revolution. Such a neat construction, however, was upset by national counter-narratives, the “small histories” that disrupt the totality of the U.S. nation. In particular, this chapter focuses on three subjects central to American counter-narratives – the African American, the Filipino, and the “Hindu.”

By 1922, the torrent of activities of Indian nationalists in America had slowed to a trickle. But as the diasporic Indian nationalism of the World War I-era had tapered, the agitation in colo-

46. Kamala Visweswaran, *Un/Common Cultures: Racism and the Rearticulation of Cultural Difference* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 11.

nial India was reaching new levels of unrest. It was not until American writer Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* was published in the Summer of 1927 that the American nation figured into the discourse of Indian nationalism again. Written as an exposé of India's cultural and social depravity as a means to argue against India's capacity for self-governance, *Mother India* produced an onslaught of responses, which argued against Mayo's representation of India. An unexpected consequence of these rebuttals was a construction of the United States as a depraved version of Western modernity – "a civilization gone amok," as one rejoinder put it. Behind this civilizational critique, I argue, was a reframing of the transnational discourses of race, which reconsidered the Indian petitions to an international community based upon the discourse of common racial (read "Aryan") lineages. In effect, I trace how the Indian responses to *Mother India* effectively redrew the "color line."

Chapter Three examines the socialist leader Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay who wrote two histories of the U.S., which were published right before Independence: *Uncle Sam's Empire* (1944) and *America: The Land of Superlatives* (1946). I argue that by reading Chattopadhyay's work as a work of American history, we find an interrogation of the larger structures of nation and empire. In Chapter Four, I turn to the work of Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto, who resided in Pakistan after 1948, and used a far more immediate form to understand and critique America's empire. In nine satirical "open" letters to "Uncle Sam," which Manto wrote between 1951 and 1954, he examined the possibility and impossibility of a "postcolonial" Pakistani nation-state by addressing its neocolonial relationship to the United States. Playing an allegorical stand-in for Pakistan, Manto used satire as a means to critique the broader meanings of a Third World nation in the Cold War.

The dissertation ends by shifting focus away from national perspectives and toward the history of transnational subaltern collaborations. Chapter Five draws attention to the Dalit movement by tracing the influence of African American literature on the Dalit literary movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Focusing on the work of Dalit cultural critic M.N. Wankhade, I argue that his essays imagined new terms of subaltern subjectivity, contesting the national subject and the discourse of caste itself.

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One final qualification – a note on scope – before we get to our individual case studies: This dissertation is hardly comprehensive, and suffers, like most studies about the subcontinent, from slippages in naming. For the most part, I tried to focus on the histories of Indian historical actors, and because the limited range of my histories, I avoided the term South Asian (which would have covered India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal). One exception is the chapter on Saadat Hasan Manto, whose focus in the publication of “Letters to Uncle Sam” in 1954 was clearly Pakistan. For the case of Manto alone, I wasn’t willing to forgo the Indian-centric naming of the dissertation. But problems in geographical titles also reflect the constantly shifting borders of geographies, and the period of time this dissertation covers (from 1905 to 1974) witnessed three nations emerge out of one colonial state.

A more troubling limitation in the dissertation is that all the historical actors in this study hail from Punjab and Maharashtra. Due to my own limitations in language and to a lack of translations, I had to neglect certain histories that might have otherwise been included in this study, but will mention a few for the sake of acknowledgment. One of the most interesting stories of Indian-American exchange, for instance, comes from the story of the Assamese singer Bhupen Hazarika, who, during his studies at Columbia University, befriended Paul Robeson. Hazarika went on to sing several versions of “Old Man River,” a song that Robeson had transformed from its minstrel-inspired origins to a theme of Black empowerment. Other histories – including a more extensive history of the Ghadar Party, or R.K. Narayan’s writings on the U.S., for instance, were considered but abandoned given that the amount of writing directly relating to the United States was often limited. Nevertheless, my hope is that this study can contribute to a more expansive consideration of the South Asian American history by considering writers who actively used the United States as a lens to rethink the categories in their native home.



## Chapter 2

# Nationalist and Analogist: Lala Lajpat Rai's *United States of America, 1905-1919*

### 2.1 Mr. Rai Goes to Washington 1905

In late September 1905, Lala Lajpat Rai was standing in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol building among a crowd of visitors, when a tour guide directed his attention toward an image one-hundred-and-eighty feet above. Painted in the half-sphere of the oculus was *The Apotheosis of Washington*, Constantino Brumidi's 1865 state-commissioned fresco. In the center sat a celestial George Washington on a throne in the clouds, flanked on each side by figures from classical Greco-Roman and nouveau American mythology. There on a brief three-week tour along the East Coast, Rai – forty years old, not yet the emblematic Indian nationalist he would later become – noted the details of the painting in an editorial printed in his Lahore-based English weekly *The Panjabee*. With his gaze focused on *The Apotheosis*, Rai began to organize a web of American icons and symbols into, in his words, a “picture [that] tells volumes of history.”<sup>1</sup>

In the centre stands America with the eagle at her feet listening to the inspiration of Hope and indicating her reliance on justice, whose scroll of Constitution bears the date of adoption of that instrument, September 17, 1787. Besides this there are two other colossal groups on the portico, one represents Columbus and an Indian (Red) girl; the other represents the settlement of America – a pioneer in desperate conflict with a savage. [...] The subject is the American development and the decadence of the Indian race. In the center stands America in the effulgence of the rising sun bestowing honour upon George Washington. On the right are Commerce, Education, Mechanics and Agriculture; on the left the Pioneer, the Haver, a dejected chieftain

1. Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai, Volume 2*, ed. Bal Ram Nanda, 180.



Figure 2.1: *The Apotheosis of Washington*

and an Indian (Red) mother with her babe mourning beside a grave. [...] Oh, what a pathos! and what a fact!”<sup>2</sup>

Rai’s description of the Capitol’s interior was a telling one. Centered on the ebb and flow of civilizations, Rai narrated the fall of “savage” society against the rise of the American state in all its constituent faculties: “Commerce, Education, Mechanics, [...] Agriculture,” and so on. Still, his tour through the Capitol building added more to his emergent American iconography than simply the decline of “Indians (Red)” and their conspicuously bloodless replacement with the modern, Western pioneer. Rai gave mention to episodes in the country’s revolutionary history as captured in the John Trumbull paintings set in the Capitol’s walls: *The Declaration of Independence*, *The Sur-*

2. Rai, *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai, Volume 2*, 179.

*render of Cornwallis, The Surrender of Bargoyné* “by the British,” Rai personally appended.<sup>3</sup> Later, standing outside the building, the tour guide pointed out that the floor beneath the party’s feet was “paved by beautiful tiles imported from England” and that “it was a matter of great satisfaction that the only English material used for the building of this national edifice was one which was always underfoot.”<sup>4</sup> The audience, barring the few “humiliated English men” in attendance erupted into laughter. “Now, what a tale does this remark tell!” Rai wrote.<sup>5</sup> That tale was the birth of the American nation. And as Rai saw it, the nation emerged not only from “conflict with the savage,” but from war with the once-powerful and now humiliated English, upon whose foundation America was literally and figuratively erected.

The next day, Rai paid a visit downriver to the estate of George Washington in Mount Vernon, Virginia, where he encountered more symbols to fix into his constellation of American icons. “In the main hall,” Rai wrote, “are preserved the key of the French bastille sent by Lafayette to Washington after the capture of the prison.”<sup>6</sup> He noticed three of Washington’s cutlasses mounted to a wall with an “injunction not to unsheathe them for the purpose of shedding blood, except in self-defence or in defence of their country and its rights, and in the latter case to keep them unsheathed and prefer falling with them in their hands, to the relinquishment thereof.”<sup>7</sup> By the end of his narrative tour through the Mount Vernon estate, Rai grew more emotional, his prose more maudlin, and he confessed that the “visit saddened [him]”; he thought of the plight of India under British rule, and described his shame at remaining a colonial subject in the home of these Atlantic patriots.<sup>8</sup>

Reader! Can I tell you what thoughts arose in my mind in the course of my itinerary through Washington and what feelings and sentiments were born and stifled in the course of two brief days I stayed in this city. No! I cannot. I dare not. Bonded slave as I am, how can I give utterance or thoughts which though noble in themselves cannot

3. The career of Lord Cornwallis, the British general in the American Revolution, linked India and America when he became the Governor General of India five years after his disastrous 1781 surrender in Yorktown.

4. Rai, *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai, Volume 2*, 180.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, 182.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

be uttered with freedom and impunity in the land of the mighty Aryans – in the land of Pratap and Shivaji – in the land which is mine by birth and by birth of my forefathers but where I now live only the sufferance of the foreigner.<sup>9</sup>

As Rai connects the lines between his American icons and symbols, a complex set of narratives and metaphors about the United States appears: America is the land borne out of the white pioneer overthrowing the Native American; the land that birthed and housed revolutionaries – from Washington, who led his fellow settler colonial subjects to nationhood, to the Marquis de Lafayette, who, emblemized for Rai both American and French Revolutions.<sup>10</sup> But right alongside Rai's American narrative is the myth of an India – the once unified, now colonized nation – which stood in metaphorical relation to revolutionary America. Next to the 18th century figures of Washington and Lafayette is the 16th century Rajput leader Pratap, and the 17th century Maratha King, Shivaji, both proto-nationalist figures of the “land of the mighty Aryans.”<sup>11</sup> (The term “Aryan,” I will later explain, was itself a site of exchange between two racial typologies.) As one analogy materializes, another ghostly analogy emerges out of its shadow: the appellative twins of Indians and “Indians (Red)” share not only names, but also the coupled trajectories of civilizations lost to the English outsider. Rai muted another analogy when his self-description of being a “bonded slave” avoids the immediate comparison to those Americans who were shackled into chattel slavery only one generation earlier.

I open with this scene for a number of reasons. First, it illustrates the way in which Lala Lajpat Rai's interpreted the United States through a kind of double vision; his readings of America always inflected the character of his own imagined nationalist subjectivity. And second, because it foregrounds the competing narratives of the United States with which Rai, and so many other Indian nationalists of the period before World War I, had to contend. In interpreting and arrang-

9. Rai, *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai, Volume 2*, 182-183.

10. Rai's idealization of France is displayed in full in an article published in the February 1906 issue of the Urdu monthly *Zamana*. In the article, Rai once again pairs American and French icons together – this time, Thomas Paine and Voltaire – as emblems of political and cultural liberty, pit against English conservatism. The article takes a quick turn for the humorous, as Rai begins to draw distinctions between the socially liberated French and the painfully stuffy English, who “eat in silence,” fear dressing in the wrong color combination, “believe in following the beaten track,” and whose “teeth are uneven and mostly dirty” as opposed to the “clean, even and strong” teeth of the French. *ibid.*, 209-216.

11. *Ibid.*, 183.

ing the iconography of the U.S. on the pages of *The Panjabee*, in weaving Brumidi's fresco and Mount Vernon's key and cutlasses into a text already threaded with Indian allusions, Rai inflected the terms of American nationalism with an Indian relevance, invoking a set of historical narratives of victories and defeats, and a set of analogies provocative to the protracted Indian struggle against the British. He was, in short, grafting America's national myths onto the discursive body of Indian nationalism, reimagining the Indian subject as an amalgam of Washington and Lafayette, Pratap, and Shivaji. This Indian subject was like the nation's son who never surrendered his saber, and decidedly unlike the "dejected chieftain" and the "Indian (Red) mother," who kneeled, mourning at the grave of their still-born progeny. After all, Indian nationalism's gendered emblem, Mother India, could not afford to be barren.

Yet, despite the diminished presence of the narrative of Native American slaughter and the altogether silenced narrative of African American slavery, those histories of race continued to lurk in the margins, never fully erased, always threatening to disrupt America's national myth of coherence, and with it, unsettle Rai's Indo-American analogy of national, anticolonial revolution. These narratives – often volatile, often tragic, and always antagonistic to the national project – are what Homi Bhabha has termed the "counter-narratives of the nation." National counter-narratives are the stories that "disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities," maneuvers that include rendering the signifying space of the nation as "archaic and mythical," displacing its "irredeemabl[e] plural[ity]."<sup>12</sup> Rai's editorials on America narrated the United States in ways that were certainly mythologized, naturalized, and semantically sealed. This was partly a product of the places he was visiting – the alabaster monuments in D.C. and Mount Vernon, curated and sanitized sites of national memory – but it was also partly, it seems, a product of his attempt to imagine a clean, revolutionary analogue. In imagining America's narrative of the nation alongside the field of Indian nationalism, however, the "signifying space" of the nation becomes porous, more complex, a space that opens up multiple comparisons, not just those convenient to the nation's own aggrandizing autobiography. And despite Rai's attempt

12. Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 300.

to preserve the signifying space that allowed a set of equivalences drawn between the American nation and its Indian counterpart, these counter-narratives always held the threat of its disruption, creating metaphors which were less idealistic and often more critical. Not just limited to the broad narrative of African Americans and native Americans, the very presence of Indians in America (or “Hindoos,” as they were summarily called then), who were the targets of racial discrimination and often racial misidentification, disrupted the analogies that were being constructed by a nationalist like Rai.

Most of the Bostonians who turned up at Parker Memorial Hall on the 16th and 17th of September 1905, for instance, did not see another Washington in the dark man standing before the podium. Rai lectured on “the religion of the Vedas” and the political condition of India, likely drawing comparison between India’s present and America’s past battle against the British Empire as he later would regularly do in his American speeches. Much to Rai’s bemusement, the crowd seemed to see a mystical “Hindoo” instead, and raised questions regarding the “supposed spiritual powers which Indians [were] believed to possess.”<sup>13</sup>

The tension in that Boston Hall in 1905 captures the central concern of this chapter; Rai’s analogical thinking, his desire to see himself and the Indian nationalist cause within the symbolic telos of the American Revolution, was constantly disrupted by the realities of his experience in the U.S. There, Rai confronted America’s discourse on South Asians, ranging from the aforementioned “exoticized Hindoo,” whose links to a pre-colonial past intrigued (and occasionally threatened) American religious thinking to the laboring South Asians on the West Coast, whose real presence was folded into the racist, anti-Asiatic politics of American labor movements.<sup>14</sup> Moreover,

13. Rai, *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai, Volume 2*, 169; There was certainly a precedent for the crowd’s interest in the “spiritual” Hindu – a decade earlier, in 1893, Brahma Samaj leader P.C. Mazoomdar and Swami Vivekananda had wowed audiences in Chicago at the Parliament of Religions. Meanwhile, Rabindranath Tagore toured the U.S. on lecture circuits on several occasions (1912-13, 1916-17, 1920-21, 1929, and 1930), drawing in large crowds for his lectures, but nevertheless drawing ridicule for his appearance in public. See Stephen N. Hay, “Rabindranath Tagore in America,” *American Quarterly* 14 (3 1962): 449.

14. This early West Coast history of the South Asian diaspora has been traced and commented by several scholars. See Joan Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Vinay Lal, *The Other Indians: A Political and Cultural History of South Asians in America* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2008); See especially Chapter 8, “The Tide of Turbans” in Ronald Takaki, *A History of Asian Americans: Strangers From a Different Shore (Updated and Revised)* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1998); Recent work by Vivek Bald has begun to augment the dominant narratives of early South Asian American diaspora by tracing

when he returned to the United States in November 1914, Rai left behind the national monuments and moved in the circles of early 20th century American progressive leaders.<sup>15</sup> He regularly crossed paths with American liberal and radical circles that supported the Indian nationalist struggle. Figures like Moorfield Storey, the leader of the American Anti-Imperialist League, who Rai briefly met in 1905; J.T. Sunderland, the Unitarian minister and Civil War veteran, who later took over Rai's short-lived India Home Rule League; Agnes Smedley, a white, feminist member of the Ghadar party, who later became a member of the Comintern; and African American leaders as ideologically opposed as W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, all lent their support and contacts to Rai.<sup>16</sup> In speeches, novels, autobiographies, articles and "little magazines," these leaders actively brought the counter-narratives of the United States to Rai's attention, as they organized a new politics of reform.

In this chapter, I am interested in examining Rai's depictions of three racialized figures that stood in for the counter-narratives of America: first, the Black subject, whose presence in America brought out the legacy of slavery and the perpetuation of the racist character of the nation; second, the colonized Filipino subject, whose presence raised questions about America's imperialist (and accordingly, its anti-colonial) legacy; and third, the "Hindu," who stood among these counternarratives both as the Indian migrant facing anti-Asiatic policies, as well as the colonized subject on the world stage. As Rai was defining and advocating his Home Rule version of Indian nationalism in a text like *Young India* (1915), which he started writing in Boston in December 1914, he was also defining the United States, contending with narratives that the country brought to the question of Indian nationhood, seeking homologies to the Indian colonial context. I con-

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the understudied history of lascar sailors, who traveled to ports in New Orleans in the late 19th and early 20th century. See Vivek Bald, "'Lost' in the City," *South Asian Popular Culture* 5 (1 2007): 59–76; Bald, "Overlapping Diasporas, Multiracial Lives: South Asian Muslims in U.S. Communities of Color, 1880-1950."

15. The most useful source for retracing Rai's second trip through the United States through the U.S. remains Naeem Rathore, "Indian Nationalist Agitation in the United States: A Study of Lala Lajpat Rai and the India Home Rule League in America, 1914-1920" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1965).

16. Along the way, an eclectic cast of secondary characters appear from this period of the early South Asian diaspora in America: from the Ghadar revolutionaries who tried and failed to gain his support (Chandra Chakravarty and Ernest Sekunna, the Bengali and German pair who played a large role in the Hindu-German conspiracy of 1917; Ram Chandra, one of the leaders of the Ghadar Party from 1914 to 1917) to artists like Dhan Gopal Mukerji, the Calcutta-born, California-based writer, most famous for writing children's fiction.

sider how the various frameworks of racial division influenced Rai's larger nationalist imagination. What was the racial logic behind Rai's brand of anti-imperialism? In what ways did the colonized Indian resemble the African American – whose status in the U.S. was also second class – politically disenfranchised, and facing an unsympathetic white power structure? In what ways did America's relatively young colony in the South East Asia appear as another manifestation of the British Raj? And finally, what kind of Indian subject arose out of these comparisons?

The answers to these questions changed over the two decades between his first trip to the U.S. and his death in 1928, during which time he wrote about the U.S. in essays, and speeches published in American newspapers like *The New York Times*, the Calcutta-based *Modern Review*, and his own New York-based organ, *Young India*. But by far, his fullest statement on the country was *The United States of America: A Hindu's Impressions and Study* (1916), which he penned after a tour across America that took him to New York, Chicago, Atlanta, New Orleans, Los Angeles, and Berkeley from November 1914 to June 1915. Rai was in the East bay, at the home of his friend Professor Arthur Pope, when he put the finishing touches on the monograph, the central thesis of which was that “the problems of the United States are very similar to those that face us in India.”<sup>17</sup> But this gets us ahead of the story, and the events in Rai's life that led up to that monograph's publication serve as our major point of entry.

We pick up nine years after that September day in the Washington capitol. Rai is aboard the *S.S. Philadelphia* crossing the Atlantic, from England to the New World, from the Raj's metropole to a place he had yet to fully define.

## 2.2 Westward Bound 1914

In 1914, the voyage from Liverpool to New York City lasted an entire week. It was enough time for the passengers on the steamer to befriend Rai and his colleagues – the scientist Jagdish Chandra Bose impressed boarders with his laboratory equipment, his theories of radio waves and plant

17. Lala Lajpat Rai, *The United States of America: A Hindu's Impressions and Study* (Calcutta: R. Chatterjee, 1917), iii.



physiology. A woman that Rai nicknamed the “Turkish girl” fell in love with one of his aloof friends (a point which troubled the self-described “puritanic” enough that he devoted two pages about her). Also on board were several prominent Indian internationalists – Shiva Prasad Gupta, who later represented the Congress at the second conference of the League Against Imperialism, and Benoy Kumar Sarkar, a prolific and prominent ideologue of the Bengali Swadeshi movement. It was also on board that Rai might have had his first glimpse of the racial fears that surrounded American immigration. “Indians, Syrians, Egyptians and people from south-east Europe” were allegedly born with a highly contagious eye disease that caused blindness, an apologetic doctor explained, while examining the seven Indians on board for the second time. Rai, whose critical lens of the United States was then blurred at best, made no further comment.<sup>18</sup>

Much had changed in the nine years that elapsed between Rai’s first visit to the United States in 1905 and his second visit, which began in November 1914, when he sailed from England to New York. In 1905, Rai was only forty years old, a rising political leader from Punjab, who was still known more for his leadership as an Arya Samajist reformer than his work with the Indian National Congress. His tour covered New York, Buffalo, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston, where he lectured as much on Hinduism as he did on the nationalist movement. In his observations of the country, captured in interviews with the *Boston Globe*, polemics published in the *New York Post* and the *New York Republican*, as well as Indian organs like *The Panjabee*, Rai emphasized the difference between Americans and Europeans, even as it pertained to custom (“[In England] hospitality like this is an exception while in America it is the rule”).<sup>19</sup> He spoke with as much reverence for the American education system as he did for the glass flowers in Harvard’s Natural History Museum. Rai did not fully ignore the problems in American society – he noted, for instance, that “whites have a great prejudice against what are here known as the coloured people” – but also wrote with optimism of the non-European heterogeneity of the U.S. “[T]here are Filipinos, Cubans, Indians (both Red and East), Arabs, Syrians, Chinese, Japanese,” he wrote, and “[a]lmost every national-

18. Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai, Volume 5*, ed. Bal Ram Nanda, 64-65.

19. *Ibid.*, 187.

ity in fairly good strength publishes its own organs.”<sup>20</sup> Among the Indians he met during his short stay, Rai mentioned a meeting with Maulana Barkatullah, president of the newly-established Hindustani Progressive Association of New York.<sup>21</sup> He also made acquaintance with Moorfield Storey and the Anti-Imperialist League, an ideologically eclectic group of American intellectuals that rallied in opposition to America’s attempted annexation of the Philippines and whose membership once included Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, Ambrose Bierce, and William Jennings Bryan.<sup>22</sup> An interview during the week of Rai’s departure from the United States to England, was published in the *New York Evening Post* as “The Lesson that Indians should Learn from the United States.” What Indians could glean most, he remarked, was “the spirit of unity and nationality that obtains in [the U.S.] among a mixed population composed of all nations of the earth.”<sup>23</sup> Colonial India, with its myriad of religions, regions, and castes, played against each other under British rule could learn the unity of nationhood from the U.S., Rai implied, however fragile that unity was in the tumultuous years of the Gilded Age.

When Rai returned to the United States in 1914, his stature in the Indian nationalist movement had risen considerably. In 1907, after being arrested for sedition and jailed at Mandalay Fort Prison without a trial, Rai wrote about the episode in the pamphlet *The Story of My Deportation*, quickly becoming a public symbol of the colonial government’s punitive excesses. That same year, he, alongside fellow Congress leaders, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal, became known as “Lal-Bal-Pal.” For their incisive commentary and protests, the trio were turned into national figures of resistance to the partition of Bengal. Rai’s notoriety quickly traversed national borders. A future acquaintance, N.S. Hardikar, who studied medicine at the University of Michigan and was the leader of the Hindusthancee Students Association, noted, “Before leaving India for

20. Rai, *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai, Volume 5*, 184-5.

21. Barkatullah would later teach Hindi at the Tokyo School of Foreign Languages, where he published the pan-Islamist journal *Islamic Fraternity*. Eventually, he returned to the United States in 1912 or 1914 (there are conflicting reports) to aid the San Francisco headquarters of the Ghadar Party. Rai would meet Barkatullah again during that time, but being opposed to the Ghadar party’s flirtation with the German government and their more radically conceived anticolonial revolution, Rai privately called Barkatullah a “baglol.”

22. See Alan Raucher, “American Anti-Imperialists and the Pro-India Movement, 1900-1932,” *Pacific Historical Review* 43 (1 1974): 83–110; Christopher Lasch, “The Anti-Imperialists, the Philippines, and the Inequality of Man,” *Journal of Southern History* 24 (3 1958).

23. Rai, *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai, Volume 2*, 187.

America, I had read of the ‘Lal-Bal-Pal’ Trio and young as we were in 1907, we [the H.S.A.] had the utmost regard and respect for them.”<sup>24</sup> When he arrived in the U.S., Rai was invited to college campuses across the country, and eventually roped Hardikar into becoming Rai’s India Home Rule League secretary in New York City.<sup>25</sup>

In May 1914, Rai arrived in London as an Indian National Congress delegate. While his major preoccupations involved the colonial-metropole relations between Britain and India, he was certainly aware of the happenings in North America, as they pertained to the recent influx of immigrants in Canada. The *Komagata Maru* incident – in which nearly four-hundred Indians, mainly Sikhs, were refused entry into Canada and were left on a ship for a month before it returned to India – stirred outrage across India.<sup>26</sup> In England at the time, Rai was invited by a Sikh leader to Canada, he notes in *USAHIS*, but with the war underway he postponed his trip.<sup>27</sup> Seizing the opportunity for commentary, on June 7, Rai wrote a letter to the editor of *The Tribune*, published nearly a month later. The *Komagata Maru* incident had brought to fore the rule of colonial difference, Rai pointed out, for the British Government

want[s] the Indians to believe that they are the equal subjects of the King, but when the former claim their rights as such, they behave as if they have neither the power nor the desire to secure the same for them. Perhaps, it is not so much the fault of the Government of India as of those statesmen who have to reconcile their professions and principles of liberalism with their policy of subjection.<sup>28</sup>

But even as its northern neighbor invited much criticism as an extension of the empire, which discriminated against its darker commonwealth subjects, the United States had somehow escaped the critical lens of most Indian leaders. In April 1911, Har Dayal – Punjabi Anarchist, part-time Stanford lecturer, founder of the radical San Francisco-based Ghadar Party, and “idealist of a

24. N.S. Hardikar, *Lala Lajpat Rai in America* (Delhi: Servants of the People Society, 1966), 5.

25. Dohra Ahmad, *Landscapes of Hope: Anti-Colonial Utopianism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

26. See the documentary Ali Kazimi, *Continuous Journey*, (Vancouver: Peripheral Visions, 2004). For a historical monograph on the incident, see Hugh Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada’s Colour Bar* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1989).

27. Rai, *The United States of America: A Hindu’s Impressions and Study*, 401.

28. Rai, *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai, Volume 5*, 22.

strange type,” as Rai described him – penned an essay, “India in America,” published in Calcutta’s *Modern Review*.<sup>29</sup> In his essay, Dayal cathected onto the symbol of the American flag, almost to the point of religious zealotry. “No one can breathe beneath the Stars and Stripes without being lifted to a higher level of thought and action,” Dayal wrote. “The great flag of the greatest democratic state in the world’s history burns up all cowardice, servility, pessimism and indifference, as fire consumes the dross and leaves pure gold behind. The flag is a moral tonic, a religious intoxicant, more potent than a thousand sermons and revivalists meetings.”; the flag is a “mighty messenger of hope and good-will, converting the dregs of humanity into ornaments and pathless deserts into smiling homesteads”; the flag stands for “unity, liberty, tolerance, and individual progress and not for racial self-assertion and bitter memories of the past.”<sup>30</sup>

The assertion that the American flag, the metonym of the nation, represented “unity, liberty, tolerance” and the lack of “racial self-assertion,” betrayed the actual experience of Dayal and the laboring Indians along the Pacific coast. Those Indians, mainly Sikhs from the Jullunder and Hoshiapur districts in Punjab, faced attacks and discrimination by anti-Asiatic organizations throughout the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> By February 1914, Dayal was already turning up in the national press to protest proposed immigration legislation that would prohibit Indian eligibility for American citizenship.<sup>32</sup> That April, the “tolerance” embodied in the flag was again tested when Dayal was wanted on charges of spreading anarchist propaganda, managing to flee the country for Sweden before his arrest. In Dayal’s writing, the signifying space opened up in the American flag represented the mottoes of liberalism, yet his actual experience seemed to contradict that very notion.

Stranger still was Dayal’s invocation of the Aryan, in casting Indian immigrants alongside American settlers. Dayal wrote that the flag, like some baptismal fire, had renewed the Indian subject – the “Hindu laborers, students, and swamis in America” – embodying him with the spirit

29. Lala Lajpat Rai, *Young India: An Interpretation and a History of the Nationalist Movement from Within* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1916), 199.

30. Har Dayal, “India in America,” *Modern Review* 10 (1 1911): 1–11.

31. Lal, *The Other Indians: A Political and Cultural History of South Asians in America*.

32. Har Dayal, “Hindus Arrive to Protest,” *Washington Post*, February 10, 1914, 1.

of “the old Aryans who colonized [India], and developed schools of learning and philosophy. All that life is being lived over again here, the Sikhs representing the sturdy Aryan settlers.” Dayal’s choice of words is curious – describing, in hugely laudatory terms, the process of “colonization” that the Aryan settlers had allegedly conducted, at a time when such a narrative would seem largely at odds with anti-imperialist critique.<sup>33</sup>

By and large, the meanings of race to which Indians in America subscribed, when Rai arrived in the United States in 1914, were unclear and polysemic. Students like Saranghadar Das wrote in *Modern Review* about being mistaken for “Negroes at the first sight” and confronting general anti-“Asiatic” prejudice, but at the same time, Das claimed that “in a railway train no American comes forward and says to a Hindu, ‘Get out of here, you dog of an Indian,’ or ‘Get out of here, you nigger,’” a statement that would not have held true for colonial India.<sup>34</sup> Like Dayal, Das too viewed the United States as a space of politicization, and for that reason alone, asserted that Indians ought to come to the U.S., the “Land of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.” Working at the Western Sugar Refinery Company of San Francisco had made him acutely aware of the “the fight between Capital and Labor,” and the few encounters with “race hatred knocks out all our caste, religious and provincial prejudices and reminds us of our inhuman treatment of our ‘untouchables’ and pariahs.”<sup>35</sup> Sudhindra Bose, a student and later a lecturer in Political Science at the University of Iowa, wrote more critically of racial segregation in the U.S., stating that “[o]ne of the greatest problems which faces the south to-day is the negro problem.” But Bose also claimed that “race prejudice does not seem to affect the people of Indian whether they happen to be in the North and South,” as opposed to in England, where “the vicious color line has been so tightly drawn that even in the Inns of Court [...] Indian and native English students seldom eat together.”<sup>36</sup> In both cases, racial prejudice explodes with several different meanings out of the American context – for Das, it accentuated not only the English prejudice within the British Raj, but made him aware of caste, religious, and regional discrimination among Indians; for Bose, the “color line” was

33. Dayal, “India in America.”

34. Saranghadar Das, “Why Must We Emigrate to the United States of America,” *Modern Review* (1 1911): 69–80.

35. *Ibid.*, 78.

36. Sudhindra Bose, “Life in the Southern States of America,” *Modern Review* (1 1911): 129–33.

used obliquely to critique the divide between the Indian and English subject. The point is that discussions about racial discrimination in the American context often enabled criticism of both British racism towards Indians, and intranational prejudices within India, even while they seemed to ignore the seriousness of the original subject altogether. No student perhaps felt the intranational prejudices of India as sharply as Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, who in 1916 was studying at Columbia University, only blocks away from Harlem at the cusp of its cultural renaissance. Born into the Mahar caste (an “untouchable,” or what he would later term “Dalit” caste from Western India), Ambedkar would eventually return to India to become the most important Dalit leader in India in the 20th century, eventually becoming the chairman of the constituent assembly which drafted the Indian constitution. Ambedkar’s early writing also tried to distinguish the social relations of caste and race. In “Castes in India,” written for an Anthropology Seminar during his stay at Columbia, Ambedkar suggested that endogamy ultimately gave rise to the Indian caste system, and while other non-caste endogamous groups exist, such as “Negroes and Whites [...] in the United States,” he dismissed the comparison – perhaps preemptively – concluding that “in India the situation is different.”<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, in the decades to come Ambedkar turned to the “Negro question” again, once, as I will describe in a later chapter, in response to Lajpat Rai. For Lajpat Rai, the encounter with race in the U.S. played an even more complicated, and fraught role, as his writing reveals.

Racial divisions were physically apparent from the moment Rai set foot in America on November 21, 1914. Queued at customs, Rai and his companions stood in a line that in many ways organized the racial hierarchy pervasive at the time. “[T]he American citizens get off legally by stating the place of their birth and the date of their birth; next come the white people; the Asiatics are examined most searchingly, specially the Indians and the Japs,” Rai explained, nevertheless insisting that “no distinction is made between white and coloured or between Americans and non-Americans.”<sup>38</sup> The moment is interesting in that Rai returns to the racial vocabulary of the U.S. –

37. B.R. Ambedkar, *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, ed. Valerian Rodrigues (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

38. Rai, *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai, Volume 5*, 63.

“white and coloured.” But even more importantly, it shows that in the context of the nationally bound space of the customs, Rai saw himself as a member of the latter, in sheer contrast to his earlier identification with Aryan whiteness. That now-commonplace assertion – Indians not being white – was a much more contentious issue in the early decades of the 20th century.

## 2.3 Black, Brown, and White

By the 1910s, an implicit argument had developed regarding the racial stock shared between Americans (who were implicitly “White”) and Hindus (who were biologically “Caucasian”). Life on the ground, however, revealed another story altogether. As early as 1907, the Chinese and Korean Exclusion League, based in San Francisco, contested Indian immigration along the Pacific coast, displaying an ironically inclusionary spirit by renaming themselves the Asiatic Exclusion League in order to bring Hindus into the fold. That year, the League played a central role in organizing the Bellingham riots in Washington, where a mob gathered to beat and displace hundreds of Sikh laborers who had arrived to the logging town months earlier. Soon thereafter, copycat actions followed along the coast – in Everett, Washington that November, Live Oak, California in 1908, and St. John, Oregon in 1910. Formed as a consortium of labor organizations and even supported by American Federation of Labor President Samuel Gompers, the Exclusion League kept a watchful eye on the number of Indians who migrated into the orchards, lumberyards and sawmills on the West coast. In a report on “The Hindoo Question in California” presented during a February 1908 meeting, the question was raised on whether “the Hindoos [were] here in sufficient numbers to constitute a menace to the American laborer?” The report enumerated the “undesirability” of Indians – “their lack of cleanliness, disregard of sanitary laws, petty pilfering [...] of chickens, [their] insolence of women” – but concluded they were “more sinned against than sinning,” blaming the Canadian Pacific Railroad and Lieutenant Governor for importing Hindu labor in order to reduce wages.<sup>39</sup>

39. Asiatic Exclusion League, *Proceedings of the Asiatic Exclusion League, 1907-1913* (New York: Arno Press, 1977).



## HINDUS IN OREGON.

There Poor Laborers are given the Bible in their own tongue.

Figure 2.2: “Hindus in Oregon” from Rai’s *The United States of America: A Hindu’s Impression and Study*

In the years that followed, however, the Hindoo Question became a more fraught and lopsided topic of debate. In January 1909, the League again raised concerns about Indian migration into California. “Who are these Hindus and what are their antecedents?” a report questioned, “What evidence is there that they are seeking to come to the United States to acquire homes and participate in the institutions that have builded [*sic*] here by citizens of the white race?” Dichotomies between the Hindu and white laborer became increasingly racialized; while the League framed their opposition to migrants in terms of labor (the Asian migrants were making things difficult for white workers, living in such lowered standards that the latter could not compete, etc.), their underlying ideology always hinted at a broader formation of white supremacy. Their opposition towards Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese, for instance, had always invoked an essentialized racial difference, supported by the-then anthropologically-sanctioned categories of “Caucasoid” and “Mongoloid,” and at times invoking hackneyed historical narratives of Genghis Khan, Timur





A band of Hindus on a transpacific liner landing at San Francisco. During the week of February 5 three hundred and twenty-seven came through the Golden Gate. There are now ten thousand Hindus in California. Their first entry was into British Columbia and the Puget Sound country, where a race-war became quickly kindled and resulted in serious riots. The northern winters, however, turned the Orientals to the south, and they have become an element to be reckoned with in the labor situation of California. They are, on the whole, inferior workmen. They manifest no interest in the country or its customs; and they differ from the unobtrusive Chinaman by being sullen and uncompromising in adhering to their habits

Figure 2.3: Image from March 26, 1910 issue of *Collier's Weekly*. The caption describes the unfavorable characteristics of “Hindu” laborers – “inferior workmen,” who “manifest no interest in the country,” and only “differ from the unobtrusive Chinamen by being sullen and uncompromising in their habits.”

the Lame, and Babar to feed conspiracies of an eminent Asian takeover of the Pacific.<sup>40</sup> But even if the League and the supportive press argued against Indian immigration and naturalization, legally the Hindu's rights to citizenship could not be contested, at least on racial lines. In an editorial in the New York-based socialist rag *The Call*, the Commissioner of Immigration Hart H. North stated, “The Hindus are not governed by an exclusion law such as we have respecting Chinese, Japanese and Koreans; they have the same legal standing that any European immigrant has, and I cannot treat them otherwise.”<sup>41</sup> As a solution, North proposed a hypothetical “general Asiatic law” to avoid discriminating between the different Asiatics who turned up on the Pacific shore for work, in order to discriminate equally against them all.

40. League, *Proceedings of the Asiatic Exclusion League, 1907-1913*, 7.

41. *Ibid.*, 46.

The “legal standing” that North referred to revolved around the imprecise definition of “white” that existed throughout the history of the United States. In 1790, the U.S. Congress ruled that in order to become a naturalized citizen of the Union, one must be “a free white person,” a requirement that lasted until the Civil War threw that racial prerequisite into jeopardy.<sup>42</sup> During the momentous 1856 Dred Scott case, African Americans gained the right to citizenship and naturalization albeit with several limiting conditions. Still, the restriction against Native American and Asian naturalization continued. Legal historian Ian Haney Lopez explains, “Congress opted to maintain the ‘white person’ prerequisite, but to extend the right to naturalize to ‘persons of African nativity, or African descent.’”<sup>43</sup> What “white” actually meant, however, was still a contentious issue. During the period after the Civil War, racialist arguments forwarded by Indians made coeval the terms “white” and “Caucasian,” and the latter category was derived by a racial classification system that gained traction in succeeding decades. According to A.H. Keane’s ethnological study, *The World’s People* (1908), the human family could be divided into four main categories: “Negroes or Blacks in the Sudan, South Africa, or Oceania” “Mongol or Yellow in Central, North and East Asia,” “Amerind (Red or Brown) in the New World,” or the “Caucasian (White and also Dark) in North Africa, Europe, Irania, *India*, Western Asia, and Polynesia.”<sup>44</sup> Drawing from the racial theory of Indian civilization, which hypothesized that Aryan settlers, who migrated from modern day Iran inhabited the Indian subcontinent and constituted the genetic makeup of Northern Indians, many South Asians applying for citizenship in the 1910s and 1920s presented evidence of their eligibility for citizenship on grounds that they were “Aryan,” and hence, they were “Caucasian,” and hence they were “white.” Depending on the mood of the judges and clerks making the decision, this argument would or would not hold: For Abdullah Dolla (1910), Bal-sara (1910), Akshay Kumar Mozumdar (1913), Taraknath Das (1914), Singh (1919) it did, but for Sadar Bhagwan Singh (1917) and a younger Taraknath Das (1911) it did not. For those early

42. Joan Jensen’s chapter “Naturalization and the Constitution” in *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* includes a discussion on this ruling, and its relation to South Asian immigrants in the U.S..

43. Ian Haney-Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York and London: New York University, 2006), 31.

44. Augustus Henry Keane, *The World’s Peoples: A Popular Account of Their Bodily & Mental Characters, Beliefs, Traditions, Political and Social Institutions* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1908), 5.

decades in South Asian American history, rights to citizenship truly hinged on the whims of the courts and clerks.

Returning to 1914, when Rai stepped off the *S.S. Philadelphia* and makes a distinction between “whites and coloured,” implying that he was a member of the latter, one could argue that Rai found a potentially radical, if fleeting moment of identification, even if he argued that at customs he and his colleagues were treated no different (regardless of the fact that, with the eye examination and the intrusive interrogation, he clearly was). By the time he sat down to write his monograph *The United States: A Hindu’s Impressions and Study* (hereafter known as *USAHIS*) the following Spring, Rai’s thoughts on American race relations had developed considerably. Race, and particularly what was then known as the “Negro Problem” became a site to interrogate various structures of power, from the hierarchies of caste to class to race to nation. The metaphors in *USAHIS*, however, became quickly entangled. If at times Rai saw the position of African Americans in the United States as analogous to the indignity faced by the depressed classes – the so-called “Untouchables” – at the hands of the upper caste Indians, at other times he saw such a position as analogous to the indignity faced by Indians (and metonymically, the entire Indian nation) at the hands of the British. At other times, Rai flipped the script, using caste as an analytical category for the various racial struggles in the U.S. as well as a metaphor for the class struggle in the entire industrialized West.

Armed with letters from his New York acquaintances – W.E.B. Du Bois and Mary Ovington, both co-founders of the N.A.A.C.P. – Rai traveled to the deep South in the Winter of 1915. He first visited Alabama, where he was greeted by Booker T. Washington and given a tour of Tuskegee Institute. From there, he traveled to Georgia, where he visited Morehouse College and met John Hope, the first African American President of the school. Along the way, it seems that Rai also witnessed firsthand the overt racism of Jim Crow America. Attending a screening of D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*, he was shocked to find a frenzied audience reaching what he called “the highest pitch of race hatred.”<sup>45</sup> Twice, during dinner conversations with his otherwise “charming” white

45. Rai, *The United States of America: A Hindu’s Impressions and Study*, 394.

hostesses, Rai asked about the Negro problem, only to receive angry responses about the “new generation” of “wicked,” non-docile Negroes.<sup>46</sup> His readings and experiences culminated in three chapters devoted to the Negro Problem in *USAHIS*: “The Education of the Negro,” “The Negro in American Politics,” and the more provocative and analytic “Caste in America.” Studying the “the Negro Problem on the spot” was “[o]ne of the things that prompted me to pay a second visit to the United States,” Rai wrote at the onset.<sup>47</sup> Like the other chapters in his monograph, Rai quoted extensively, filling pages with statistics, verbatim passages of local law, and the paraphrased arguments of national leaders. The downside of his method of writing is that it is now difficult to extract Rai’s own position from the long passages he excerpted from the likes of Washington, Du Bois, and Kelly Miller, the Dean of Howard university.

Only when Rai began to draw comparisons between the U.S. and India, did he stake any sort of claim on the subject. Projecting the issue of India’s caste system onto race relations in the U.S., Rai declared, “[t]he Negro is the PARIAN of America.” And lest the caste origins of the word “pariah” be lost on American readers, Rai clarified, “[t]here is some analogy between the Negro problem in the United States of America and the problem of the depressed classes in India.”<sup>48</sup> “The two cases are not on all fours with each other,” Rai maintained, but one major thread that tied the Pariah and Negro together was their shared experience of social segregation.

When Rai discussed the discrimination against “people of a different color [and] (between the *Varnas* of the Hindus),” he noted that when it came to inter-dining and inter-marriage, caste and racial segregation played out in exactly the same way in the U.S. and in India.<sup>49</sup> Two examples, which Rai learned through anecdotes in the first months of his stay, were used to make his point. A Harvard professor of Economics told Rai that after a conference that both he and W.E.B. Du Bois attended, they wished to continue the conversation over dinner; “Dr. Du Bois remarked that the only eating place open to him was the refreshment room of the railway station, and how

46. Rai, *The United States of America: A Hindu’s Impressions and Study*, 395.

47. *Ibid.*, 77.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*, 389.

eventually all of them had to go there in order to have the pleasure of Dr. Du Bois' company."<sup>50</sup> John Hope, the president of Morehouse College, explained that he is forced to sit in the back of a streetcar and, in Rai's words, "give up the front seats to the most ignorant, dark-colored, white scoundrel."<sup>51</sup> "Neither the fact of their fathers being white people or that their own color is fair, not their education and learning is of the slightest help to them so far as their social and political status is concerned," Rai wrote.<sup>52</sup> When it came to inter-marriage, Rai aimed his criticism towards Christian ideology and the contradictory way that it "forbid[s] the Negro loving a white girl and having issue by her, but [...] give[s] a free license to a white man having negro concubines."<sup>53</sup> Going beyond just highlighting an insular instance of Church hypocrisy, Rai used the point to lodge a broader critique of Christian missionaries, who, like the colonial government in India, had used the inhumanity of the caste system (as well as "sati," the oft-mentioned example of religiously-sanctioned female immolation) to argue for India's incapacity for self-governance. The Indians, he thought, were at least not so hypocritical:

To me it seems that the Hindu Aryans of India never applied the color bar so rigidly as the Christian whites of the United States of America are doing today, in the 20th century of the Christian era. yet Christian writers who dare not raise their voice against the color line in the U.S.A., have no hesitation in sitting in judgment on Hindus and denouncing them and their religious system for the institution of caste.<sup>54</sup>

Aside from the obvious attack that Rai lodged against the empire's American apologists for ignoring their own homegrown institution of caste, there is another point of note in this statement. Rai placed the "color line" inside the borders of the Indian nation. If the Negroes are the Pariahs, then the opposing analogous pair, on the other side of the "color line" (or bar) are the "Christian whites of the United States" and the "Hindu Aryans of India." In other words, Blacks are to whites as Pariahs are to Hindu Aryans. This begs the question, how did Rai define the "color line" at all?

When Rai wrote about "the color line" in *USAHIS*, he used quotations from Du Bois's *Souls*

50. Rai, *The United States of America: A Hindu's Impressions and Study*, 388.

51. *Ibid.*, 392.

52. *Ibid.*, 389.

53. *Ibid.*, 392.

54. *Ibid.*, 393.

of *Black Folk* and Paul Leland Haworth's *America in Ferment*. Haworth, a professor of History at Columbia University, was quoted by Rai as follows: "In his chapter on 'the color line,' Mr. Haworth, an American writer, remarks that if the subject be considered in all aspects, 'it is hardly too much to say that the problem of the color line is one of the biggest problems of the ages.'"<sup>55</sup> Rai's selective quotation is somewhat misleading. *America in Ferment*, a polemical book that the *New York Times* deemed "Progressive," was actually deeply conservative when it came to the topic of racial integration. In Haworth's estimation, the "color line" was a concept that described the distinct segregation of racial groups. According to him, the reason the color line was "one of the biggest problems of the ages" was because of the friction that arose from increased contact between different groups as a result of the forces of migration and colonization. Drawing on the beliefs of intrinsic cultural incompatibility, Haworth described the presence of the color line between the British and Indians in the Raj, periodically traversed when the former "meet [Indians] on occasion socially, even mingle their blood with them illicitly, but the two races do not coalesce [...] in spite of the fact that a large proportion of Hindu Blood is Aryan."<sup>56</sup> In the U.S., Haworth acknowledged that the national sentiment against the "backward" Chinese, Japanese, and Hindu laborers led to unfair treatment, but his proposed solution was a more rigorous enforcement of exclusionary laws.<sup>57</sup> As for the Negro problem, Haworth lamented that "[u]nfortunately race prejudice does not prevent illicit unions, and it is in this manner that virtually all intermixture of blood occurs."<sup>58</sup> In other words, the problem with the color line in the twentieth century was that it was beginning to erode.

Du Bois' paraphrased commentary on the "color line" in Rai's *USAHIS*, which read simply that "the color question is the problem of the twentieth century," came from the opposite end of the political spectrum. What goes missing in Rai's paraphrase, however, is the explication of Du Bois's statement in his chapter "Of the Dawn of Freedom." Du Bois wrote, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, – the relation of the dark to the lighter races of

55. Rai, *The United States of America: A Hindu's Impressions and Study*, 388.

56. Paul Leland Haworth, *America in Ferment* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1915), 115-116.

57. *Ibid.*, 118.

58. *Ibid.*, 138.

men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”<sup>59</sup> From the beginning, Du Bois had intended the metaphor of the “color line” to describe an international problem, pushing the plight of African Americans into a larger arena that included global imperialism. The phrase debuted in July 1900 at the Pan-African Conference in Westminster Town Hall, where Du Bois gave a speech titled “To the Nations of the World,” an echo of his famous *Souls of Black Folk* maxim:

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line, the question as to how far differences of race, which show themselves chiefly in the colour of the skin and the texture of the hair, are going to be made, hereafter, the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilisation.<sup>60</sup>

The subjects of the color line, Du Bois explained, were not only the Negroes in America, but “the millions of black men in Africa, America, and the Islands of the Sea, [and] brown and yellow myriads elsewhere.” Those “darker races” experienced modern civilization, with its promises of “justice, freedom, and culture” through the institutions of slavery and rapidly expanding, globe-carving colonization. The line did not describe an intrinsic, biological racial difference – as it appears to have in Haworth’s interpretation – but rather, like Du Bois’s other popular metaphor of the veil, it underscored the imbalance of power between Western civilization and the colonized, the enslaved, the conquered, the black, brown, red, and yellow masses that lay in its opposition. Six years later, the phrase reappeared in a short essay titled “The Color Line Belts the World,” first published in *Collier’s Weekly* in 1906, and written on the occasion of the Asian victory in the Russo-Japanese war. Du Bois once again asserted that the “Negro problem in America is but a local phase of a world problem.” And taking the Japanese triumph against Czarist Russia as a symbolic blow against a major white national power, Du Bois wrote, “Shall the awakening of these sleepy millions be in accordance with, and aided by, the great ideals of white civilization, or in spite of them and against them? This is the problem of the Color Line.”<sup>61</sup>

59. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903), 13.

60. W.E.B. Du Bois, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis (New York: Henry Holt / Company, 1995), 639.

61. W.E.B. Du Bois, *W.E.B. Du Bois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line*, ed. Bill V. Mullen and Cathryn Watson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 33-34.

Rai's interpretation of the "color line" was neither like Haworth's nor Du Bois's. Obviously, Rai did not share Haworth's sexual anxieties over the worldwide slackening of racial divisions, but neither did he exactly imbue the "color line" with the internationalist racial dimensions that Du Bois did. In Rai's mind, the conceptual "color line" that divided America's Negroes and whites was the same social barrier that divided India's pariahs and the Hindu Aryans. And despite his strange affixation of the racial category of "Aryan" to the latter of the pair, nowhere else does Rai suggest a racial distinction between the depressed classes and the elites – the Untouchables and the Brahmins – in the caste system. Rai did, however, write that "the Hindus come from the same stock as the Europeans," an argument, which as I described earlier, was backed up by the pseudo-scientific racial classifications in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The analogy between American and Indian social divisions was, under those considerations, relatively clean.

Intentional or not, one of the effects of that analogy was to subsume the entire issue of untouchability inside the national borders of India, fitting caste into the national frame. In Du Bois's view, the narrative of the Negro produced a snag in the national narrative of the United States, presenting not only a group that was separate from the bulk of white Americans, but that contested the very fabric of American citizenship by virtue of its identification outside the national borders of the U.S. For Rai, who painstakingly narrated the history of slavery in *USAHIS*, the Negro problem was ultimately an American problem, and hence, the counter-narrative introduced by the presence of African Americans did not disrupt any India-U.S. analogies. Rather than a contestation of the entire national form, one might read Rai's interpretation of "the color line" as being absorbed by the larger national form; like caste discrimination, the American "color line" was an in-house problem to be fixed.

Yet, Rai displayed certain analogical slippages, in which he compared the social problems faced by African Americans as analogous to those faced by Indians, more generally, under the colonial yoke of the British. In the opening paragraph of the chapter "The Negro in American Politics," Rai compared the institution of slavery, in which "a man owns a man, body and soul" to political bondage, in which "one nation rules over another, holds it under complete sway, exploits it and



uses her.”<sup>62</sup> The meaning here is that the deliberate restriction of knowledge to Indians functioned similarly to efforts to miseducate African Americans, in that they served to maintain a population that could not formulate a resistance to state power. Still, Rai mutes the counter-narrative of African Americans by distinguishing the Indian from the Negro, precisely on the grounds of the nation. “The Negro is not indigenous to the soil; he has no past, nor a language of his own, other than the language given to him by his erstwhile masters; he has no country to look to, other than the United States.” Flipping the analogy, the logic holds that if the Pariah is the Negro of India, then, accordingly, he still too has no serious claims to a separate nation.

In arguing that the institution was not specific to Hindu society, Rai suggested that the caste system was, in fact, a much more universal institution that could readily describe the relations of class in feudal society. Rai wrote, “The color line [...] is not the only caste line in the Western world, though that is the most obvious and one that obtrudes itself rather too prominently and too frequently.”<sup>63</sup> If India had been labeled as a backward society due to its caste system, then the same could be made of the entirety of Western modernity, in its industrial capitalist form.

No comparison can be instituted between the Brahmin legislators of ancient India and the capitalist legislators of the modern world. Both are liable to fall. After centuries of disinterested and pure legislation, the Brahmins fell and misused their power and influence in forging chains of intellectual bondage for the bulk of the nation. They gave themselves divine honors and pretended to save the souls of men in exchange for pecuniary offerings, i.e., like the Popes of Rome, but they did not establish a soul-killing industrial system such as the modern industrial Brahmins of the West have done, I would at any time rather be ruled by a Rabindrinath Tagore than by a magnate of Wall Street.<sup>64</sup>

On one hand, we might say that the juggling of several social relations (of caste, class, race, and color) under the signs of “the color line” or of “the caste line” points to Rai’s sloppy use of analogy or else the dubious nature of transnational comparisons, altogether. On the other hand, we might think of the convergence of metaphors Rai struggled to cobble together as reflective of the difficult entanglements of power that British imperialism fostered. Writers like Nicholas Dirks

62. Rai, *The United States of America: A Hindu’s Impressions and Study*, 129.

63. *Ibid.*, 396.

64. *Ibid.*, 49.

have long since explained how the classification of castes by the British administration were used to fracture the nationalist movement, ruling the nation by means of increasing the intranational divisions. Imperialism could not be explained by the antiquated racial typologies that organized American society, nor did racial hierarchies always reflect a gradient of treatment. Unlike the nation's narrative attempt at flattening difference in its own cause, Rai took seriously the complex and various dimensions of subjugation, internationally in the relations of colony and metropole, and intranationally in the relations of caste and color.

When it came to the revolutionary analog that he saw in Washington nine years earlier, however, Rai could act so frustratingly simplistic. Speaking before a crowd at the Hindustanee Association of America in New York, on the 12th of December 1914, Rai appealed to American sympathy by invoking the similarities shared by the American Revolution and the Indian nationalist movement, ideological similarities irrespective of racial differences.

You who have enjoyed liberty since 1776 must wish to see justice done for the love of humanity irrespective of party, colour, creed or nationality. I do not ask you for your money, or your country, or for anything material. I only ask for sympathy. You who have delivered yourselves from the same yoke under which we are now suffering will respond to my appeal. My American friends, if you do not grant me sympathy you will be guilty of a crime.

If 1776 provided such a lasting emblem of anti-imperialist thought for Rai, if it embodied “justice done for the love of humanity irrespective of party, colour, creed or nationality,” then its application to the young American colony of the Philippines would seemingly be without question. That, however, was not the case at all.

## 2.4 An American Raj?

The cession of the Philippines to the United States in December 1898 gave rise not only to the fiercely contested Philippine-American war, which ultimately ended in Filipino defeat. It gave rise to the fiercely contested debate between American expansionists and their anti-imperialist counterparts. Just prior to the outbreak of the war, U.S. and Filipino military forces had jointly

acted against Spain in the yearlong Spanish-American war, ostensibly in an effort to liberate Spain's colonies. The resulting 1898 Treaty of Paris, however, made clear that the former colonies in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam were to be relinquished to the United States (only Cuba would enjoy a certain formal independence). One distinguished anti-imperialist, Mark Twain, famously wrote, "I have read carefully the treaty of Paris, and I have seen that we do not intend to free but to subjugate the people of the Philippines. We have gone there to conquer, not to redeem."<sup>65</sup>

While the majority of the American public had backed the U.S. forces in the Philippine-American War, a group of Americans, including Twain, banded together to form the Anti-Imperialist League, a nonpartisan consortium protesting what was widely admonished as America's "imperialist adventure."<sup>66</sup> Founded in Boston, the Anti-Imperialist League galvanized many of the leaders who were once instrumental in the abolitionist effort, figures like Erving Winslow, Moorfield Storey, Gamaliel Bradford, David Greene Haskins, and William Lloyd Garrison, Jr. According to the League's impassioned Secretary Erving Winslow, their primary goal was to free America of the Philippine colony and from the policy of imperialism, which directly contradicted the "true mind" and "righteous attitude" of the Republic.<sup>67</sup>

Several of the League's members, including Winslow himself, took an interest in a broader anti-imperialist position that extended to critiques of British India, even if considered peripheral to the goals of the League itself. In 1906, William Jennings Bryan deemed British rule of India as nothing short of "legalized pillage," worse than even Czarist rule in Russia, but argued not for an independent Indian nation-state but a renewed relationship between India and Britain that

65. Mark Twain, *Mark Twain: The Complete Interviews*, ed. Gary Scharnhorst (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 353.

66. For histories of the debate that the Philippine-American war inaugurated, see Richard E. Welch, *Response to Imperialism: The United States and the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972); Richard E. Welch, *Imperialists vs. Anti-Imperialists: The Debate Over Expansionism in the 1890s* (Itasca: F.E. Peacock Publishers, 1972); Robert L. Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898-1900* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968); E. Berkeley Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate, 1890-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970).

67. Erving Winslow, *The Anti-Imperialist League Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (Boston: Anti-Imperialist League, 1909), 5.

would promote prosperity in the colony.<sup>68</sup> Unbeknownst to Bryan, his critique was republished and translated into Bengali, German and Spanish by the Ghadar Party in a pamphlet titled “British Rule in India.”<sup>69</sup> An anti-imperialist, though not a member of the League, J.T. Sunderland, a Unitarian minister who first visited India as a missionary, had become by 1900 the most consistent American propagandist for India, publishing several pamphlets that criticized the British rule in India. In 1907, Sunderland created the short-lived Society for Advancement of India, which primarily promoted industrial and educational advancement in India, but also, to a lesser extent, advocated self-government. League Secretary Winslow requested support from Sunderland, to which he gave permission to circulate a pamphlet on India among League members.

When Rai arrived in Boston in September 1905, he was hosted by the Anti-Imperialist League. There, he met Winslow, who he thanked in the pages of *The Panjabee* for arranging the visit. Later, in *USAHIS*, Rai characterized the League’s ideological bent as antagonistic to imperial policy on the grounds of “broad humanitarian principles,” “self-interest,” as well as its deviation from “the spirit of the Republic.”<sup>70</sup> “[T]hey see a menace to their own liberties and the eventual and sure involving of the Republic in international wars,” Rai explained. The Filipino resistance to American Empire, let alone Rai’s fellow anti-colonial nationalist Emilio Aguinaldo, was wholly unacknowledged in his summary. After the Spanish-American war, he wrote, “[i]t took the American Government two years to establish order,” effectively erasing the colonized agent in Filipino history.

Rai made the Philippines an object of study during his second visit to the United States, but for the most part, he used the American colonies as a model to describe how the British ought to rule India. As historian Paul Kramer points out, Rai’s account of the Philippines was based “less on the anti-imperialists than on interviews with Franck McIntyre of the Bureau of Insular Affairs.”<sup>71</sup> Rai appears to have been eager enough to criticize British Rule in India that he accepted many of-

68. Raucher, “American Anti-Imperialists and the Pro-India Movement, 1900-1932,” 82.

69. William Jennings Bryan. *British Rule in India*. San Francisco: Hindustan Gadar Party, Undated. South Asians in North America Collection, BANC MSS 2002/78 cz, Box 1, Folder 26, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. The Bengali, German, and Spanish editions are included in the same collection.

70. Rai, *The United States of America: A Hindu’s Impressions and Study*, 296.

71. Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 365.

ficial dogmas of U.S. national exceptionalism without skepticism. He affirmatively quoted a letter from McIntyre to the colonial secretary in England, for example, that stated Filipinos had been “given more power in his government than is exercised by any oriental people,” that “all the agencies which are supposed to work for the advancement of a people in popular self-government are being used to the greatest possible extent.”<sup>72</sup> By February 1916, Rai pitched an article to his acquaintance Walter Lippmann, provisionally titled “Political Conditions in Philippines and India: A Contrast.” Though Lippmann found no space for the article in his magazine *The New Republic*, eventually a version of the essay turned up in the *Boston Evening Transcript* and the *Los Angeles Times* under the more commanding title, “Making India like the Philippines.” Throughout the essay, Rai pointed out the differences between British rule in India and American rule in the Philippines, praising the latter for its effectiveness in preparing its subjects for democracy.

Surprisingly, for a leader who had spent much of his life deconstructing imperialist arguments, Rai recognized no subterfuge – at least publically – in President McKinley’s proclamation that “the preparation of the Filipino peoples for popular self-government in their own interest and not in the interest of the United States.” On the contrary, he pointed out that the British government’s sole objective was “the continuance and the perpetuation of British rule by British agency.” The difference between the two imperial powers was further underscored when Rai wrote that “after twenty years of American rule the administration of the islands is more democratic than that of British India today after over a century and a half of British rule in Bengal.”

In his chapter titled “The Philippine Islands” from *USAHIS*, Rai argued more or less the same thing, only adding detailed notes about the improvements to the Philippines that came after the transition from Spanish to American rule. Nowhere did Rai entertain the Filipino arguments of independence that fueled the 1898 revolution. The effect was to render the United States into a rare object: a benevolent, anti-imperialist empire, a temporary but necessary aberration to American liberalism that would lay down the road to Filipino independence. He characterized American political opinion on the Philippines, between both Republicans and Democrats, as unanimously

72. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States & the Philippines*, 365.

opposed to permanent annexation of the colonies. “The only difference that existed among the political parties of the United States was to the fixing of the time when the United States should withdraw from the islands,” Rai wrote, explaining that the Democrats favored an early withdrawal while the Republicans opposed such a timeline.<sup>73</sup> Absent from the discussion was, in fact, the very complicated racialist logic that fueled both Republican and Democratic opposition towards empire. To be fair, many of the members of the Anti-Imperialist League, like Winslow, Moorfield Storey, and William Lloyd Garrison, had criticized American rule over the Philippines as essentially a racist project that continued the legacy of slavery. Garrison went so far as describing Aguinaldo as fighting in the “same cause as John Brown.”<sup>74</sup> But most anti-imperialist arguments that came from both Republican and Democratic parties were tepid, stemming from a pragmatic, if not racist point of view.

Critic Christopher Lasch explains that while in form, the anti-imperialist goals of both Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans seemed broadly liberal, in content, both positions were examples of racial Darwinism. Southern Democrats unanimously opposed the cause of imperialism “on the grounds that Asiatics, like Negroes, were innately inferior and could not be assimilated to American life.”<sup>75</sup> The Northern Republicans on the other hand argued that if the Filipinos became citizens, they would migrate to the United States and compete with American labor. In agreement was labor leader Samuel Gompers, (earlier introduced in this chapter as a key member of the Anti-Asiatic League) also a member of the Anti-Imperialist League. In terms compatible to his anti-Asiatic stance, Gompers wrote, “If the Philippines are annexed what is to prevent the Chinese, the Negritos, and the Malays coming to our own country?”<sup>76</sup> The resistance to American imperialism from both Republican and Democrat parties was not grounded in “broad humanitarian principles,” as Rai had argued, but on the contrary, from unease in incorporating more non-Whites into the Union. Lasch puts it succinctly: the anti-imperialists “did not challenge the

73. Rai, *The United States of America: A Hindu's Impressions and Study*, 299.

74. Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate, 1890-1920*, 152.

75. Lasch, “The Anti-Imperialists, the Philippines, and the Inequality of Man,” 321.

76. *Ibid.*, 326.

central assumption of imperialist thought: the natural inequality of men.”<sup>77</sup>

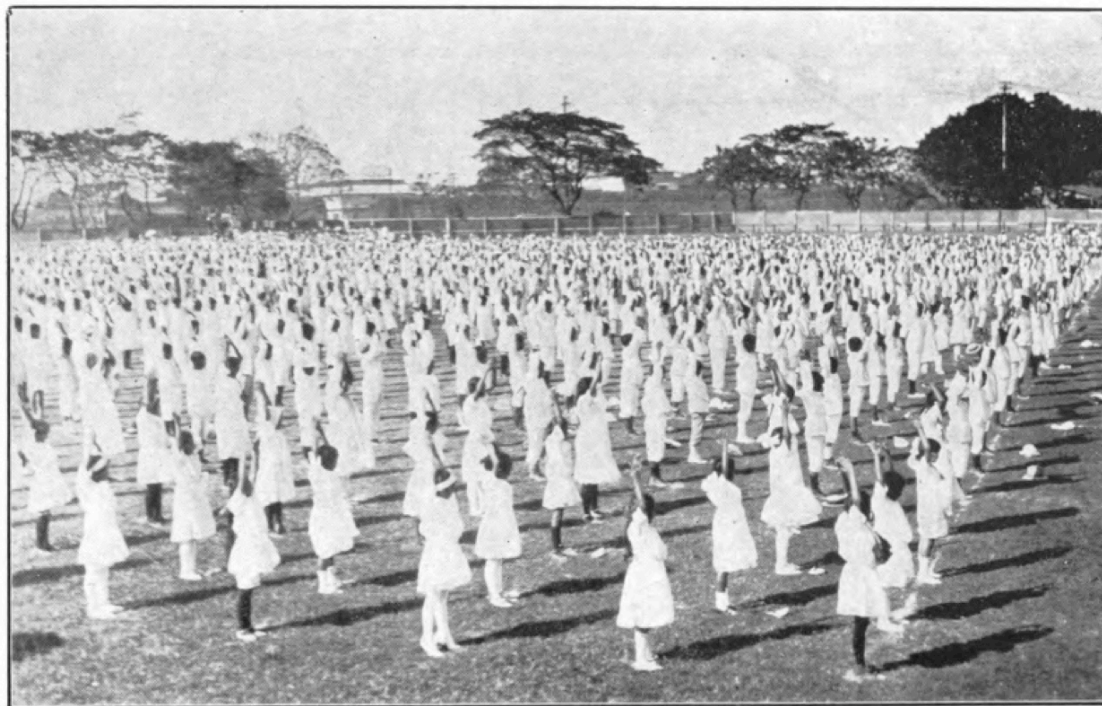
Recent scholars have been perplexed by what seems to be Rai’s equivocal position on the American occupation of the Philippines. Historian Erez Manela accredits the ambivalence to Rai’s wariness of British censorship, arguing that he “avoided explicit comparison to British rule in India, but his discussion of the details of U.S. rule in the Philippines left little doubt as to what he had in mind.”<sup>78</sup> Manela implies here that Rai restrained himself from offering a more critical view of the U.S. colonial project in the Philippines, but I am not so sure. It is certainly true that the United States at the time was flooded with many British spies that worked within the Indian diasporic circles, and British-paid counter-propagandists, who published direct rebuttals to Indian nationalist arguments for independence in newspapers.<sup>79</sup> Case in point was Rustom Rustomjee from Bombay. Allegedly broke and living in a hotel in Boston, Rustomjee and his wife were introduced to Rai, who happened to be staying in the same hotel during his visit to New England in January 1915. Rai later came to learn that Rustomjee was put on the British payroll for propaganda work, when Rustomjee published one imperialist apologia after another in U.S. newspapers. A week after a June 1916 *New York Times* editorial, in which Rai argued that the majority of governing posts in India were taken up by British, Rustomjee immediately struck back. “I fear that Lajpat Rai has only told half of the truth, which is almost worse than to utter falsehood, about the administration of India,” Rustomjee wrote, before adding his wide-eyed approval of British rule: “I venture to say that [the British administration’s] motives are unimpeachable and their intentions bona fide. They mean well to India. And without them there would be anarchy and bloodshed.”<sup>80</sup> That same kind of response was also delivered to *Ghadar* editor Ram Chandra Bharadwaj, whose

77. Lasch, “The Anti-Imperialists, the Philippines, and the Inequality of Man,” 324.

78. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, 88.

79. One such spy was mysteriously referred to as “S.S.” in Rai’s short memoir, “Indian Revolutionaries in the United States and Japan,” which he left behind on his return to India. The identity of S.S. appears to be Suchet Singh, a student at New York University from 1913 to 1914, who made some money as a lecturer managed by the Lee Keedick Lecture Bureau. Naeem Rathore explains that Singh not only used “slides to illustrate his talks,” but also “a European-made movie picture to supplement his lecture, ‘The Armies of India.’” Another spy, a “Mohammaden” referred to as “A.A.,” Rai suspected too, but the archives have left little information behind on him.

80. Rustom Rustomjee, “Who Rules in India: A Reply to the Contention that Britain Holds All the Reins,” *New York Times*, June 20, 1916, 10.



CALISTHENIC DRILL BY 3000 PUPILS FROM THE MANILA SCHOOLS, PLAYGROUND DAY, CARNIVAL OF 1915.

Photograph by  
Bureau of Education, Manila

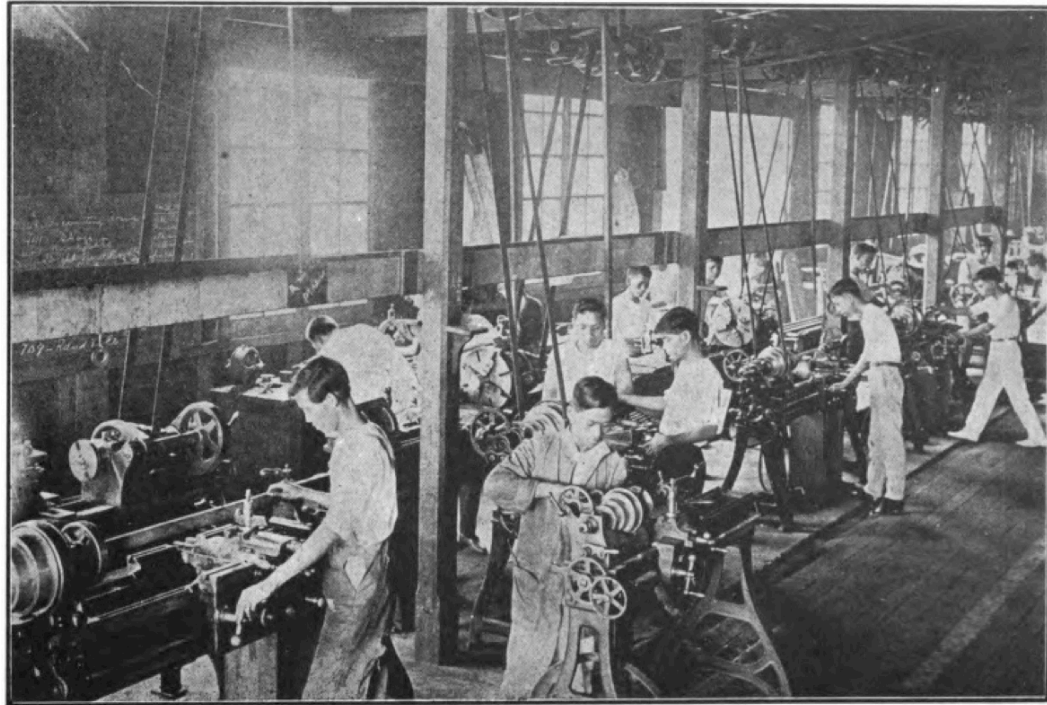
Figure 2.4: Manila School in Lajpat Rai's *The United States of America: A Hindu's Impressions and Study*

warning of an impending revolt in India was countered by Rustomjee's enthusiastic assertion that "[t]he evidence of India's loyalty to the British throne is so overwhelming and the response to the call of Great Britain to India's sons and daughters [...] is so enthusiastic, spontaneous, and unanimous that it seems almost a work of supererogation to contend and confute the assertions of Mr. Ram Chandra."<sup>81</sup> Like clockwork, letters of opposition appeared in the American newspapers the moment the British were criticized for their rule in India.

There may have been reason to believe that Rai, who had already been charged with sedition without ever facing trial, was cautious of any direct criticism of the United States while he was residing there. But even in a December 1916 pamphlet published on the distant shores of Japan,

81. Rustom Rustomjee, "India's Loyalty Asserted: Unrest of a Few Home Rule Highbrows is Not Representative," *New York Times*, June 24, 1915, 8.





INTERIOR OF MACHINE SHOP, PHILIPPINE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND TRADES, MANILA.

Photograph by  
Bureau of Education, Manila.

Figure 2.5: Filipino laborers in Lajpat Rai's *The United States of America: A Hindu's Impressions and Study*

Rai wrote of American and French Empires in a positive light compared to the British dominion of India. "Indians travelling abroad have seen American rule in the Philippines and the Hawaii islands and the French rule in Indo-China," Rai observed, "and have also come to know about [...] the superiority which in their eyes British rule in this respect possessed, as compared with other foreign administrations in the world."<sup>82</sup> His distinction between Britain's bad imperialism and the United States's good imperialism, then, does not seem like simply an aberration or an act of self-censorship. Dohra Ahmad attributes the lack of solidarity towards the Philippines as a practical decision, in order to avoid alienating American readers. *Young India*, the monthly organ of Rai's India Home Rule League of America published several positive assessments of the Philippine

82. Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Collected Works of Lala Lajpat Rai, Volume 6*, ed. Bal Ram Nanda, 147.

Islands, Ahmad points out. In two 1920 articles published anonymously, “India and the Philippines” and “The Philippines and India,” *Young India* cited the United States’ governance of the Philippines with uncritical approval.<sup>83</sup>

Perhaps Rai’s position on the Philippines was the outcome of his awareness of audience, but a case could also be made that his approval was in step with arguments he made for Indian Home Rule within the British Empire. As opposed to the Ghadar party members, who endorsed a German-funded, armed insurrection against the British in hopes that it would lead to an independent republic of India, Rai took a more evolutionary approach to the issue of Indian independence. In a May 1916 letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, Rai argued that the “Indian nationalist wants the Government of India to be free and unfettered except by what is in the interests of India,” which would be best served if the colony was in “a position similar to one occupied by Canada or South Africa.”<sup>84</sup> If Rai could support the Home Rule solution for India – that is, a representative Indian democracy still under the dominion of British empire – then arguably a more democratic Philippines still under American rule would not have been such a contradictory idea. Acknowledging the disastrous economics and political despotism of British rule, Rai wrote that the unexpected outcome of imperialism was that India is “awakening to its possibilities and a remarkable renaissance.”<sup>85</sup> Perhaps he saw the same outcome for the Philippines?

More likely, however, Rai really did believe in the benevolent role of American empire at the time. Throughout the chapter in *USAHIS*, Rai discussed the effectiveness that the U.S. displayed in regulating and disciplining its colonial subjects. The chapter is filled with photographs from the Bureau of Education, Manila – a colonial institution founded by the U.S. Five photographs display Filipinos in highly organized arrangements – the women in bright white frocks in contrast with their dark skin, the men in white shirts and slacks with their hair neatly combed, diligently attending to the machines of industry. The captions read: “Kitchen and Cooking Class,” “Calisthenic Drill By 3000 Pupils From The Manila Schools,” “Sewing Class At Work,” “Interior of

83. Ahmad, *Landscapes of Hope: Anti-Colonial Utopianism in America*, 120.

84. Lala Lajpat Rai, “What India Wants: Liberty Like That of Canada or South Africa,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1916, 12.

85. Lala Lajpat Rai, “Making India Like Philippines,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 1915, III4.

Machine Shop,” “Manila School Garden.” In *Visualizing Empire*, David Brody argues that photographs like these were a primary technology in the justification of empire, as photographs in the press circulated in American homes, effectively disseminating empire to an American public.<sup>86</sup> In essence, then, Rai recirculated the images of empire as his own sort of justification: this, *USAHIS* seemed to say, was empire done well.

How much of this was Rai’s desire to preserve the symbol of the United States as a revolutionary analog? Was this what precluded him from lodging criticism of America’s growing imperialist presence in the rest of the world? Why did 1776 seem a reasonable emblem for Indians and not for the Filipinos, who warred with the United States a decade prior? Part of what distinguished the Philippines from India, Rai argued, was racial difference. “Every student of history knows what a gifted race the Hindus are,” he wrote, describing the advances of Indian civilization while Europe was still “immersed in primitive methods of life.” In comparison to the state of India during British occupation, “the Filipinos had not a vestige of democratic institutions and ignorance and illiteracy reigned supreme” before American occupation. He concluded, with a disclaimer that no insult was intended, that “neither in character nor in culture nor yet in intelligence and personal valor can there be any comparison between the Hindus and the Filipinos.”<sup>87</sup>

Therein lay the limits of Rai’s racial politics and the limits to his anti-imperialist vision in 1915. In *USAHIS* Rai articulated an anti-imperialism that was still shaped by his own racial hierarchy. Ultimately, during the period of Rai’s exile in the United States, he held tightly to a racialized logic for Indian independence. Such logic was present in his very early statement about Pratap and Shivaji, patriots from the “land of Aryans,” and it was present in 1915, when he finished *USAHIS*, maintaining that Indians were from the same “stock as Europeans.” In other words, claims to Indian self-governance were based on proving that colonial difference was a fallacy, where as in the context of the Philippines, the colonial difference was an unbridgeable gap created by racial difference.

86. David Brody, *Visualizing American Empire: Orientalism & Imperialism in the Philippines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

87. Rai, “Making India Like Philippines.”

## 2.5 Conclusion

In spite of his criticism of the racism that maintained the Negro Problem of the United States; in spite of his acknowledgment that the relationship with the Philippines was ultimately imperialistic (benevolent though he may have found it); in spite of the fact that he recognized Indian migrant laborers faced the prejudice of color, race, religion and the “powerful force of white labor” in the country; when Rai prepared to leave the United States for India again in the winter of 1919, the United States he had composed in his writing still occupied a relatively tidy imaginary space. The country, as Rai described it in *USAHIS*, was much more complex in his estimation than it appeared in his 1905 *Panjabee* editorials about his visit to the capitol. But still the ideal of the American nation as a symbol of national longing, in Rai’s writing, remained.

It took another decade after his return to India before Rai wrote about the U.S. again. *Unhappy India*, a monograph that he penned in 1928, just a year before his death, completely reconceptualized the global relations of post-war America. The U.S. was no longer seen as the revolutionary nation that rose up against Britain, nor the progressive state that aimed at ameliorating its internal problems with race. The country was now lumped into a larger formation that included Europe – a part of the “white world,” as Rai put it. “When we say Europe, we mean the white races of the world – Europe and America, for America is only a child of Europe,” he wrote with uncharacteristic candidness in the book’s introduction.<sup>88</sup>

Regarding the U.S. dominion over the Philippines, which Rai had praised when contrasted to the British Rule of India, he now wrote of the way in which the “imperial game” played by both metropolises was to paint the colonies in the “blackest colours,” to perpetuate a “slave mentality” in its subjects. Invoking Kipling, Rai wrote of the psychological domination that colonial relations had on its subjects:<sup>89</sup>

This is the genesis of the cult of the white man’s burden. This is the mentality which stimulates the Empire-builder. This is the material with which the ‘steel frames’ are

88. Lala Lajpat Rai, *Unhappy India: Being a Reply to Miss Katherine Mayo’s ‘Mother India’* (Calcutta: Banna Publishing Co., 1928), 407.

89. *Ibid.*, xiv.

forged to keep the subject peoples in bondage and to prevent them 'from doing harm to themselves' by aspiring to, and working for their freedom. This is how Britain made her Empire in India, this is how the U.S.A. took possession of the Philippine Isles and now refuses to vacate them.<sup>90</sup>

Moreover, in regards to the Negro problem, which Rai had previously described as simply an internal problem akin to the Pariah in India, he now wrote, "[t]here is nothing parallel to [the cruelties inflicted on the Negro] in the history of India."<sup>91</sup> And adding to the international dimensions of the Negro Problem, Rai wrote, "When in 1865 the Northern States of the United States were engaged in a civil war with the Southern States on the ostensible ground of Negro emancipation, liberty-loving Great Britain sided with the South."<sup>92</sup> The effect was to completely re-imagine the United States, which was once perceived as an ally or even a model for the Indian nation, as a figure in a broader network of white supremacy. In words that now echoed Du Bois's maxim on the color line, Rai wrote, "The awakening of the East has frightened both Europe and America."<sup>93</sup> What happened?

The question might be more accurately posed as "who happened?" And the answer came in the form of an American-based muckraker named Katherine Mayo who, on the basis of her 1927 exposé on India, *Mother India*, inspired an unprecedented number of responses from Indians and India-sympathizers, English and American. Rai's *Unhappy India* was one of the first, if not the most popular, rebuttals. In the controversy that ensued, the figure of the United States shifted radically in Indian nationalist discourse, from a source of historical inspiration to an object of contempt, or at times, as we will see, of parody.

90. Rai, *Unhappy India: Being a Reply to Miss Katherine Mayo's 'Mother India'*, xv.

91. *Ibid.*, 147.

92. *Ibid.*, 107.

93. *Ibid.*, xvii.

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NEW YORK

Dear Mr Huebsch

I would like you to keep the enclosed envelope  
for me in your safe. It contains a very  
important manuscript. I will ask for it  
when I require it.

You have not sent me a copy of Heilsons new book  
on old Freedom.

June 6-1919

Yours truly  
L Rai

Figure 2.6: Letter from Lajpat Rai to American publisher B.W. Huebsch, dated June 6, 1919. "I would like you to keep the enclosed envelope for me in your safe. It contains a very important manuscript. I will ask for it when required." The manuscript enclosed was included details about Rai's visit to the United States, including several details about suspected Indian spies working on the British dime.

## Chapter 3

# Uncle Sham's Mother: Shifting Racial Frameworks in the *Mother India* Controversy, 1927-1934

### 3.1 The Indian and the American Grotesque

In 1927, an American writer named Katherine Mayo was guided through the streets of British Calcutta, where she claimed to discover not one but two cities: The first “big, western, modern” and full of buildings which “might belong to a prosperous American city”; the second, an “Indian town of temples, mosques, bazaars” organized by labyrinthine alleys that transgressed the “rectangular lines” of the city map; the first, Calcutta, was the realm of colonial governance; the second, “Kalighat,” the native world behind the colonial facade.<sup>1</sup> Moving deeper into that second city, Mayo jotted down sights that would later horrify, titillate and enrage the hundreds of thousands of readers her account would draw in the years to come. She wrote of a crowd surrounding two priests who hacked the head off a goat, and a woman who sprang forward, dropping on her fours lap up its blood. Further along, Mayo wrote of scores of men and mendicants, “fat,” “hairy,” and “begging”; she wrote of a burning-ghat, in which the corpse of a young woman – “blessed among women, in that she is saved from widowhood” – was sent up in flames over a funeral pyre; she wrote of bathers in the muddy and holy Ganges, performing their ablutions and drinking the same dirty water that flowed by their knees.<sup>2</sup> These characters – the butcher priests and fat mendicants, the desperate women and dirty bathers – were the opening players in Mayo’s wildly popular 1927 exposé, *Mother India*, the culmination of the three months she spent in the country. Over

1. Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927), 3-4.

2. *Ibid.*, 7.

the course of the book, other such figures – like the abused Untouchable and abusive Brahmin, the child bride and impotent Indian male – joined the cast, and provided an indelible set of images of the subcontinent that would circulate as the book became a world-wide best seller. Emphasizing disease, disparity, and the allegedly depraved sexuality of India's population, Mayo's book was a sensationalist and greatly exaggerated account of the native bodies that made up colonial India, but its purpose was broader than providing the Western reader a voyeuristic lens onto India. Published during nationalist agitations against the controversial Government of India Act of 1919, which denied Indians dominion status within the Empire, Mayo's book seemed to pose an implicit question: Were these the same people clamoring for independence?

Two years later, a Parsi man named Dinshah P. Ghadiali gave testimony to a host of graphic sights in Mayo's own country, where he had resided for the past eighteen years. All the barbarism of *Mother India* detailed by Mayo – who Ghadiali nicknamed “Baronness Muchausen, Fabricatress of Libels on India” – could be found in the U.S., he explained, only amplified.<sup>3</sup> On a tour of the infamous Union Stockyards of Chicago, he wrote of a steel wheel studded with chains and hooks, where one butcher hooked a pig's leg, another slit its throat, before the hog was dumped “*while alive*” into boiling water.<sup>4</sup> The pig was dismembered piecemeal by butchers, who resembled “medical students gloating over a dissected carcass.”<sup>5</sup> In response to the cremation scene in Calcutta, Ghadiali wrote that the Americans preferred their dead embalmed and casketed, “slowly eaten off by myriads of worms [...] as long as they do not *see with their eyes* what is happening.”<sup>6</sup> If Mayo found the Hindu's “ablutions” in the Ganges a source of ridicule, then what would she make of the river Jordan, the very source of the Christian practice of baptism? In a chapter-for-chapter rebuttal, Ghadiali populated his version of America with figures analogous to Mayo's Indians: Klansmen, “long-suppressed” Negroes, “sex wolves” in Atlantic city and their oversexed women. India at least had colonial governance to blame for any perceived social backwardness, but what, Ghadiali

3. Dinshah P. Ghadiali, *American Sex Problems* (Malaga: Spectro-Chrome Institute, 1929), frontispiece.

4. *Ibid.*, 2.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, 3.



seemed to ask, was America's excuse?<sup>7</sup>

A clever reversal of barbs, Ghadiali's book – somewhat misleadingly titled *American Sex Problems* (1929) – was just one of many responses to *Mother India* that deflected Mayo's criticism of India and mimicked her rhetoric to criticize the United States. But as trivial as its examples were, Ghadiali's book was emblematic of a set of Indian narratives about the U.S. that gained notoriety during the controversy that followed *Mother India*. No longer valorized as the anti-colonial emblem that Indian nationalists had clung to in previous decades, the United States was disparaged as a society that harbored cultural excesses, whose own history of democracy was deeply hypocritical, and whose ascendance as the “moral giant” of the age betrayed the actual practices of its people. These narratives, which ranged from the incisive to the frivolous, all performed what Meera Kosambi has recently described as a “returning [of] the American gaze.”<sup>8</sup> Quite literally, Indian responses to *Mother India* parroted Mayo's culture-focused arguments against India's self-governance, but redirected their critiques towards the United States. In particular, Mayo outlined several obstacles – the prevalence of disease, alleged sexual dysfunction, and ill treatment towards lower castes and women – as proof of India's unpreparedness for any degree of national sovereignty. By emphasizing the rampant venereal diseases of Americans and their oversexed bodies, and by highlighting news of lynchings against African Americans and the disenfranchisement of the country's minority communities, Indian writers threw into question the hegemony of the United States on the post-war world stage. And through a kind of mimicry, these *tu-quoque* rejoinders also served to critique and lay bare the very terms of the imperialist discourse exemplified in Mayo's writings.

In what follows, I lay out this peculiar episode of “books and battles,” as one publication described it, and critically read for the different meanings of the United States that both *Mother India* and its responses constructed.<sup>9</sup> First, I examine the development of Mayo's colonial dis-

7. Historian Mrinalini Sinha's exhaustive study of the Mayo controversy elucidates this very question, discussing in great detail how Mayo's emphasis on the social problems of colonial India enabled Indian nationalists to critique British rule as an impediment to social reform. Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*.

8. Ramabai, *Pandita Ramabai's American Encounter: The People of the United States* (1889).

9. Irene Cleaton and Allen Cleaton, *Books and Battles: American Literature, 1920-1930* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1937).

course, which not only spanned colonial-states from Suriname to the Philippines and to India, but also acted as a kind of safeguard for an Anglo-Saxon racial identity for the U.S. Second, I trace the way in which Mayo's own pro-imperialist and exclusionary ideology was cleverly reworked in four, largely understudied responses to the book: Lajpat Rai's *Unhappy India* (1928), K.L. Gauba's *Uncle Sham* (1929), Dinshah P. Ghadiali's *American Sex Problems* (1929), and Sudhindra Bose's *Mother America* (1930). These responses were unique, among the fifty book-length rejoinders to *Mother America*, in that they focused on documenting the cultural practices of the United States, rather than refuting the factual claims of Mayo's study. Recent scholarship has examined how the controversy that surrounded *Mother India* also opened up a debate in the U.S. on American identity and memory, but less attention has been paid to the Indian participants of this debate. The historian Paul Teed, for instance, emphasizes the debate on American identity and memory catalyzed by *Mother India*, but looks more closely at the response of American intellectuals in this debate.<sup>10</sup> This chapter offers to help fill part of the controversy by looking at the Indian engagement to questions of American identity. However divergent the specific political stances and circumstances of each of authors, and whatever their shortcomings, these works all undermined the way that Mayo placed the Indian national question onto a cultural platform – or as Gauba puts it, “from the Constitutional plane to a pathological base.”<sup>11</sup> Their method of doing this was to render the United States into a “civilization” ridden with archaic and irrational cultural practices. America, in other words, became a site for interrogating the rhetorical figures and discursive tropes of Mayo's representation of India.

### 3.2 Race Across Empires

From her earliest publications onwards, two major themes marked Mayo's writings: first, an unabashed admiration for and conflation of imperialist projects, British, Dutch, and American alike;

10. Paul Teed, “Race Against Memory: Katherine Mayo, Jabez Sunderland, and Indian Independence,” *American Studies* 44 (1-2 2003): 35–57.

11. K.L. Gauba, *Friends and Foes: An Autobiography* (New Delhi: Indian Book Co., 1974), 80.

and second, an exclusionary stance on immigration policies of the United States. In reading the works that led up to *Mother India*, one can easily see that motivating both of these concerns was a racial ideology that placed a particular construction of “whiteness” at the far end of an imagined evolutionary spectrum and at the top of hierarchies of modern rule.

The first inklings of this ideology are found in Mayo’s short stories about Suriname, published between 1911 and 1913 in the pages of the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Scribner’s Magazine*. Having resided in the Dutch colony for eight years with her father, a mining engineer, Mayo observed first-hand the complex operation of a colonial-state that maintained and disciplined a set of subjugated populations – in the case of Suriname, the recently emancipated Black population of ex-slaves and recently imported East Indian population of indentured laborers. Organizing the colony through a set of racial tropes, Mayo casts her white characters as indulgent but occasionally flappable colonial masters and mistresses, and the “Negro” characters as docile, if somewhat irksome, colonial subjects.<sup>12</sup> In an early *Atlantic Monthly* story titled “Big Mary,” for instance, Mayo likened one Black character, in terms of “strength,” “patience” and “intelligence” to an ox, and like an ox, he could be “led by whoever pulled on his nose ring.”<sup>13</sup> With overwrought detail, she described the difference between white and black physiognomies. A Black character was an “aborigine-type,” “thin-lipped, but flat-nosed, ape-eared, slant-chinned, broad-jawed, [...] with the little eyes of an intelligent bush animal.” The white colonial master, on the other hand, was “ruddy, hearty, fine-featured [...] with silver hair [...] clear and kind blue eyes.”<sup>14</sup> These physiognomies were mapped onto a kind of social and biological evolutionary scale, in which the Black characters lagged centuries behind. Later in the story, for instance, Mayo compared the contrast between the “slight little figure” of the “colonial mistress” Nora and the “rough-hewn form of the great Negress” Mary as the “contrast of the Twentieth Century with the Age of Stone.”<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, despite their alleged primitive qualities, the Black characters’ “limitless good-will and sympathy” and willingness

12. Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*, 68.

13. Katherine Mayo, “Big Mary,” *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1911, 112.

14. *Ibid.*, 113.

15. *Ibid.*

to defer to their masters made them ideal colonial subjects.<sup>16</sup>

The Indian laborers in these stories, however, were not so easily categorized. In “My law and Thine,” Sirpal, a Calcutta man, had a face that seemed “benign enough” but still appeared as an “inscrutable mask – legacy of centuries of a mode of thought, locked and sealed from the occidental mind.”<sup>17</sup> Later in the story, however, the otherwise deferential Sirpal gruesomely murders his adulterous wife, defending himself on the grounds of his cultural beliefs. During his arrest, he asks the police “that the law of their land may be obeyed on me even as I have obeyed the law that is mine.”<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the Black characters, Sirpal retains his immutable cultural difference behind a benign appearance. Historian Mrinalini Sinha observes that in Mayo’s Suriname stories, in general, the “Hindus [...] threaten the proper ordering of colonial society.”<sup>19</sup> These racial prejudices against Indians were certainly not rare or uncontroversial at this time. Nevertheless, Mayo’s early mentor, the liberal Oswald Garrison Villard – editor of *The Nation* and co-founder of the N.A.A.C.P. – noticed his assistant’s consistently negative depictions of Indians and warned her against the tendency: “Surely there must be many sweet and beautiful traits about these Hindus,” he wrote to her in 1911.<sup>20</sup>

But while Mayo often wrote with a guarded paternalism towards the Black ex-slaves of Suriname, allowing them to be easily tucked into the colonial fold, the Indian, whose culture was centuries-old and quarantined from Western thought, was “inscrutable” and moreover, dangerous. Associating Indians with an unpredictable and violently misogynist ancient culture would prove to be an important trope in *Mother India*, in decades to come. But just as influential was Mayo’s colonial triangulation between colonial master, docile subject, and a threatening third figure that stood somewhere in between. This triangulation would later provide a basic framework for Mayo to interpret all colonial relations and interpellate all colonial subjects. It would also prove influential in her arguments against Indian immigration to the United States.

16. Mayo, “Big Mary,” 115.

17. Katherine Mayo, “My law and Thine,” *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1912, 239.

18. *Ibid.*, 244.

19. Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*, 68.

20. Manoranjan Jha, *Katherine Mayo and India* (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1971), 19.

After a decade of writing books that took up more domestic and disciplinary concerns, Mayo returned to her earlier interest in colonialism when she published *The Isles of Fear: An Examination of America's Task in the Philippines* in 1925. In *Isles of Fear*, Mayo asserted that a U.S. colonial presence was all that kept the Philippines from descending into its earlier “history of destruction, decay, and loot.”<sup>21</sup> Responding to the anti-imperialist petitions for the Filipinization of the colonial government, Mayo argued that so far such policies had had disastrous consequences in the Philippines, naming the Jones Act of 1917 specifically as a failure. But the power of *Isles of Fear* came not only from its direct polemics against the perceived liberal-acquiescence of U.S. colonial legislation, but from the way she reclaimed and reordered American symbols, which had long been used by both Filipino nationalists and American anti-imperialists to underscore the hypocrisy of U.S.’s history of anticolonial revolution and its imperial designs. One such American was William Jennings Bryan, who in speech after speech during the early 20th century, declared that if Americans pursued a colonial policy in the Philippines, they would defile the legacy of 1776 and would have to “muffle the tones of the old Liberty Bell.”<sup>22</sup> Aware of these rhetorical strategies, Mayo attempted to delegitimize comparisons between Filipino nationalists and America’s Founding Fathers. “To picture to yourself the figure of the little cacique,” Mayo explained to her American readers, “you must first deliver your mind from the treacherously recurring subconscious idea that he is a brown-skinned New England squire living in a tropical Lexington or Concord.”<sup>23</sup> Filipinos, already divided amongst their many rival populations, Mayo argued, could only understand patriotism as a means for gaining personal profit. And while colonial education had afforded them access to books on American history, he did not have the capacity to fully understand the meanings of that history. The Filipino interprets “our national history, by his own race experience,” she wrote, and “sets up parallels where none exist.”<sup>24</sup> So, while allusions to Abraham Lincoln, Daniel Webster, and Patrick Henry circulated in Filipino nationalist speeches, Filipinos lacked

21. Katherine Mayo, *The Isles of Fear: The Truth about the Philippines* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1925), 94.

22. William Jennings Bryan, *Republic or Empire?* (Chicago: Independence Company, 1899), 22.

23. Mayo, *The Isles of Fear: The Truth about the Philippines*, 11.

24. *Ibid.*, 212.

the “preliminary training” that went into creating the “President, the orator, the public favourite,” and eventually, the American nation-state.<sup>25</sup> Training the native population for eventual independence was the common rhetoric by which U.S. imperialists justified its imperial mission in the Philippines.

After shutting down the possibility of an American analogy, Mayo further complicated the picture of the Philippines by effectively denying the subjects of the colonial state any claims to national unity. “What do you mean when you speak of the people of the Philippine Islands? Do you think of them as a political body? A social body? A distinct race? Do you think of them as a minor nation, represented by delegates to Washington?,” Mayo asked, to which she herself replied, “If you do, you start wrong.”<sup>26</sup> Throughout *Isles of Fear*, in fact, Mayo set up a triangle of colonial relations reminiscent of her Suriname tales: on one vertex was the American ruler, on another, the docile peasantry (Tao), and on the third, the sly and manipulative urban class (Caciques). Beyond the class distinctions between the peasantry and urban classes, Mayo insisted that ethnic divisions in the Philippines – between the southern Moro, the Christian Filipino, and the Igorot – were as vast as the distinction between nations: “The line of demarcation is to them at least as definite and as sensitive as is, to a Frenchman, the line that protects France from the terror across the Rhine.”<sup>27</sup> The overall effect was to undermine the relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines as metropole and colony; the “isles of fear” were rendered too complicated for simple anti-colonial platitudes.

*Isles of Fear* received largely positive reviews on both sides of the Atlantic. Nicholas Roosevelt of the *New York Times* recommended that the book be read by “every Congressman and by all politicians and editors who have occasion to discuss the Philippine Islands.”<sup>28</sup> A similar endorsement turned up in the pages of the *London Times Literary Supplement* by a commenter who wrote, “We venture to believe that [*Isles of Fear*] will leave its mark on America’s thinking about the Philippine problem and in due time of England’s thinking about India and Egypt too... It is a book which

25. Mayo, *The Isles of Fear: The Truth about the Philippines*, 212.

26. *Ibid.*, 9.

27. *Ibid.*, 10.

28. “America’s Blundering Devotion to the Philippines,” *New York Times*, April 5, 1925, BR3.

no serious student of British Imperial problems can afford to ignore.”<sup>29</sup> One such student of empire was the English official Lionel Curtis, a member of the Round Table group that authored the Government of India Act of 1919. Curtis contributed a laudatory preface for the British edition of *Isles of Fear*, in which he wrote, “in Miss Mayo’s view of nature there are two colours, black and white. The medium in which she draws scarcely permits her to indicate shades between these extremes.”<sup>30</sup> Indeed, such a Manichean view of the colonial Philippines were transplanted almost directly to India where she traveled two years later.

Irrespective of the differences between the centuries-old British dominion of India and the decades-old American militaristic control of the Philippines, Mayo modeled *Mother India* largely on *The Isles of Fear*. Like the Philippines, India could not constitute a nation given its volatile array of populations prone to “periodic destructive outbursts of sulphur and flame.”<sup>31</sup> In a chapter titled “We Both Meant Well,” Mayo further drew comparisons between British rule of India with American rule of the Philippines when she argued that the latter was an even greater challenge to govern. “In the Philippines,” she wrote, “no social bars exist – no caste distinctions except the distinction between *cacique* and *tao* – rich man and poor man – exploiter and exploited. In India something like three thousand castes split into mutually repellent groups the Hindu three-quarters of the population.”<sup>32</sup> Still, these thousands of castes were simplistically interpellated into Mayo’s familiar colonial triangulation. British colonial governance, she argued, was all that prevented the full-scale domination of the upper castes over the lower castes. Cobbling together several historical narratives in *Mother India*, Mayo narrated the history of caste through an imperialist-indigenist lens:

Madras, the citadel of Brahmanic Hinduism. Citadel also of the remnant of the ancient folk, the dark-skinned Dravidians. Brahmanic Hinduism broke them, cast them down and tramped upon them, commanded them in their multi-millions to be pariahs, outcasts, ignorant and poor. Then came the Briton, for whatever reason, establishing peace, order, and such measure of democracy as could survive in the

29. Jha, *Katherine Mayo and India*, 21.

30. Mayo, *The Isles of Fear: The Truth about the Philippines*, 13.

31. Mayo, *Mother India*, 240.

32. *Ibid.*, 192.

soil.<sup>33</sup>

Compare that passage to this one from *The Isles of Fear*:

Malays as they are, no caste system exists among them. And they show but two classes – the cacique, or moneyed class, which bosses and from which all politicians come; and the tao, or peasant class, which is bossed, and which has, in practice, no voice whatever in governmental or political affairs.<sup>34</sup>

While conceding the differences in social organization between India and the Philippines (namely, the presence of the caste system), Mayo argued that a native hierarchy would prevent any sort of democratic rule. In the Philippines, were it not for the “intervention of the Anglo-Saxon spirit,” she wrote, “the voice of the victim would scarcely have been raised.”<sup>35</sup> Like the Briton in India, the Anglo-Saxon American is all that could retain order and promote democracy.

For Mayo, however, writing *Mother India* was as much about undermining Indian national identity as it was about defining a particular version of American national identity. Emphasizing the shared colonial projects of Britain and the U.S. served to underplay earlier iterations of America’s anticolonial history, thereby ameliorating the antagonistic history between the two countries. Key to these imperial connections was the way that Mayo drew Britain and the United States into the same fold by underscoring their shared Anglo-Saxon racial identity.<sup>36</sup> In *Mother India*, for instance, she drew a contrast between the Indian, “broken-nerved, low-spirited, petulant ancients” and the “Anglo-Saxon [who was] just coming into full glory.”<sup>37</sup>

Mayo’s vision of the U.S. defined by an Anglo-American racial identity had immediate stakes on the domestic front. Just as Mayo defined the “white” racial identity for the American nation, a group of Indians were challenging the restrictive racial requirements for American citizenship

33. Mayo, *Mother India*, 146.

34. Mayo, *The Isles of Fear: The Truth about the Philippines*, 10.

35. *Ibid.*, 46.

36. Teed argues that Sunderland and other American writers used the Mother India controversy to argue for and against narratives of America. Even Mayo’s organizational ties were linked to promoting good relations between British and Americans: in 1920, Mayo co-founded the British Apprentice Club in New York, to provide hospitality to cadets of the British armed forces while their ships were docked in the city. See Teed, “Race Against Memory: Katherine Mayo, Jabez Sunderland, and Indian Independence,” 36; Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*, 71.

37. Mayo, *Mother India*, 32.



that had emerged just years earlier with the passing of the Immigration Act of 1924. The recent challenges to the Act had also apparently motivated the writing of *Mother India*. According to a letter from Mayo's acquaintance Emily Lutyens, on May 1928, Mayo lectured at a meeting at the house of Lady Lyttleton in London, where she allegedly explained her three reasons for writing *Mother India*: one, to counteract anti-British propaganda carried on by Indians residing in the U.S.; two, to investigate the menace to the health of America that India presented; and three, to petition the enactment of the Hindu Citizenship Bill pending in Congress.<sup>38</sup> (Mayo, for what it's worth, later denied making such claims). The Hindu Citizenship Bill of 1927, which was proposed by New York Senator Royal Copeland, aimed to reverse a recent Supreme Court decision that had radically redefined racial categories in the U.S. four years earlier.

According to the law, in 1922, "Hindoos" in the United States – Sikh, Hindu, Muslim alike – were "white." The following year, according to a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court, they were not. The turning point came during the 1923 *United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind* case, which landed a major blow against the struggle for South Asians to obtain naturalization. Born to a Sikh family in Punjab, Bhagat Singh Thind studied at Berkeley in 1913, served six months in World War I with the U.S. Army, and was granted American citizenship in 1919, only to have his status as an American citizen later rescinded. Thind's argument for naturalization hinged on the same racialist categories deployed by Lajpat Rai, Har Dayal and others, a decade earlier; that is, as a descendant of the Aryans of India, Thind claimed he was legally "white" within the parameters of the American naturalization laws. While the argument was enough to sway a judge in Portland in 1919, the case was soon appealed and eventually overturned by the United States Supreme Court, four years later. The decision of the Supreme Court distinguished between the scientific definition of race and the popular definition, which was, they suggested, the Constitution's intent: "It would be obviously illogical to convert the words of common speech used in a statute into words of scientific terminology when neither the latter nor science, for whose purpose they were coined was within the contemplation of the framers of the statute... the words of the statute are to be interpreted

38. Jha, *Katherine Mayo and India*, 52.

in accordance with the understanding of the common man, from whose vocabulary they were taken.”<sup>39</sup>

The issue, then, was that the category “white persons” lay in the domain of “common speech and not scientific origin”; any argument by Indians laying claim to whiteness by the “scientific” criteria of racial theories could readily be dismissed. For proof of the cultural and non-scientific meaning of “white,” the Supreme Court ruled that the racial difference is “of such character and extent that the great body of our people instinctively recognize it and reject the thought of assimilation.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, the status of “white” hinged on a capacity to assimilate. Jennifer Snow explains in greater detail that “[t]he case against Thind depended on a much more vaguely bounded concept of ‘whiteness,’ signaled by the term ‘assimilation.’ The lawyers for the United States attacked Thind’s ‘assimilability’ by defining caste, and Hinduism as a whole, as an alienating and barbaric social and religious system, one that rendered ‘Hindus’ utterly unfit for membership in the ‘civilization of white men.’ The idea of ‘caste mentality’ was an important part of American anti-Indian racism.”<sup>41</sup> More to the point, whiteness was defined by its popular perception and not any formal definitions. Through racial typologies Thind, and the rest of the Indians in the U.S., were white and eligible for citizenship, but because the Supreme Court deemed that no American could imagine them as a fellow citizen, then, he or she simply could not have been.

In 1924, at the behest of two Republicans – Washington Congressman Albert Johnson and Pennsylvania Senator David Reed – the Johnson-Reed Act was passed, further restricting immigration by closing the doors to migrants from areas outside of the northwestern European nations. This legislation effectively stopped all immigration of Indians and made them ineligible for naturalization as U.S. citizens. Public opposition to the United States ruling against Thind and the subsequent restriction of Indian naturalization came from several corners of the country. One Indian, Vaishno Das Bagai – an import business and general store owner based in San Jose and a

39. “Hindus Too Brunette to Vote Here,” *Literary Digest*, March 10, 1923, 78.

40. Jennifer Snow, “The Civilization of White Men: The Race of the Hindu in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*,” in *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas*, ed. Henry Goldschmidt and Elizabeth McAllister (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 268.

41. *Ibid.*

former member of the Ghadar Party – decided to end his life rather than live under the restrictive purgatory of non-citizenship.<sup>42</sup> In his suicide note, later published in the *San Francisco Examiner* on March 17, 1928, Bagai wrote, “In year 1921 the Federal court at San Francisco accepted me as a naturalized citizen of the United States and issued to my name the final certificate, giving therein the name and of my wife and three sons. [...] But now they come to me and say, I am no longer an American citizen. They will not permit me to buy my home, and, lo, they even shall not issue me a passport to go back to India. [...] Is life worth living in a gilded cage? Obstacles this way, blockades that way, and the bridges burnt behind.”<sup>43</sup>

New York Senator Royal Copeland, proposed a bill to “restore by legislation the Hindus to the place they were originally assigned by Congress among peoples eligible to citizenship in the United States.” In an address delivered at the Testimonial Dinner organized by the India Freedom Foundation, Copeland argued for the inclusion of “Hindus” as citizens, “who possess all that original Americans have except color alone.” “Color,” however, did not assume race, Copeland insisted: “The Hindu has the skull, the features, the hands, the figure, and above all else the intelligence of what we call American [...] he possesses every physical trait of the Northern European races except his possession of a tinted skin.”<sup>44</sup>

But beyond the immediate effects that the 1924 Act imposed on the thousands of Indians whose future status as U.S. citizens was now jeopardized, the Act, and the debates that preceded and surrounded it, marked a broader discursive shift in the meanings of the U.S. internationally. In spite of its relatively recent inclusion of African Americans as citizens, the U.S. had effectively tightened its imagined racial body “white” as it tightened its borders.

The effect, it seems, was ultimately a reworking of whiteness in American racial discourse, to avoid the trappings which previous racial typologies produced and replacing it with a definition

42. For a detailed account of Bagai’s life, see Chapter Four, “Obstacles This Way, Blockades That Way” of Erika Lee and Judy Yung, *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

43. “Here’s Letter to the World from Suicide.” *San Francisco Examiner* (photocopy). South Asians in North America Collection, BANC MSS 2002/78 cz, Box 5, Folder 18, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

44. Royal S. Copeland. *“Hindus are White”: A Plea for Fair Play to Americans*. New York: Hindu Citizenship Committee, 1927. South Asians in North America Collection, BANC MSS 2002/78 cz, Box 4, Folder 4, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

that created stronger ties between Americans and the Northern Europeans, who enjoyed unrestricted immigration status. Mayo's writings were inflected with such an ideology, invoking an "Anglo-Saxon" identity for the United States and its allies. When *Mother India* was published in 1927, it fed into these various political discourses motivated by race – the international politics of empire in India and the Philippines, and the domestic politics of exclusion within the borders of the U.S.

*Mother India* quickly became an international best-seller, going into nine reprints and selling 140,000 copies in its first year of publication alone, before its eventual translation into seven European and six Indian languages. By 1930, the response to the book included fifty book-length endorsements and rebuttals, a short-lived Broadway play, and plans to adapt the book into a Hollywood film.<sup>45</sup> As a defense of the British Raj, *Mother India* was celebrated by the British monarch, colonial officials, the British public and the press alike. The leftward-leaning British paper *New Statesman* published a review that stated that the common reader "will feel that these religious baby-violators" – by which he meant Indians – "ought to be wiped off the face of the earth, as they almost certainly would be if we withdrew our troops from the North-West frontier. [...] There appears to be no rational possibility of democracy in India."<sup>46</sup>

Reviews in the American papers were similarly enthusiastic. *The Chicago Daily Tribune* went so far as to compare the book to Dante's *Inferno*; P.W. Wilson, in a *New York Times* review, saw Mayo's book as a "contemporary gospel of empire," which rethought the view of empire from tyranny to "service and sacrifice, of hygiene and healing, of education and [...] liberty"; and M.F. Cummings of the *Los Angeles Times* argued that both those who "agree with Miss Mayo's conclusions and those who [...] are unalterably opposed to them, agree that the Hindus as a class lack initiative and originality" (Mayo's words exactly), that their "self-dedication to the moot cause of national unity and their racial enthusiasm in general, which is easily aroused, are soon spent."<sup>47</sup>

45. Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*, 2.

46. Jha, *Katherine Mayo and India*, 63.

47. See "'Mother India' is Unforgettable; Its Horror Lives On," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 31, 1927, 8; P.W. Wilson, "India is Her Own Worst Enemy," *New York Times*, June 5, 1927, BR1; M.F. Cummings, "Shall Indian Break Her Bonds?" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 19, 1927, 30.

Such representations of the Indian – whose figure bore an antithetical imprint against the American archetype of the inventive, hard-working Anglo-Saxon pioneer – also fit in perfectly with the prevalent anti-immigration rhetoric of the day. The American press had for the past two decades stoked anxieties of “the Hindu menace,” the imagined brown hordes perennially on the brink of flooding the country.<sup>48</sup> The recent challenge of the Hindu Citizenship Bill of 1927 lobbied by Senator Royal Copeland attempted to classify Indians as “whites” on the grounds of a shared Aryan ancestor. In the face of the racialist petition asserting no difference – “moral or physical,” cranial or racial – between the Hindu and the “original” “Nordic” Americans, Mayo’s *Mother India* came along only to reify that difference on the grounds of cultural practice.<sup>49</sup>

Along with its immediate relevance to debates on Indian immigration in the U.S., *Mother India* gained even more notoriety from reports of the controversy it produced internationally; the backlash among Indians in America and at home were a consistent source of sensational headlines. Gandhi had famously called the book “the report of a drain inspector sent out with the one purpose of opening and examining the drains of the country [...] or [giving] a graphic description of the stench exuded.”<sup>50</sup> The *Chicago Daily Tribune* cited a Calcutta newspaper article protesting *Mother India* in sharply gendered language – a “Hindu leader [called] the American woman” with “her flashy black eyes, slim, sinuous figure, her knack of talking seductive English, and her air of wicked abandon, [...] the ideal of villainous,” and warned that “the only safe thing to do is to shut American girls between 15 and 25 in cages.”<sup>51</sup> On January 21, 1928, outside the New York Town Hall building on 123 West Forty-Third Street, where Mayo was giving a lecture on “The Women and Children of India,” the *New York Times* reported that a few of India’s sons burned copies of her book amidst a crowd of spectators. Inside the hall, an Indian professor from Lucknow University, John Jesudason Cornelius, protested the distorted picture Mayo painted, to which Mayo coolly responded, “I don’t care to debate the facts.”<sup>52</sup> A theme common in *Mother India* reviews

48. “Sees a Hindu Menace,” *Washington Post*, October 29, 1913, 2.

49. Royal Copeland, *Hindus are White (An Address Delivered at the Testimonial Dinner to Senator Copeland on May 4, 1927)* (New York: Hindu Citizenship Committee, 1927), 14.

50. “Gandhi Gives View of Miss Mayo’s Book,” *New York Times*, October 9, 1927, E3.

51. “Calls U.S. Woman Earth’s Most Dangerous Animal,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 11, 1927, 5.

52. “Hindus Here Burn Miss Mayo’s Book,” *New York Times*, January 22, 1928, 49.

was the dispassionate Mayo in contrast to the excitable Hindu: Mayo photographed at her austere desk poring over pages,<sup>53</sup> Mayo armed with irrefutable facts, Mayo who, when asked for a book she most wished she had written, replied, “the Indian census.”<sup>54</sup>

Yet alongside the opinion that the Indians were overreacting circulated the opinion that facts could deceive; that facts, themselves, could provide a false image of Europe, or Mayo’s homeland, if one only redirected Mayo’s gaze onto the United States. One commentator, a Reverend Dr. Arthurfield Waken, wrote to the *New York Times*, praising *Mother India*, but nonetheless calling for a book of equal force for the United States (even suggesting the title, “Uncle Sam”), which would describe “the slums, coal mining districts, graft, neglect of national parks, and similar evils.”<sup>55</sup> Bipin Chandra Pal, the Bengali Indian nationalist, was quoted responding to Mayo in the Indian weekly *Forward*, citing a trip to Chicago where he witnessed one hundred and fifty women “sitting at a number of marbles tables spreading over the hall with intent to let themselves on hire.”<sup>56</sup> Satirist Corey Ford, under the pen name John Riddelhi (itself a play on his usual nom de plume, John Riddell), published in the August 1928 issue of *Vanity Fair*, an editorial titled “A Step-Son of Mother India’s Aunt Answers.” “Although I have been to America, a fact which obviously qualifies me to write it without any prejudice whatsoever,” Ford quipped, “I am nevertheless informed on good authority of the following terrible fact: A number of people die in America every year.”<sup>57</sup> In 1927, Modernist painter and writer Wyndham Lewis, in a review of Mayo’s book that appeared in his journal *The Enemy*, skewered *Mother India*, deeming it a book that deserved a spot in the “Pantheon of Hate” for the “insidious manner it [put] the British Government in the position of Machiavellian power.”<sup>58</sup> Lewis painted a scenario in reverse (dispensing with the rules of capitalization):

Miss Mayo knows that if an indian lady journalist, for instance, hurried to America

53. “Photo: The Author of a Best Seller on Three Continents,” *New York Times*, October 30, 1927, RP11.

54. “Confessions,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 6, 1927, 10.

55. “Wants Book by a Foreigner Criticizing Our National Life,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1928, 26.

56. “Book by Miss Mayo Rouses Hindu India,” *New York Times*, October 6, 1927, 6.

57. John Riddelhi, “A Step-Son of Mother India’s Aunt Answers: A Parody Investigation of America in Miss Mayo’s Best Manner,” *Vanity Fair*, August 1928, 67.

58. Wyndham Lewis, “Mother India,” *The Enemy: A Review of Art and Literature* (1927): xiv.

on such a mission as Miss Mayo's she could very easily draw an equally untruthful picture. [...] [T]he Indian lady visitor or inquisitor, the 'restless analyst' from the East, could quote extensively from some American equivalent of the *Loom of Youth*, and tell the horrified Indian Public that in all the schools and universities of the United States homosexuality was rampant [...] that all American men were sexually impotent at thirty (hence the Broadway girl-shows) [...] [she] could quote Mencken for bits about the monstrosities of Prohibition [...] and she could wind up by saying that America is "a physical menace." [S]he might remark [...] these [American] mothers put on flesh-coloured tights and went and danced all night, while their husbands stole out, gun in hand, and went lynching Negroes in the next block. [...] And then, of course, she could quote Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico* to give an idea of the sort of blood sacrifices currently perpetuated by the Americans. This she could easily mix up with the Ku Klux Klan and say they disemboweled fifty Negroes a day in any fair-sized American city.<sup>59</sup>

Lewis' description was prophetic. Though it's unlikely that Indian writers got hold of Lewis' modernist journal *Enemy* and read the piece, in the years that followed *Mother India's* publication, they began to adopt Mayo's muckraking style, some even using the sources that Lewis mentioned. In *Uncle Sham*, for instance, K.L. Gauba quoted verbatim from H.L. Mencken's compiled volumes of *Americana*, prompting one *New York Times* reviewer to blame Mencken directly for the book.<sup>60</sup> Even more prescient was Lewis's identification of two major areas of American life that Indian writers highlighted in their responses to *Mother India*: the rampant racial inequalities of the U.S., and the sexuality of Americans. Such responses were more than simplistic, frivolous or even retributive constructions of the United States, but rather were deconstructive critiques of Mayo's unique brand of American imperialist discourse. For many writers, the co-optation of Mayo's discursive framework was a sort of immanent critique, imitating Mayo in order to expose the logic that held together her construction of India, a logic that directly linked cultural essences to the capacity for political self-rule.<sup>61</sup> Out of the fifty-odd book-length responses that emerged in the wake of *Mother India*, I focus on four rejoinders that historians have bracketed under the category of tu-quoque logic, the "you too" argument, beginning with Lajpat Rai's *Unhappy India* published

59. Lewis, "Mother India," xvii.

60. "Chickens Come Home to Roost," *New York Times*, August 20, 1929, 21.

61. Sinha discusses the way that the Mayo controversy also enabled a revision of the relationship between the "political" and "social." The book catalyzed a public campaign for the Child Marriage Restraint Act, which Sinha argues, effectively identified colonial governance as an obstacle to social reform. In this chapter, however, I am interested more in the way the Mayo controversy enabled new imaginings of the United States.

in 1928. To be sure, I am more interested in the effects rather than the effectiveness of their strategies; after all, with the possible exception of K.L. Gauba's *Uncle Sham*, none of these books had a serious impact in countering the enormous sway Mayo's book had on global imaginings of India. But while all responses to *Mother India* foregrounded the role of colonial discourse in maintaining the common sense of empire, texts such as Rai's or Gauba's, alongside Ghadiali's *American Sex Problems*, and Bose's *Mother America*, attempted to expose the logic of colonial discourse by creating "muckraked" narratives of American life, with varying degrees of success. American narratives of social fissure were the site to interrogate and perforate the imperialist discourse of Katherine Mayo specifically, but also to interrogate the politics of race, nation, empire and transnationalism in the post-war world, more generally. A foundational narrative of American society that allowed a critique of Mayo's logic was, in fact, the "Negro Problem," held up by Indian writers an example of a contradiction (or counternarrative) in American nationhood.

### 3.3 Race in the Metropole

The earliest book-length responses to *Mother India* followed more or less the same strategy: first, they contested Mayo's observations, refuting her facts when possible, and giving mention to the Indian-led caste and women's reform movements that Mayo had failed to note; second, they pulled a number from Mayo's book and highlighted social fissures or "deviancy" in the United States, whether that be the country's long history of racism or its supposedly depraved sexual practices. The first to strike back was C.S. Ranga Iyer, a member of the Indian Legislative Assembly, whose rebuttal *Father India: A Reply to Mother India* (1927) hit the shelves within months of *Mother India*'s publication. In addition to outlining the reform efforts of 18th and 19th century Indian leaders, Iyer, mired in the dated social mores of the early 20th century, used American judge Ben Lindsey's *Revolt of Modern Youth* (1925) to counter Mayo's discussion of child betrothal in India with lurid details of the immoral "sex atmosphere in which the girls of America live."<sup>62</sup> Never-

62. C.S. Ranga Iyer, *Father India* (London: Selwyn & Blount, 1927), 29.



theless, all the “outrageously improper” behaviors of Americans still did not prove, according to Iyer, that “the United States are not fit for Swaraj and should be placed under the tutelage of the more moral if dark-coloured inhabitants of the Philippine Islands.”<sup>63</sup> Through a clever rhetorical reversal, Iyer made explicit the imperial relations of the U.S. and the Philippines. Moreover, he effectively disconnected the link between cultural standards and the right to colonial governance, or self-governance, for that matter.

A more powerful response came a year later, when Lajpat Rai wrote *Unhappy India*. Key to Rai’s text was an emphasis on the role that colonial discourse played in perpetuating myths about native culture and the belief in the necessity of empire. Rai wrote, “It is a part of the imperial game to paint the subject people in the blackest colours, and to slander and libel them most shamelessly. The object is to produce and perpetuate the slave mentality of the subject people, and to obtain moral sanction of the rest of the world for usurping the rights, properties, and liberties of other peoples.”<sup>64</sup> Rai’s choice of words (producing the “slave mentality of the subject people”) was a clever reworking of Mayo’s own terminology. In the second chapter of *Mother India* titled “Slave Mentality,” Mayo went into great detail to describe the psychology of the Indian – melancholic, woeful, ineffective and inert – linking it to Hindu cultural practices. The cause, Mayo wrote, was “simply, his manner of getting into the world and his sex-life thenceforward,” after which she began her lurid discussion of Indian sex lives.<sup>65</sup> In using Mayo’s own term, and describing it as the byproduct of colonial discourse rather than any kind of essence of the Indian psyche (enslavement rather than slave mentality), Rai was very simply demystifying the language of Mayo. “Her object was to whitewash British imperialism,” he wrote, and “to her all that there is in India is wrong and is so because the Hindu is either a savage sensual beast, or a pervert, or both.”<sup>66</sup> Informing his readers about Mayo’s contacts, including the aforementioned Lionel Curtis, Rai insisted that the motive of *Mother India* was “political and racial,” despite the author’s claims of neutrality from being an

63. Iyer, *Father India*, 33.

64. Rai, *Unhappy India: Being a Reply to Miss Katherine Mayo’s ‘Mother India’*, xiv-xv.

65. Mayo, *Mother India*, 4.

66. Rai, *Unhappy India: Being a Reply to Miss Katherine Mayo’s ‘Mother India’*, 1-2.

American.<sup>67</sup> The political motivations of Mayo seemed clear to even the lay reader; but what did Rai mean by *Mother India's* “racial” agenda?

Surpassing *Mother India* in length, *Unhappy India* compiled selections from Rai's 1916 American ethnography, *United States of America: A Hindu's Impressions and Study* (discussed in Chapter One), with line-by-line assessments of Mayo's arguments. But far different than his earlier writings on the U.S., *Unhappy India* signaled a reevaluation of the American exceptionalism to which Rai had subscribed years earlier. In the book, Rai forwarded a transnational concept of “whiteness” that did not distinguish the United States from Britain. This concept signaled a significant change from Rai's writings taken from his 1905 visit to the East Coast of the U.S., or his 1916 volume *United States of America*, in which he emphasized America's anticolonial and anti-British history. Part of this was the specifics of the controversy: Rai and others were responding to an American and not an English writer, and hence, the U.S. figured largely into any kind of rebuttal. But it seems fair to suggest that Rai was also responding to Mayo's own racial discourse, which had pit a homogenous white West (Dutch, American, and English) against the rest of the colonized world. This racial bifurcation even penetrated the preface, when Rai explained that he quoted extensively from American sources because “white peoples of the West are not prepared to accept and believe any testimony but that of persons of their own race and colour.”<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, armed with issues of the N.A.A.C.P. organ *The Crisis*, sent to him by his old friend W.E.B. Du Bois, Rai devoted two chapters titled “Less Than the Pariah” to examples of American racism. These chapters were direct rebuttals to Mayo's chapters on untouchability – titled “Less than Men” and “Behold, A Light!” – in which she had narrated the cruelties inflicted upon Dalits (“untouchables”) by caste Hindus. The “light” referred to in the latter chapter was none other than the Prince of Wales, whose visit to New Delhi was boycotted by Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, but attended by a “swarm of Untouchables,” who literally sang the Prince, King, and government praises. Mayo was again setting up her familiar triangulation of

67. Rai, *Unhappy India: Being a Reply to Miss Katherine Mayo's 'Mother India'*, lxii.

68. *Ibid.*, ix.

colonial power, wherein the colonial ruler rescues the native downtrodden from native elite.<sup>69</sup> In reality, any meaningful political alliance between Mayo and Dalit leaders like B.R. Ambedkar never existed, due to the latter's own critique of British rule. As Mrinalini Sinha documents in her exhaustive history of the Mayo controversy, during Ambedkar's visit to the U.S. in 1931, he was heavily recruited by Mayo. Mayo, however, was rebuffed by Ambedkar who had issue with Mayo's misquoting of him in *Mother India's* 1931 sequel, *Volume Two*.<sup>70</sup>

In *Unhappy India*, Rai's basic argument was that if the practices of untouchability were enough to disqualify Indians from self-rule, then how could one justify the legitimacy of the Declaration of Independence, signed when the country's economy was run on the backs of slave labor:

One would have thought that the Americans would be the last people to declare Hindus to be unfit for Swaraj and democracy because of the existence of a class of untouchables among them. Americans never abdicated their right of self-government or allowed other people to question it, in spite of the existence among them of a larger proportion of 'untouchables' and a severer form of untouchability than that in India. When they issued their famous Declaration of Independence slavery was an established institution in their country. [...] Even to-day the untouchables in India are neither lynched nor treated so brutally as the Negroes in the United States are.<sup>71</sup>

The two chapters on racism in *Unhappy India* were filled with statistics of lynching compiled in Rai's earlier monograph *The United States of America: A Hindu's Impressions and Study* (1916), and further abetted with short excerpts from 1927 issues of *The Crisis*. Among the many incidents of lynching Rai catalogued, the East St. Louis Riot of 1917, as documented in *The Crisis*, captured Rai's attention the most. Before devoting ten pages to the incident that left somewhere between 100-150 African Americans killed, Rai issued the following statement: "[a] brief account of the Massacre of East St. Louis in 1917 will serve to disillusion those who believe in the moral superiority of the white man."<sup>72</sup> In fact, *Unhappy India* was unique in that Rai introduced the "white man" as the other, a foil to the "the black or brown or yellow peoples," among whom he counted

69. Mayo, *Mother India*, 176-77.

70. Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*, 105.

71. Rai, *Unhappy India: Being a Reply to Miss Katherine Mayo's 'Mother India'*, 124.

72. *Ibid.*, 122.

himself in 1928.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, throughout the two chapters, there was a deliberate pairing of the U.S. and the British Empire, caught together in the larger folds of the “white man,” “white world,” and “white civilization.” In one sentence Rai wrote about East St. Louis, the next he wrote of Indians around the outposts of the Empire unable to enter “the white people’s hotels, restaurants, cafés, and other places,” and the next, he explained that “all this becomes a tame affair when one considers the treatment meted out to the African natives whose trustees the white people pretend to be.”<sup>74</sup> Rai moved as swiftly from the Black subjects in the United States to Indian subjects in the British Empire to the Black African subject in unmarked European colonies. Rhetorically, he was constructing his own figurations of colonial power to replace Mayo’s.

The East St. Louis Riots figured largely into the work of Du Bois, in particular, his work *Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil* (1920). Du Bois writes, in “epic language” (as Amy Kaplan describes it) of the East St. Louis Riots, viewing the violence as not only the “legacy of southern history and slavery, but as a part of the world history of a global economic system.”<sup>75</sup> Du Bois writes:

It was the old world horror come to life again: all that Jews suffered in Spain and Poland; all that peasants suffered in France, and Indians in Calcutta; all that aroused human deviltry had accomplished in ages past they did in East St. Louis, while the rags of six thousand half-naked black men and women fluttered across the bridges of the calm Mississippi.<sup>76</sup>

In many ways, Rai’s slippery analogies were reminiscent of Du Bois, who both constructed race as an organizing force in the world. Years after seeing himself as a revolutionary in the pedigree of Washington and part of the same “racial stock,” Rai connected a line between anti-black racism in America, anti-Indian racism in the British Raj, and a more broadly defined, global white racism that targeted the colonized worldwide. Rai had said as much in the opening pages of *Unhappy*

73. Rai, *Unhappy India: Being a Reply to Miss Katherine Mayo’s ‘Mother India’*, xviii.

74. *Ibid.*, 141.

75. Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 202.

76. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1920), 95.

*India*, describing the mentality of the “white races of the world – Europe and America,” who had kept subject peoples under their domination through the guise of the “white man’s burden.”<sup>77</sup>”

Even more remarkable was just how far Rai drew that line of equivalence. “Yet another class of America’s mercilessly persecuted untouchables is that of the Red Indians,” he wrote in one passage. “They have come up to the level of the African natives. Just as for the Masai in East Africa, [...] the richest lands are under the white men, so the Red Indian gets the ‘worst lands in which life could be sustained at all’”<sup>78</sup> Whereas two decades earlier, under the capitol’s dome, Rai was ambivalent about the pathos of the “Indians (Red),” the effect of *Mother India* was to force Rai to imagine the division of power in the world as a bifurcation between whites and “non-whites”:

White imperialism is the greatest world menace known to history, and its racial arrogance rests on the assumption that those who are not ‘white’ are ‘less than men.’ It has deprived vast populations of political and civic liberties, and is ruthlessly exploiting them for economic ends. [...] Unless it is promptly and effectively brought under check it promises not merely to bomb out non-white civilization, but even to end all civilization in a death dance – a dress rehearsal of which we have had in the World War of 1914 – inspired by greed and jealousy.<sup>79</sup>

Rai’s use of “world menace,” a phrase that was repeated throughout several other responses to Mayo, was another term lifted directly from the language of *Mother India*. In a chapter titled “World Menace,” Mayo discussed the cases of malaria, bubonic plague, and cholera in India, and the pandemic threat that disease posed on the United States. Her discussion of disease, and the bodies that transmit them, however, was a thinly veiled euphemism for the movement of people to the shores of the United States. “In estimating the safety of the United States from infection, the elements of ‘carriers’ must be considered,” wrote Mayo, by which she meant, of course, that small trickle of Indian migrants that constituted the “Hindu menace” in the newspapers of the day. Further playing on xenophobic fears, she reminded her readers that “India is scarcely a month removed from New York or San Francisco.”<sup>80</sup> Mayo’s *Mother India*, as I have already discussed,

77. Rai, *Unhappy India: Being a Reply to Miss Katherine Mayo’s ‘Mother India’*, xv.

78. *Ibid.*, 136.

79. *Ibid.*, 141.

80. Mayo, *Mother India*, 371.

connected the politics of imperialism with the politics of immigration, and as scholar Asha Nadkarni observes, both these concerns were “materialize[d] through the discourse of public health.”<sup>81</sup> Rai responded to Mayo’s fixation on disease by reminding his readers that the historical “carriers” of disease have always been colonizers from Europe, adding that the term Indians use for Syphilis is “frangi rog,” the foreigner’s disease.<sup>82</sup>

In describing white imperialism as the world menace of the ages, however, Rai effectively reversed and replaced Mayo’s metaphor, from disease to a “death dance,” from the imagined threat of pandemics to the historical threat of world war, which had ravaged the world a decade before. Novelist Dhan Gopal Mukherji, one of Rai’s earlier acquaintances in the U.S., also wrote about Mayo deeming India a “world menace.” As if, Mukerji wrote sarcastically, “a result of Miss Mayo’s effort the League of Nations is moved to declare India a segregate country unfit for exploitation.”<sup>83</sup> Given Mukerji’s time as an observer of the League of Nations during a stint in Geneva, his comment was loaded, criticizing the spurious nature of India’s place in the European-dominated League of Nations, whose relation with the East had historically been a colonial one.

Despite the stature of Lajpat Rai in India and abroad, *Unhappy India* failed to make much of a mark and was overshadowed by his death that same year. Rai died from injuries sustained from police attacks against protestors of the Simon Commission – a legislative body made up completely of British Ministers of Parliament, who were to decide on the type of constitutional reform for the Indian colonial state. But in the volume, Rai verged towards a worldview that in many ways used Mayo’s racial framework against itself. Mayo’s “trans-imperial” category of the Anglo-Saxon race, who carried the “white man’s burden” of colonization was adopted by Rai, who used it to extend his critique of British imperialism to the United States.

Among the responses to *Mother India*, only K.L. Gauba’s work rivaled Mayo’s exposé in terms of sales and notoriety. By 1929, Gauba, the son of Punjabi industrialist and millionaire Lal Harkishen, had more or less amassed his own fortune on the basis of profits from *Uncle Sham*, his re-

81. Asha Nadkarni, “‘World-Menace’: National Reproduction and Public Health in Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India*,” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2008): 807.

82. Rai, *Unhappy India: Being a Reply to Miss Katherine Mayo’s ‘Mother India’*, 240.

83. Dhan Gopal Mukerji, *A Son of Mother India Answers* (Boston: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1928), 74.

sponse to Katherine Mayo. A year earlier, observing the relative commercial failures of earlier responses to Mayo, Gauba pitched his idea to Rai in his *Sunday Times* column, “Musings of a Punjabi”:

I give Lala Lajpat Rai a tip. If he wants to make money, *Unhappy India* is much too stale a theme. India has been unhappy a long time and it is not likely to be happy soon. In these days people are more interested in masturbation, prostitutes, and the married pastimes of unmarried young ladies. [...] I am afraid the answer to the book like *Mother India* is not: “Your picture is very exaggerated, we have good men and women; our social reform movement is vigorous; look at the statistics [...]” To my mind the effective reply is: “My American friend offered me whisky. I asked him how he got it. He said in America, money can buy everything, every department, every state official, every policeman and every magistrate and every bitch and to serve whisky is the easiest of things.”<sup>84</sup>

Unlike Rai, Gauba had not spent any time in the U.S., his only American contact being a “blueblooded Bostonian” he had met in London, who supplied him with references. Reasoning that “[i]f Miss Mayo could write of India after spending three months in the country,” he would do one better and write about America without ever having gone there. Gauba soon took to books and magazines of both “pornographic and surrealistic” quality, printed in the U.S. and sold at Lahore book stalls.<sup>85</sup> Compiling a list of texts like Judge Lindsey’s *Revolt of Modern Youth* (a source for Iyer and Rai, as well), Stephen Graham’s *New York Nights*, and Mencken’s compiled *Americana* volumes, Gauba traveled to the opulent Cecil hotel in the mountains of Shimla, where he wrote for three months of the monsoon season. By the end, Gauba had completed *Uncle Sham: The Strange Tale of a Civilisation Gone Amok*, publishing the book himself under the “Times Publishing Company.” As an early order of business, he allegedly sent a copy to Katherine Mayo herself, inscribed personally, “To one drain inspector from another.”<sup>86</sup>

*Uncle Sham* was more popular among the public than it was in the press. The book went through twenty printings in ten months, with more than one hundred thousand books sold in a year; enough that one American traveler noticed the book was a “best seller on news-stands all over

84. Gauba, *Friends and Foes: An Autobiography*, 71.

85. *Ibid.*, 82.

86. *Ibid.*, 85.

India.”<sup>87</sup> *Uncle Sham* appeared in the American press as well: first, when a minor controversy arose after customs officials seized the book and banned it from entering the United States.<sup>88</sup> Eventually, an American edition was published by Claude Kendall, and soon American readers weighed in.<sup>89</sup> A *Los Angeles Times* reviewer took *Uncle Sham* as an indication of the new-found hostility India felt towards the U.S. as a result of *Mother India*: “World fellowship may be a fine thing, but today is not the time to talk to Indians of spiritual unity with America. They hate us over there. On every news stand in Bombay, Calcutta and other Indian cities are cheap reprints of ‘Uncle Sham’ containing a collection of clippings from our own journals [...] all to show us up as a nation of hypocrites.”<sup>90</sup> In a syndicated review, Ronald Kenyon wrote with allegorical flair, “On the sunny plains at Lahore, India, an Old gentleman with a goaty beard and wearing striped trousers has been pegged out. Under the glare of the Indian sky, he is tied hands and feet while a polished young gentleman proceeds to dissect him. His scalpel is dipped in vitriol and he murmurs apologies as he proceeds to take the hide off our old friend Uncle Sam of the United States.”<sup>91</sup> In spite of Kenyon’s review, Uncle Sam’s hide was intact even after Gauba had his way. Gauba’s quick-witted insults and vitriol drew applause from supporters and disapproval from detractors, but in the end, *Uncle Sham* was far less a radical reinterpretation of Mayo’s racial framework than it was a full-on imitation thereof.

*Uncle Sham* begins at a dinner table; a post-war banquet, where a Presidential hopeful (flanked on both sides by a “bootleg king” and “flirt”) pronounces that America is both “the world’s most powerful nation” and “the moral giant of history.”<sup>92</sup> Over the course of the book, Gauba dismantled that claim, by constructing the U.S. through misogynistic if also familiar terms as Mayo’s India – oversexed and sexually transgressive, as indicated in chapters titled “The Virgin,” “Fairies,” “The

87. Sherwood Eddy, *Challenges of the East* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1931), 61.

88. Frank Swinnerton, “U.S. Customs Bars Entry of ‘Uncle Sham’ from India,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 17, 1929, 8.

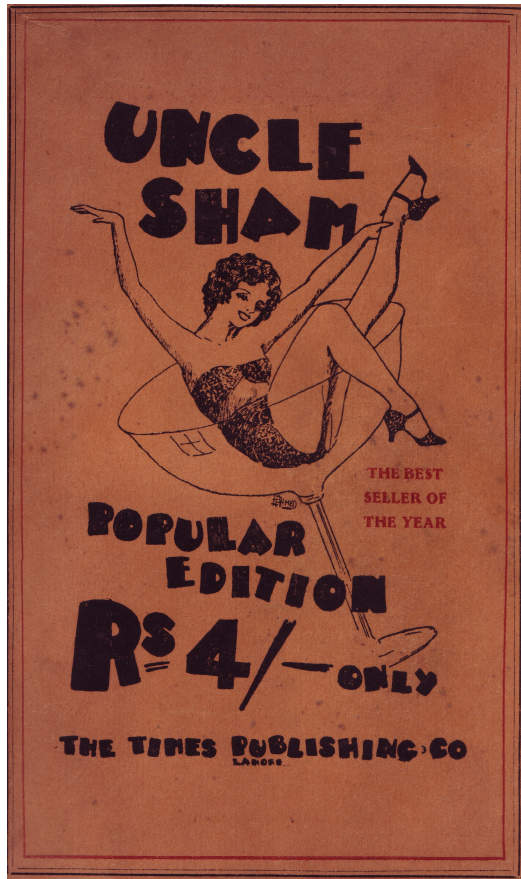
89. Interestingly, Gauba explains that a passage relating to “the preference for Negroes by white women in America” was excised for the U.S. edition.

90. Bailey Millard, “East is East, West is West,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 4, 1931, A4.

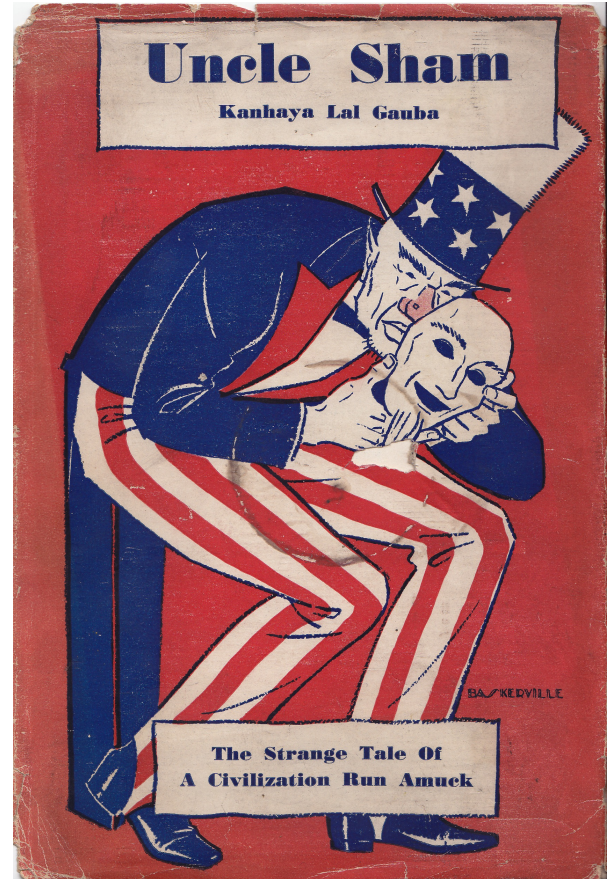
91. Gauba, *Friends and Foes: An Autobiography*, 86.

92. K.L. Gauba, *Uncle Sham: Being the Strange Tale of a Civilisation Run Amok* (Lahore: Times Publishing Co., 1927), 11.





(a)



(b)

Figure 3.1: (a) The Indian (Lahore: Times Publishing Company, 1929) and (b) American (New York: Claude Kendall, 1929) covers of *Uncle Sham*

Sowing,” and “The Grease Spot.” But like his predecessor Rai, Gauba devoted a good deal of his writing to Black-white relations in the U.S. to indicate the hypocrisy at the heart of American democracy:

The relation of the White and Negro populations in the United States – generally spoken of as the Negro problem – is the most grave and perplexing of domestic issues. It is also, perhaps, the largest blot on the institutions of the American democracy. The racial distinction, discrimination and antipathy constitute eloquent testimony upon the vaunted liberty of United States citizenship.<sup>93</sup>

In two chapters titled “K.K.K.” and “The Negro,” Gauba contrasted the image of the U.S. as the self-proclaimed “world’s greatest democracy” – dominated with scenes of post-war victory –

93. Gauba, *Uncle Sham: Being the Strange Tale of a Civilisation Run Amok*, 41.

with statistics of poverty, unequal incarceration rates, and crimes against African Americans culled from the Chicago Commission of Race Relations' report *The Negro in Chicago* (1922). For instance, Gauba set up a scene at the signing of the treaty of Versailles, where "President Wilson was sitting in judgment upon German atrocities, [while] a Negro was publicly roasted."<sup>94</sup> Elsewhere, Gauba contrasted the "War of Democracy, the War to save Civilization," which united "Black men, tan men, Negroes, Japs, Chinese, Lithuanians, Poles, French, English and Americans," with a scene months later when Chicago was engaged in "one of the wildest Negro hunts in history."<sup>95</sup> The power in his contrasts was the product of different framing devices – the international U.S. was set against the domestic U.S. – paralleling, in ways, Mayo's own strategy of presenting the Indian nation as a set of contrasts between Indian modernity and its archaic, oppressive culture; imagined political unity and real cultural dissolution. Anti-Black racism was not the only realm of social life that Gauba presented, however. The Ku Klux Klan's "triumvirate of 'hates," targeting the Catholic, Jew, as well as "the alien and Negro," were cited as yet another example of "perverted Americanism."<sup>96</sup>

The African American press seemed to be of two opinions of *Uncle Sham*. On the positive end was the sharp social critic George Schuyler. In his column for *The Pittsburgh Courier*, he recommended *Uncle Sham*, calling it a "devastating book" and for its cover price of three dollars, a "good Christmas present."<sup>97</sup> "[Gauba] tells the truth about our liberty, the treatment of the Negro, our boss-ruled politics, [...] and American Imperialism," Schuyler added.<sup>98</sup> In an anonymous editorial about the 1934 film *Imitation of Life* published in Baltimore-based *Afro-American*, Gauba's name turned up again: "If you think our white folks haven't their weak points pick up Kanhaya Gamba's [sic] 'Uncle Sham,' which deals with American dope dens, vice rings, graft in cities, its sex dives and sin dens, its venereal diseases, its working of children, its lynchings, its fairies, its outlaws, racketeers, bootleggers and a thousand and one sins our country has."<sup>99</sup> Over the years, *Uncle Sham* had

94. Gauba, *Uncle Sham: Being the Strange Tale of a Civilisation Run Amok*, 46.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid., 35.

97. George Schuyler, "Views and Reviews," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 7, 1929, 12.

98. Ibid.

99. "Imitation of Life," *Afro-American*, February 16, 1935, 4.

gained enough notoriety to become shorthand for a muckraked image of America.

But it appears that *Uncle Sham* as an idea was more appreciated by the African American press than the book itself, which it seems unlikely Schuyler ever read. In a more detailed review published in both the *Afro-American* and *Pittsburgh Courier*, Ralph Brewing took Gauba to task for his inconsistent assessment of racial inequality in the U.S. While embracing the book's "ribald" take on the "so-called Negro Problem" in which Gauba asserted that "the southern lynching jamboree is an expression of the Ku Kluxers sexual inferiority complex," Brewing also pointed out that Gauba's positions on race were not all that progressive.<sup>100</sup> Gauba had written that miscegenation is "one of the greatest menaces with which our white civilization is faced," a statement that prompted Brewing to ask, "What does the author mean by 'our' white civilization? Does he mean that by choice he has adopted the white civilization as his own? [...] Since when did England invite her Hindu subjects as equals in the Anglo-American supremacy of the world?" Furthermore, when Gauba wrote that the craving for "swarthy flesh is one of the new diseases of the modern age," Brewing reminded Gauba that "his own flesh is swarthy." He concluded, with good reason, that Gauba's attitude towards "the Negro is identical with that of American white men"; that his disapproval of miscegenation was worded in the same "prejudiced language of the notorious K.K.K."; and that, on further reading, Gauba's attack on America on the account of the Negro Problem was little more than a rhetorical point and not a gesture of solidarity. The grand narrative of the color line that Du Bois had forwarded, or even the narratives of white colonizers and the expanded definition of colonized subjects that was present in Rai's *Unhappy India*, didn't extend to *Uncle Sham*.

Dinshah P. Ghadiali, in his self-published book *American Sex Problems*, wrote of race in a similarly ambivalent fashion. Just as Rai and Gauba had done before him, Ghadiali responded to Mayo's chapters on untouchability with a chapter of his own on American race relations, inexplicably titled "The Negro President in White House." Ghadiali wrote, "[o]ne does not have to retreat into the caves and jungles of 'mysterious India' to find the counterpart of this story [of Un-

100. "Uncle Sham' Bares Sex Secret of United States," *Afro-American*, April 5, 1930, 11.

touchables] enacted in the United States.”<sup>101</sup> At first, Ghadiali showed compassion, mentioning the history of slavery (citing even Uncle Tom’s Cabin as required reading), and then listing the daily inequities of Jim Crow laws and the threat of lynching regularly faced by African Americans in the South. But far from promoting a racial solidarity between the Indian and African American, or even a sympathetic parallel between Black and Dalit mistreatment, Ghadiali forwarded the outrageously conservative view that the “fatal error” in emancipation was not the extension of human liberty, “which by birthright was theirs,” but the extension of equal voting to the freed Blacks. With language almost identical to Mayo’s assessment of the essential character of the Indian and his unfitness for self-rule, Ghadiali wrote that “[t]he Negro, nearly a quarter of a million years behind in point of evolution as a race, could not digest liberty” and (borrowing Gauba’s language) “ran amuck.”<sup>102</sup> Was Ghadiali’s imitation of Mayo an attempt to tarnish the sterling image of the U.S.? Surely it was. But Ghadiali also expressed equally horrific opinions about Dalits, justifying the stigmatized status of their labor through biological explanation: “The high class vegetarian Hindu [...] must have had cogent reasons for the debarring from social intercourse the ‘Untouchable’ who constantly wallowed in filth and lived on dead animal carcasses. [...] They are human ‘buzzards.’”<sup>103</sup> Ghadiali’s reactionary views on African Americans were not unlike his views on Dalits: they both represented nationally inassimilable subjects far behind on the racial, evolutionary scale. Simply put, in *American Sex Problems*, Ghadiali used the basic discursive framework of *Mother India* to represent the United States, but left that basic framework in tact.

A late response to the *Mother India* controversy came from the pen of Sudhindra Bose. Bose had arrived in the U.S. decades earlier, in 1903, when he worked as an assistant steward for Standard Oil. Later, Bose became a student at the University of Iowa, where he would eventually become a lecturer on Oriental politics.<sup>104</sup> In 1934, Bose’s *Mother America* was explicitly prefaced as

101. Ghadiali, *American Sex Problems*, 77.

102. *Ibid.*, 78.

103. *Ibid.*, 84.

104. Bose also earned an income on the Circuit Chautauqua, where he gave lectures on India and his travels to East Asia. Curiously enough, in a 1927 leaflet advertising his lectures for the circuit, Bose simultaneously performs the exoticized Indian (dressed in a silk turban on the front cover) but also is described “sunburned white man,” fluent in “American.”

“Not a rejoinder to the production of *Miss Mayo*.”<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, its suggestive title and its long passages refuting Mayo’s claims make it fairly clear that a rejoinder is exactly what the book was. Like his peers, Bose made the familiar argument that America’s democracy was deeply compromised on the basis that politically “the Negro is not the equal of the white American.”<sup>106</sup> Bose, who had written earlier about his experiences in the U.S. in the *Modern Review* and a book titled *Fifteen Years in America*, outlined the segregation faced by African Americans in a chapter titled “American Negroes.” “The Negro must travel in a Jim Crow car, eat in a Jim Crow hotel, worship in a Jim Crow church, and be buried in a Jim Crow cemetery,” Bose wrote, and echoing Rai’s conclusions nearly two decades earlier, he added that “he is the American pariah.”<sup>107</sup> But while Bose sometimes drew analogies between the lower caste “pariah” and African Americans, he also tended to see the equivalence between the Indian nationalist struggle and the Black struggle for rights in the U.S.: “I surely believe that the Afro-American has made more progress along certain lines during the past sixty years than we in India, under the English rule, for a hundred.”<sup>108</sup> In using race as a category to describe both caste-oppression of the Dalit subject within Indian society and the colonial oppression of the Indian subject, Bose undermined the triangulation between English overseer, Indian nationalist, and the oppressed Untouchable upon which Mayo’s imperialist discourse depended.

But *Mother America* was unique among rejoinders in that it also interrogated the self-narratives and iconography of the nationalist history of the United States. Others had touched on the hypocrisy of the Declaration of Independence, but Bose destabilized the entire history of the American nation, by rendering the narrative of national revolution into a muddy, multivocal, and less than heroic affair. The American revolution, for example, was far from the “unanimous affair” that history books had portrayed it as, Bose asserted, and in fact, war against the British represented history’s first “movement of the ‘discontented,’ ‘disloyal,’ minority.” Basing his position upon Wal-

105. Sudhindra Bose, *Mother America: Realities of American Life as Seen by an Indian* (Baroda: Bhatt, 1934), frontispiece.

106. *Ibid.*, 70.

107. *Ibid.*, 71.

108. *Ibid.*, 75.

ter Weyl's study *New Democracy*, Bose explained that the "'better classes' of the colonists did not believe at all in the doctrines of the Declaration, especially in its immediate democracy."<sup>109</sup> In presenting the colonial American population as ruptured between the loyalists and revolutionaries, Bose deliberately drew parallels between the loyalists and nationalists in colonial India:

While the country was in the midst of a terrible life and death struggle, the American Tories – 'the vile trash,' as the patriots called them – not only had no sympathy for the Revolution, but they went straight against their country, and actually fought on the side of the English. In other words, the Tories of the colonies looked to England, much as the Loyalists of India do today. [...] Independence was considered barbarism, and the American revolutionists were painted as savages.<sup>110</sup>

Moreover, Bose questioned the heroism of the American Revolution, by underscoring the importance of foreign aid in the defeat of the British: "How did the little scattered Thirteen Colonies with three million heterogeneous inhabitants win the war against eight million Britishers with ships on every sea? The truth of the matter is that had Americans depended entirely on their own meagre resources and received no outside aid, they would in all probability have been beaten and the Revolution lost."<sup>111</sup> Yet, the irony is, despite the nation's existence was dependent on foreign sources, "Americans today detest a foreigner."<sup>112</sup>

In fact, in Bose's narratives, the American Revolution was full of folly. He described the story of General Charles Lee, who, at the moment when he was supposed to advance his army, "retreated almost before the English had fired a shot." That particular story ends with Washington dashing in front of Lee, calling Lee a "damned poltroon," before rescuing the army from an annihilation that would have "ended the Revolution right there."<sup>113</sup> *Mother America*, in fact, spent a good deal of its discussion of American history on the figures of Washington and Lincoln, pulling both leaders off the pedestals of nationalist history. Washington, in Bose's *Mother America*, did not exactly resemble the lionized, "apotheosized" figure of the nation. Instead Washington appeared

109. Bose, *Mother America: Realities of American Life as Seen by an Indian*, 4.

110. *Ibid.*, 5.

111. *Ibid.*, 6.

112. *Ibid.*

113. *Ibid.*, 10.

as a “great card player, an inveterate dancer, a distiller of good whiskey, [...] a champion curser,” and a “ladies’ man”<sup>114</sup> Further undermining notions of an exceptionalist American identity, Bose described Washington as “an Englishman with English background and English viewpoints” who also “imported his ideas as well as his wardrobe from England.”<sup>115</sup> The father of the nation “in spite of his democratic leanings, was an aristocrat at heart” who “kept, bought and sold slaves.”<sup>116</sup>

As for the other towering figure of American history, Abraham Lincoln was also not spared Bose’s treatment:

That Lincoln’s primary concern was not the emancipation of the slaves, but the saving of the nation as a whole and united can be demonstrated by his own words. ‘My paramount object in this struggle,’ wrote Lincoln to the editor of the New York *Tribune*, ‘is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it.’<sup>117</sup>

On one hand we may read Bose’s reworking of the symbols of American national identity as a petty response to Mayo’s discrediting of the legitimacy of the Indian nationalist movement and its leaders. On the other hand, his narratives of American history emphasized the way in which American nationhood itself was full of contradictions from its inception, and even through the crisis of the Civil War, leaders held desperately onto the notion of national unity in spite of its fragments. Extending that idea to Mayo’s *Mother India*, which ultimately argued that the fragments of the Indian nation were irreconcilable without a colonial presence, Bose’s reconstruction of America’s national narratives contested her framework by underscoring American nationhood as equally tenuous as that of the imagined Indian nation.

### 3.4 Conclusion

Reading Bose, Gauba, Rai, and Ghadiali as key native responses to *Mother India* offers a way to think about how Mayo’s muckraker created a different sort of “cosmopolitan thought zone,” to use

114. Bose, *Mother America: Realities of American Life as Seen by an Indian*, 46.

115. *Ibid.*, 43.

116. *Ibid.*, 45.

117. *Ibid.*, 48.

Kris Manjapra and Sugata Bose's term. Bose and Manjapra explain, "cosmopolitan thought zones [are] heterotopias that call forth conversation, in which speech is not 'dessicated and stopped,' [...] but is generated by the pragmatic need to get things done in communities with highly different others." The "thought zone" inaugurated by the circulation of *Mother India* produced not only the hegemonic image of India that circulated in the American imaginary in the post-World War I era, nor did it just reinforce a white racial identity of America, as scholars Teed and Nadkarni have argued. In short, the discursive figure of the United States – its historical iconography and national narrative – was radically reformulated in the wake of the *Mother India* controversy. The book's many tu-quoque responses from Indians contributed to a drastic overhaul of the image of the United States in Indian nationalist discourse: the dominant narratives of America went from anti-British revolution to a socially-fragmented civilization, fissured on the lines of race. But while the internal racial fissures of the United States – emphasized in rejoinders by K.L. Gauba, Dinshah Ghadiali, Lajpat Rai and Sudhindra Bose – centered on the "Negro Problem," each of these writers brought different racial ideologies to the fore. In the case of Ghadiali and Gauba, the "Negro Problem" produced no analogies to the colonial condition of India. In the case of Lajpat Rai, on the other hand (and to a lesser extent Bose), the history of African Americans expanded their analogous range and supported a broad division of the world into categories of race: the "white races of the world" and their "colored" subjects. The controversy around *Mother India*, through the lens of rebuttals, then, can be read as a historical moment that aided in the redefining of global racial formations.



## Chapter 4

# Provincializing America: The Historical Critique of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, 1944-1946

### 4.1 The New Old World

Like the young Lajpat Rai gazing at the *Apotheosis of Washington* with awe in 1905, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay too was impressed by the emblems of American nationalism when she arrived in the U.S. some thirty-odd years later. In her memoir *Inner Recesses, Outer Spaces* (1987), Chattopadhyay recalls her arrival to New York in October of 1939, the first leg of a visit to the U.S. that would last nearly eighteen months. Crossing the harbor in the “dim morning light,” she observed the Statue of Liberty “holding aloft the torch to guide the wanderer seeking shelter.”<sup>1</sup> Chattopadhyay did not exactly fit the description of such a wanderer seeking shelter; she was not, for instance, a migrant seeking citizenship in America nor an exile seeking asylum, but rather an important member of the Indian nationalist movement, who had earned her stripes by founding the All-India Women’s Conference in 1927, and co-founding the socialist caucus of the Indian National Congress (INC) less than a decade later. Nevertheless, the image of the Statue of Liberty was striking enough for her to quote from the inscription found inside the monument’s base, a poem titled “The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus:

Give me your tired, your poor  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuge of your teeming shore,

1. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *Inner Recesses, Outer Spaces: Memoirs* (New Delhi: Navrang, 1987), 235.

Send these, the tempest tost to me,  
I lit my lamp beside the golden door.

Often cited to characterize America as the great refuge for the world's "huddled masses," the lines had stuck with Chattopadhyay. In one of her travelogues, she had described the lines as emblematic of America's "Pilgrim tradition," which had given the world "a haven of shelter, a land of hope where life could be started anew."<sup>2</sup>

Still, imbibing America's national slogans did not restrain Chattopadhyay from launching a more trenchant critique of the history of the U.S. The Revolutionary war had certainly "paved the way for a new experiment by a band of men and women inspired by a yearning for a new way of life," she wrote, and from that spirit arose "America's richest legacy to all mankind," the Bill of Rights.<sup>3</sup> One description after another, Chattopadhyay underscored the newness of the U.S. – "a new life," a "new colossus," "where life could be started anew." But not long after its establishment, she argued, the new colossus that had just wrested its independence from Britain, had begun to resemble the old:

[A]las, the pressure of world economy was too strong a tide for the mortals of this country to withstand. The big interests were already in the saddle, the effort to dislodge them too weak. So instead of cutting a new highway, it set its wheels on the same old beaten track. It took up from where Europe left off. The New World lost its first golden opportunity. The American way of life became only a streamlined version of Europe's old pattern.<sup>4</sup>

For the socialist Chattopadhyay, America's acquiescence to the big interests of capital would come to define her larger historical narratives of the U.S. as an imperialist world power. Published in 1946, *America: Land of Superlatives* arrived in the middle of enormous geopolitical changes. World War II had ended one year earlier, and in one year India would gain independence, as Britain and Western Europe's grip on Asia and Africa started to slacken. America loomed large as it appeared to fill in the absence left in empire's wake. How would it differ? Would it at all?

2. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives* (Bombay: Phoenix Publications, 1946), 14.

3. *Ibid.*, 10.

4. *Ibid.*, 11.

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Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay visited the United States for eighteen months, from October 1939 to March 1941, a historical moment preceding America's involvement in the war, but still reflected by it. When she arrived she was thirty-six years old, a single mother traveling with her teenage son. From a young age Chattopadhyay showed the signs of a social pioneer unafraid of navigating a patriarchal society. After becoming a child widow, she broke one social taboo by marrying outside of her caste to Harindranath Chattopadhyay – a dramatist, and the younger brother of INC President Sarojini Naidu and Hindu-German conspiracy leader Virendranath Chattopadhyay – only to break yet another, when they divorced (marking the first legal separation granted by Indian courts). Her relationship to the male-dominated INC was itself contentious; she was one of the most vocal advocates for the inclusion of women in the Salt Tax protest. She was also a world traveler, having visited Egypt, Athens, Naples, Rome, China, and Japan from 1939 onward.<sup>5</sup> Her trip to the United States was motivated by reasons both political and practical. She had hoped to enroll her teenage son into Radio Engineering courses then unavailable in India. But her tour, which was marked by visits with American progressive leaders and a steady stream of lecture engagements – with the War Resisters League in New York,<sup>6</sup> the American Association of University Women in Washington D.C.,<sup>7</sup> the India League of America,<sup>8</sup> the Council on African Affairs,<sup>9</sup> and the Mother's Health Association<sup>10</sup> – was also part of a broader effort to counter British anti-Indian propaganda in the United States, especially during the war. Fellow Congress Socialist and youth leader Yusuf Meherally put it plainly: “British propaganda flooded the world, and especially the United States of America,” and “to counter this artful propaganda Kamaladevi resolved to visit the

5. As with her trip to the U.S., Chattopadhyay wrote about the countries she visited not in the register of the memoir, but through statistics-laden histories. See *Japan: Its Weakness and Strength* (1943) and *In War-Torn China* (1944) for two examples

6. “Roosevelt is Assailed,” *New York Times*, January 4, 1940, 2.

7. “Events Today,” *Washington Post*, February 18, 1940, S6.

8. “Events Today,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1940, 22.

9. “Events Scheduled for Today,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1941, 17.

10. “Leader Tells of Woman's Lot in India,” *Washington Post*, February 21, 1940, 13.

New World.”<sup>11</sup> And, indeed, in several newspaper articles, Chattopadhyay was recorded speaking out against Indian involvement in the war as long as Indians were subjugated under imperialistic rule.<sup>12</sup> “We do not want Hitler to dominate England anymore than we want England to dominate India. We are not Nazis. We are against oppression,” she said to members of the National Woman’s Party in Washington D.C.<sup>13</sup> Her trip spanned the country, where she not only visited dignitaries but Americans excluded from the typical dignitary’s tour to the U.S., traveling to the South, making it a point to stay exclusively with African Americans; to the Great Plains, where she “met the “Okies”; to the Southwest, visiting the Pueblo Reservations in New Mexico; and to the East coast, where she visited prisoners in Sing Sing, introducing herself to the women prisoners as an “old-timer,” having been imprisoned years before for her participation in civil disobedience.<sup>14</sup>

After returning to India in 1941, she published two studies on the U.S. The first of these volumes was *Uncle Sam’s Empire*, a slim book that was part of the “Current Topics” series published by Yusuf Meherally’s Padma Publications in 1944.<sup>15</sup> Two years later, Chattopadhyay’s longer and more expansive *America: Land of Superlatives* was published, with her stated intention “to present certain aspects of American life [...] as I feel India would and should see them.”<sup>16</sup>

Because of her unique and somewhat rare experience traveling the globe as a politically active Indian women’s leader, Chattopadhyay’s life and writings, and especially her visit to the U.S., have merited a recent wave of historical scholarship. For Kenton Clymer, Chattopadhyay’s visit to the U.S. exposed the ways that American public opinion itself had become a transnational, ideological battleground – with Indian expatriates and visitors pushing the Indian self-determination in

11. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *At the Cross-Roads*, ed. Yusuf Meherally (Bombay: National Information / Publications Ltd., 1947), 4-5.

12. “Britain is Assailed,” *New York Times*, December 18, 1939, 18.

13. “India Women’s Leader Speaks,” *Washington Post*, January 21, 1941, 18.

14. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, iv-v.

15. Kamaladevi contributed three histories for the “Current Topics” series: *Uncle Sam’s Empire* as well as two other national histories, *In War Torn China* (1944), and *Japan: Its Weakness and Strengths* (1943). The series described itself as a set of “illuminating books on topics confronting us in India and the world treated concisely and lucidly.” Other selections from the series included *Leaders of India* by Yusuf Meherally, *Quit India* by Mahatma Gandhi, *Mystery of Sir Stafford Cripps* by Ram Manohar Lohia, another one of Kamaladevi’s colleagues in the Indian Socialist Party, and *Lenin’s Russia* by Louis Fischer

16. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, iii.

public lectures and columns, and the British attempts to thwart such activity.<sup>17</sup> Nico Slate has written an interesting account of Chattopadhyay's relationship to what he calls "colored cosmopolitanism," citing her ideological solidarity with the African Americans she met during her visit – including N.A.A.C.P. director Walter White, *Pittsburgh Courier* editor P.L. Prattis, and Black socialist and singer Paul Robeson.<sup>18</sup> In one particularly evocative recollection in her memoir, Chattopadhyay recounts her experience on a bus ride through Louisiana, when she was asked by the ticket collector to move out of a section reserved for Whites only. Her refusal to move, countenanced by her refusal to answer the collector's queries about her ethnicity (she responded simply by saying she was "a coloured woman"<sup>19</sup>) signals for Slate, a "coloured cosmopolitanism" which framed "commonalities of struggle between 'coloured' peoples fighting for their rights," both inside and outside national borders.<sup>20</sup> For Julie Barbieri, Chattopadhyay's transnational status and critique of Western "international" women's organizations offered an instructive, early model of Third World feminism.<sup>21</sup> And indeed, Chattopadhyay's travelogues regularly brought a global perspective to the status of women's rights. In *Japan: Its Weakness and Its Strength*, another travelogue, for example, she wrote how the country's quick transition into industrial modernity had thrust women especially into new avenues of gainful employment and social empowerment, despite the widely circulating Western stereotypes of Japanese women as "subdued, delicate, and very domesticated."<sup>22</sup>

This chapter differs from the cases mentioned in emphasis, considering first and foremost Chattopadhyay's role as a historian, and – perhaps, more counterintuitively – an historian of the U.S. Chattopadhyay was deeply invested in writing global histories like so many others involved in the nationalist movement, who consciously interpellated the story of Indian anti-imperialism

17. Kenton Clymer, *Quest for Freedom: The United States and India's Independence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 29.

18. "Events Scheduled for Today."

19. Chattopadhyay, *Inner Recesses, Outer Spaces: Memoirs*, 253.

20. Nico Slate, "I am a colored woman': Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya in the United States, 1939-1941," *Contemporary South Asia* 17, no. 1 (2009): 8.

21. Julie Laut Barbieri, "Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Anti-Imperialist and Women's Rights Activist, 1939-41" (master's thesis, Miami University, 2008), 25.

22. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *Japan: Its Weakness and Strength*, 2nd ed. (Bombay: Padma Publications, 1946), 14.

into the long axis of national struggles and imperial rule. Take, for example, Jawaharlal Nehru's *Glimpses of World History* (1934), a collection of letters on history for his daughter, the future Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. *Glimpses* was as much a set of serialized history lessons for his English-reading public, as it was a continuum of historical episodes that placed India within the larger purview of an epic, global history. In an early chapter, Nehru writes that "[i]n history we read of great periods in the life of nations, of great men and women and great deeds performed," and "in India to-day we are making history."<sup>23</sup> Nationalist world histories contained this mode of self-reflection, a sense of writing oneself – and one's imagined community – into the grand narratives of epic history. In another chapter, Nehru describes the American revolutionary war as another link on history's chain. 1776 marked "the second great revolution of the eighteenth century," followed quickly by the French revolution; soon after, Nehru prods his reader, comparing the dire conditions of the Ancien Régime to the conditions at home: "How well the description fits, not only the France of 1789, but the India of 1932!"<sup>24</sup>

Chattopadhyay, however, conceived of global historical narratives in decidedly different ways. For one, history for her was not the story of great men and women and the great events they inspired, nor was it a line of revolutions that led, like a falling trail of dominoes, to the current moment in India. Her historical writing pushed against a national telos of world history, and charted the movement of history through several competing forces: the globe-carving interests of empire, the faceless revolution of capital, as well as anticolonial struggle. But central to Chattopadhyay's narratives of American history, and concurrent with her critical lens on the problems of the nation-form, was the force of subaltern struggles within those borders. In this chapter, I look at how Chattopadhyay's critical history of the U.S. allowed her to think critically of both nation and empire – two key terms in the Indian nationalist movement, and two dominant forms of social organization in the 20th century – and to imagine a subject of history beyond the bourgeois citizen-subject of the nation. For her, America, as a site for historical inquiry, would become a means to sharpen

23. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History: Being Further Letters to His Daughter Written in Prison and Containing a Rambling Account of History for Young People* (New York: John Day Company, 1942), 2-3.

24. *Ibid.*, 375.

a broader critique of white supremacy and the colonial discourse of “civilization,” the muted implications that justified the colonial project in India and worldwide. An unintended effect is that her histories disrupt the common sense of American historiography, undermining the discourse of American exceptionalism not only by emphasizing its historical proximity to Europe, but by laying out its fundamentally imperialist nature.

## 4.2 American Empires

In a now-famous maxim, written in 1955, the eminent historian William Appleman Williams described a recurring myth in history-writing of the U.S. “One of the central themes of American historiography is that there is no American Empire,” Williams wrote. “Most historians will admit, if pressed, that the United States once had an empire. They then promptly insist that it was given away. But they also speak persistently of America as a World Power.”<sup>25</sup> For Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, writing as a colonial subject of Britain nine years earlier, this theme would have appeared ludicrous. Such a disparity between the American historians in the Ivy Tower and the public intellectuals of India speak to the critical value of reading versions of America that emerge outside of the nation’s borders. For Chattopadhyay saw imperialism as the national logic of the American state, from its origins as a settlement in the New World to its participation in World War II.

*Uncle Sam’s Empire*, Chattopadhyay’s first publication on the United States, begins by placing the U.S. within the broader arena of the Western Hemisphere. The first chapter, titled “The Caribbean: America’s Sea of Destiny,” opens with a quote from Upton Sinclair’s novel *Between Two Worlds* (1941), describing the Mediterranean as the repository of histories now lost. She quotes, “‘Mare Nostrum’ – How many had made the boast through the age and their blood had been drained into the sea, and their dust blown over the hills, and the very names of their tribes

25. William Appleman Williams, “The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy,” *Pacific Historical Review* 24, no. 4 (1955): 379.

were lost to history.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the chapter maps the Caribbean onto the Mediterranean, hoisting the New World’s empire onto the ruined foundation of its classical counterparts. Chattopadhyay continues in her own words:

History tells us that land-locked seas invariably play a significant role in the affairs of mankind. They invariably seem to evoke in the breast of those that dwell on their shores something of their own restlessness and spirit of challenge that leads to rivalry and possessiveness. Empires rear their heads on the gray white sands claiming for a while the broad blue expanse, only to crumble and to let the waves of destiny sweep over them. For each empire but calls forth the rivalry of another. “Mare Nostrum,” how proud the boast, yet how vain and how oft-echoed and re-echoed through the ages, down the centuries!<sup>27</sup>

Inflected by antiquated prose, the opening passage of *Uncle Sam’s Empire* describes history as a set of inevitable repetitions “echoed” and “re-echoed,” each new moment unaware of its predecessor. “Empires rear their heads [...] only to crumble,” Chattopadhyay writes, alluding to the lineage of Mediterranean powers from the Phoenician to the Hellenistic, and onward through the Roman and Ottoman empires. In this way, the passage recalls the historical trope of *translatio imperii*, the westward movement of empire, which marked not only the inheritance of political dominance – from Asia to Greece to Rome to Britain – but also the inheritance of political decline. As historian Hayden White might describe it, Chattopadhyay emplots her history of America into a satirical mode, a “drama of diremption,” that perceives “an eternal return of the Same in the Different.”<sup>28</sup> Written in 1944, on the cusp of the dissolution of the British Empire, Chattopadhyay articulated a shifting westward of geopolitical power. With the empires in Europe in decline, the United States is interpellated into the long, satirical narrative of empire.

Beyond the passage’s creative rhetoric, the opening of *Uncle Sam’s Empire* is significant in its contestation of the U.S.’s dominant historical discourse, the implied warning in Williams’ statement. First, by placing the United States into a longer history of empires, Chattopadhyay effectively undermines a narrative of American exceptionalism, the nation’s stubborn attachment to

26. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *Uncle Sam’s Empire* (Bombay: Padma Publications, 1944), 1.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 9,11.



the self-description of an uncomplicated anti-colonialism and disavowal of imperialism. The ideology of American exceptionalism, Amy Kaplan explains, is rooted in a belief of “America’s radical difference from other nations as something that goes beyond the separateness and uniqueness of its own particular heritage and culture. [...] [I]ts exceptional nature lies in its exemplary status as the apotheosis of the nation-form itself and as a model for the rest of the world. American exceptionalism is in part an argument for boundless expansion, where national particularism and international universalism converge.”<sup>29</sup>

By articulating that long line of past empires, Chattopadhyay further critiques the broader idea of imperialist exceptionalism, in which each Empire claims its difference to its predecessor. As Edward Said puts it, “Every single empire, in its official discourse, has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort.”<sup>30</sup> In mapping the American empire discursively onto the site of previous empires – in describing the Caribbean as the new Mediterranean – Chattopadhyay ultimately folds American history into the broader global histories of empire. America was an empire, she explains, from its very inception.

And indeed, in *America: Land of Superlatives*, Chattopadhyay begins by describing the “discovery” of the American continent by Columbus, but she does so by describing Columbus’ voyage as the outcome of European imperial desire. “If India had not been such an irresistible magnet [...] with its spices, dyes, perfumes, precious stones, silks, rugs and other luxuries, which had become so indispensable to the rich of Europe, the finding of this gigantic continent might have been left to exigencies of chance.”<sup>31</sup> America’s foundational narrative is written as part of a broader, global history of European imperialism – one which places India directly into the role of an exploited nation. Chattopadhyay’s target is once again the foundational self-narratives of the U.S., as she writes with casual ridicule: “The Yank, however, tells the story his own way.”<sup>32</sup>

29. Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, 16.

30. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), xxi.

31. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, 1.

32. *Ibid.*, x.

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But Chattopadhyay's interest was not only to undermine America's foundational narratives, or to reveal the imperial nature of the U.S.'s origins. Her interest was also in trying to understand the U.S. as a contemporary imperial power – how was it, and how would it be different from the imperial powers of the past?

In “Dollar Diplomacy,” the closing chapter in *Uncle Sam's Empire*, Chattopadhyay lays out the changing structure of empire in the interwar period. First, she emphasizes that the geographical reach of American empire was different than the British empire, and proceeds to show how the frontier itself was part of the imperial narrative of the U.S. The Monroe Doctrine, whose ostensible reason for existing was to stave off colonialism in the Western Hemisphere, only sanctioned U.S. accumulation of territory, she explained: “Now left to herself, the U.S. proceeded to appropriate rich huge slices of the Southern Continent – Texas, Oregon, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Upper California, and later, Porto Rico and Cuba.”<sup>33</sup>

In fact, in the closing chapter of *Uncle Sam's Empire*, Kamaladevi writes about the United States' role in the legacy of empire in a more straightforward manner: “The penetration of U.S. power into the Southern Continent has not basically differed from European penetration in Asia and Africa, except that coming at a later stage of imperialist development, the emphasis has been more on finance capital than on colonial settlement, or territorial acquisition.”<sup>34</sup> In this way “imperialist development” for Chattopadhyay resembles more of the decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule, which Amy Kaplan describes, than the traditional notion of colonial government.

If her discussion of America's misadventures in Latin America asserted the centrality of imperialism in the American national narrative, then her discussion of World War II solidified it. The discourse that justified and masked American imperialism as “dollar diplomacy” was the same discourse that attempted to shroud the war with the language of peace and democracy. “How often,”

33. Chattopadhyay, *Uncle Sam's Empire*, 88.

34. *Ibid.*, 84.

she wrote, “the Janus mask of peace and democracy has hidden a more sinister countenance?”<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, her analysis of World War II spared altogether the moralistic discourse that surrounded the war, instead focusing on the war as a “race for the dominance of the world market,” a “four-cornered trade war between America and England on the one side and Germany and Japan on the other.”<sup>36</sup> This was bold commentary, evacuating the common ethical narratives that mobilize our commonplace understanding of the war; nevertheless, it fit in line with Chattopadhyay’s larger analysis and deep suspicion of the United States’ motivation overseas. If the quashing of a dictator was at the heart of American involvement with the war, then how could the country explain its track record? “America’s official ‘dislike’ of dictators had to be reconciled all along not only with her loans to South American dictator-ruled countries but also with the financial patronage shown to Mussolini,” she wrote. Moreover, American dollars had funded the dictatorship in Hungary, while “American Corporations entered European Cartels with all their political implications.”<sup>37</sup> This mounting evidence proved for Chattopadhyay that America’s interest in the war was the same interest that mobilized their presence in Latin America: the expansion of capital.

In fact, the war’s interventionists and non-interventionists were similarly criticized for this reason, and Chattopadhyay sharply described the difference between the two positions as akin to the difference between “tweedledum and tweedledee.”<sup>38</sup> Both were ultimately interested in the war for the salvaging of capitalism, rather than out of some moral sense of responsibility: “The interventionists were primarily the Wall Street monopolists [...] connected with war production,” whose support of the war was based on a desire to “cripple Germany and establish world hegemony,” while non-interventionists represented a “second line of capitalist groups” involved less with war production, and who desired to negotiate peace with Germany, rather than face the “greater disaster of total extinction of capitalism and a Sovietised Europe.”<sup>39</sup> Her thesis of American war interests, then, underscore that the war was ultimately a race over the markets. Essentially, Chattopadhyay

35. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, 333.

36. *Ibid.*, 326.

37. *Ibid.*, 326-327.

38. *Ibid.*, 330.

39. *Ibid.*, 331.

articulated the military-industrial complex, nearly fifteen years before Eisenhower gave voice to it. The “dollar diplomacy” she described in reference to U.S. relations with Latin America also characterized American involvement in the war.

In analyzing the United States in the post-war context, Chattopadhyay also arrives at a definition of imperialism that expands beyond the Raj. In effect, she deprovincializes empire, by looking at the capitalistic logic that makes empire possible. Arriving at the “collapse of the much-hated British empire,” Chattopadhyay recognized that American imperialism would soon take its place, and with a greater speed: “American imperialism which rose during the Finance-Capital period and therefore without burdening itself with territorial colonies, today more than ever enjoys certain definite advantages over the more obsolete British brand.”<sup>40</sup>

But Chattopadhyay’s history of the U.S. was not solely critical. If her narrative of the United States as a imperialistic state power was emplotted in a satirical mode, describing a nation whose character resembles “the same in the different,” then her narrative of a subaltern America attempted to seek out an alternative, heroic narrative of the U.S.

### 4.3 American Subalterns

Among the writers I have looked at thus far, Chattopadhyay was the only one who considered seriously the presence of Native Americans to American history aside from Lajpat Rai, who briefly alluded to the “savage” painted in the U.S. Capitol’s artwork (see Chapter 2). Besides, no Indian writer considered seriously the decimation of Natives as a colonial project. In her memoir, she recounts that during her visit to the American Southwest, she met with a group of Pueblos in New Mexico. “They too had been through the same kind of traumatic experiences as ours, being dispossessed, isolated,” she wrote, imagining a link between “Amer-Indians” and East Indians, and correspondingly, between the settler colonialism of the U.S. and the colonialism of Britain. Moreover, she appeared to be interested in agrarian practices as a model for an independent India,

40. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, 347-348.

explaining, at a lecture at the Biltmore in Los Angeles that the Indian government would likely promote communal farming, not in the “large-scale” model of the Soviets, but through small village agrarianism like “the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico.”<sup>41</sup> That she took as a possible model the agrarian organization of the Pueblos says something about how Chattopadhyay perceived Native American society, not as the ahistorical relic of a bygone era, but as a viable form of social organization in the modern world. Moreover, her comparison of Pueblos Indians to the Soviets also speaks to her searching out alternative means for Indian society beyond the well-worn path of state socialism and the proletariat as the privileged subject of revolutionary change.

The majority of Chattopadhyay’s writing on Native Americans is collected in a chapter titled “The Disinherited” from *America: Land of Superlatives*. The contrast between Rai’s narrative of the fallen native, so central to the American national mythos, and the chapter’s opening lines is stark:

The Amer-Indians, as the American Indians are called, are no longer the “Vanishing Tribe,” as symbolized by the famous painting “The End of the Trail,” nor the fanciful bogeyman, “The Wild Men with the Feathers” who do war dances for the delectations of the tourists, a last pathetic remnants of a great people. The trend toward extinction is a thing of the past.”<sup>42</sup>

Here Chattopadhyay attempts to craft a redemptive narrative of the Native American, later even supplying some statistics that suggest a gradual increase in Native American population. As she explains herself, this population increase counters the popular myth of the “Vanishing Tribe” in images like James Earle Fraser’s sculpture *The End of the Trail* (which, incidentally, she misidentifies as a painting). And indeed, in the preceding century, the popularity of images and narratives of the “Vanishing Tribe” had effectively become the nation’s dominant popular rhetoric surrounding Native Americans. Paintings like John Mix Stanley’s *The Last of Their Race* (1857) depicted scenes of passive Indians at “the close of their epoch,” while other painters, like Frederick Remington created iconic images of Native and white America’s violent collisions, in which the latter served as

41. “Woman Tells India’s Hopes,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 1940, A1.

42. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, 270.

the martyr for western civilization.<sup>43</sup> Books like Joseph K. Dixon's *The Vanishing Race: The Last Great Indian Council* (1913) served to remobilize the narrative in the 20th century. Dixon's prose reached a new melodramatic height in a caption to *Vanishing Race*: "He had to give up all that was his and all that was dear to him – to make himself over or die. He would not yield. He died. He would not receive his salvation by surrender; rather would he choose oblivion, unknown darkness – the melting fires of extermination."<sup>44</sup> Two broader narratives emerged out of this discourse: First, a depiction of Native Americans standing passively at the brink of their own extinction, or second, Natives violently in conflict with the inevitable (benevolent) manifest destiny of American expansion. Both, however, implicitly positioned Native Americans as subjects outside American expansion, an anachronism in the face of American modernity.

From that context, Chattopadhyay's statement, then, might be read as a broader critique of U.S. empire at the turn of the century. "Western imperialism, and perhaps this is true of all imperialisms," Eric Cheyfitz reminds us, "founds its program on the disappearance of the 'other.'"<sup>45</sup> Chattopadhyay dramatically asserted the presence of the Native American, undermining the amnesiac logic of American empire. At other times, though, Chattopadhyay imbued the Native figure with the essentialized features of the mythologized native, describing, for instance, the "sad-eyed wistful folks disinherited of their country," sharing "heroic lores of the 'great and glorious' bygone days."<sup>46</sup> This may have been a product of the sources she used, which, other than her personal visit to New Mexico, came from several white American historians, including Lewis H. Morgan, William Prescott, John Collier, Sam Gorman, and John Heckewelder.

But as guilty as Chattopadhyay was in replicating the static image of the Native, she also actively constructed the Native American as a subject of modern history, seeking in her narrative attractive alternatives to the modern structure of society: namely, private property, patriarchy, and

43. Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 220.

44. Joseph K. Dixon, *The Vanishing Race: The Last Great Indian Council* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1913), 4.

45. Eric Cheyfitz, "Savage Law: The Plot Against American Indians in *Johnson and Graham's Lessee v. M'Intosh* and *The Pioneers*," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 130.

46. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, 292.

white supremacy. For example, describing the social structure of “Plains Indian Culture,” Chattopadhyay outlines a matrilinear system. She writes,

Maternal relationship was considered very intimate, and no marriage could take place within that orbit. Among many groups matriarchy prevailed. Women had equal rights and were entitled to share in everything [...] They also had a voice in general affairs.

As a socialist, Chattopadhyay also took interest in Native concepts of property, citing the absence of private property in native culture as a means by which the U.S. eventually displaced Native peoples. Nevertheless, Chattopadhyay writes in laudatory, perhaps idealistic ways about the effects of the lack of private property.

Private property was very simple and truly personal. It consisted of horses, foods, utensils, weapons and implements. There were no private-owned lands. Social position was not determined by the weight of possessions, but by lavish generosity and the giving away of things freely. There was no aristocracy of wealth and blood.

But more important for Chattopadhyay, was that Native conceptions of private property would eventually dissolve “aristocracy” of wealth and blood; in other words, class and caste structure could no longer exist. If the proto-Marxian texture of this comment wasn’t already implied, it is made clearer when she cites Lewis Morgan: “The tribes of the plains [...] show in their usages [of food], in hunt, the same tendency to communism.” The comment is strange, anachronistic, imagining a property-less, classless, and pre-industrial moment through the telos of communism. But this is partly the point; Chattopadhyay’s America, and specifically her focus on subaltern Americas, becomes a kind of utopian space of social imagination. In fact, in terms that probably appear at their worst romantic and at their best hopeful, Chattopadhyay places the pre-modern Native civilization in terms of post-war modernity, writing that they had “built up a real League of Nations” unlike what the Western powers had constructed in Paris 1919. In doing so, Chattopadhyay undermines the distinction between modern and premodern, savage and civilized. She writes as much in one of her more clever barbs about American civilization: “The Red natives’ claim to be called ‘Civilized’ may be disputed, but hardly the treaties the white conquerers made with them.

Admittedly the Indians were not ‘civilized’ enough to pin up ‘Keep off’ sign boards on the ancestral properties conceded to the enemy under the treaties, and of course the enlightened arrivals took whatever land they could in ‘civilizing stride.’<sup>47</sup> Civilization, the term that became Western modernity’s bludgeon for its colonized populations, was reclaimed by Chattopadhyay.

Elsewhere, she narrates Native history in epic terms, ducking specificity for a grand sweep of history of the “children of Americas.” The effect is something of a eulogy.

These children of the Americas were a brave people who gave long and stiff resistance to the white invaders. Even to this day, there are tribes who do not recognise the white man’s supremacy, and evade any direct contact [...] Their subjection proved too far shattering an experience for them. When their lands were forcibly wrested from them, it was like taking the prop from a blind man’s hands. It literally cut the ground from under them. They fared like all their kind in the other Spanish colonies of the New Continent. They beat and broke in the mines, they withered and perished in the plantations. Hunted and persecuted, they fought and resisted, as long as they could. When they could not, they dropped and sank. What hurt them more than the loss of their lands, was the ruthless devastation of their soil. Possessed by an overpowering greed for more and more, the new settlers began to bleed the rich warm earth, whose every single being they knew, to whose every single tremor their hearts quivered in unison. The sight of their lovely gardens turning to dust, struck the iron deep into their heart.

Here, Chattopadhyay moves away from the statistical, citational mode of writing to a more dramatic register. The Natives are “hunted and persecuted,” “withered and perished,” “bent and broken,” and in effect, rendered into the slave non-subject. The Indian did not vanish, in other words, but was vanished. Moreover, Chattopadhyay articulates the opposition as the “white invader” armed with the ideology of the “white man’s supremacy,” effectively recentring race and the broader narrative of colonialism as the organizing structure of America’s origins. For an Indian nationalist, who had heard with increasing irritation the “white man’s burden” justification of colonialism, this might not be so surprising. What it is surprising is how rare her candor was, when so few other Indian nationalists who visited took up the case of Native Americans, even in rhetoric.

47. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, 284.



Elsewhere, in *Land of Superlatives* and *Uncle Sam's Empire*, Chattopadhyay looked at the role of American capitalist economy along with white supremacy as the two governing ideological structures that led to the decimation of the Indian and the rise of slavery. The Native American was unproductive labor. For the cultivation of the Southern rural economy, and the lack of peasants led America's settler colonialist to turn to the Native population. But "the original Indians having been ousted, or killed off, and the survivors not fit for such strenuous labour," the colonialist turned to Africa for human labor.<sup>48</sup>

The African American struggle for human rights and political enfranchisement was a recurring theme in Chattopadhyay's discussion of the U.S., as well as for other comrades in the Congress Socialist party. Rammanohar Lohia, another leader of the party, had visited the United States in 1951 and later in 1964, meeting with Black leaders at Fisk, Howard, Toulago, as well as with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Like Chattopadhyay, incidentally, Lohia witnessed first hand the effects of Jim Crow, when he was arrested for not leaving the white section of a cafeteria in Mississippi.

When she came to the U.S., Chattopadhyay traveled to the South, arranging her visit so as to exclusively stay with African Americans, in the hopes of "shar[ing] their life and experiences." The result of this visit and her study of Black history were two chapters – "The Negro Problem" in *America: Land of Superlatives* and "The Negro Slave Trade" in *Uncle Sam's Empire*. Her usual focus in large economic forces that shape social conflict and relations as a whole is very much present in both books, and in *Uncle Sam's Empire* especially. Chattopadhyay points to the network of imperial powers – Spanish, English, French, and Dutch – that gave rise to slave trade. Conquering the New World, the European powers cultivated sugar, developing a taste for it though "too lethargic to cultivate it" themselves. "The new world became an ever gaping mouth that called for more and ever more," she writes, hungry for commodities like sugar and "the human commodity" of slavery for their production. Once again, she points to relationship between the indigenous and the slave: "As the American Indian's physical inability to adjust to the needs of the new colonists

48. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, 193.

had become more apparent and an acute shortage of labour had resulted, the planters and miners casting around for a convenient substitute had alighted on the African negro.”<sup>49</sup> *Uncle Sam’s Empire*, a book that was just as much about the Caribbean, as I will explain later, reframes the U.S. as an integral part of that imperial history.

In *America: Land of Superlatives*, Chattopadhyay turns her attention northward, focusing on the development and the cultivation of the continental United States. The British colony did not display any essential difference from the imperial powers in the Caribbean, according to Chattopadhyay, as far as its relationship to the native populations and the slave trade. Far from being an economic history or strict class analysis, however, Chattopadhyay saw her own writing on Black history as recuperative and educational project for her Indian audience; the “suppression and distortion” of this history, she writes, is a “crime perpetrated not only on the coloured people but humanity at large.”<sup>50</sup>

At her worst – as with her images of the wistful, sad-eyed Native – Chattopadhyay attempted to understand how a history of persecution led to “psychological complexes” of her historical subjects, and in the process, as Nico Slate points out, her depictions of African Americans are imbued with stereotypical imagery.<sup>51</sup> Blacks are described as “a kindly simple folk” with “a wistfulness in their eyes, the pathos in their voice are eloquent of a lacerated soul.”<sup>52</sup> Such descriptions, in many ways, echo Katherine Mayo’s own descriptions of the “pathetic” subaltern, despite Mayo’s and Chattopadhyay’s clearly different invocation of them. Moreover, Chattopadhyay defers the question of racial psychology to Black writers, citing a list from pre-emancipation writers Albery Whitman and Paul Dunbar to Jessie Fauset, Langston Hughes, and Richard Wright, quoting liberally from several of them.

But more critically, Chattopadhyay placed African American history at the center of U.S. history, eschewing the triumphalist narratives of American independence and progress for a more critical examination of the nation’s foundations. Sure, she did devote a chapter to the American

49. Chattopadhyay, *Uncle Sam’s Empire*, 51.

50. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, 179.

51. Slate, “I am a colored woman’: Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya in the United States, 1939-1941,” 14.

52. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, 178.

Revolution, but unlike the romantic depictions of an earlier generation of Indian nationalists (barring Sudhindra Bose), Chattopadhyay described the revolution as a fractured “war for national independence,” which was economically driven. Participation in the slave trade itself appears as one of the colonials’ demands from England, “the common man insisting on the principle of his rights to a share in this lucrative trade.”<sup>53</sup> In mentioning this, Chattopadhyay strips the revolution of its moral imperatives. Economics were “the real character” of the American Civil War, she explains, undermining the claims of emancipatory motivations from the North. Chattopadhyay explains that this was a war between the “northern rising bourgeoisie” against the “southern landed interest,” plain and simple:

For the further expansion of capitalism it was necessary to cripple the ‘slavocracy’ which impeded its growth at every step by blocking the growth of the home market on which the success and prosperity of capitalism depended at this stage. The capitalist realised the termination of slavery would initiate the decline of the southern landed economy [...] the open southern revolt left it no choice except military action<sup>54</sup>

This is not exactly a radical reading of the civil war. Today, few would argue that a contestation over economies and the expansion of industrial capital in the Northern was not a major, if not determining, factor in precipitating the events of 1861. And even in Chattopadhyay’s time, Charles and Mary Beard, in their central historical work, *The Rise of American Civilization* (1933), argued that the war facilitated the transition of South’s “planting aristocracy” to “Northern capitalist and free farmers,” once again centering the economic role in the Civil War. But absences are instructive, and it bears mentioning that nowhere does Chattopadhyay give space to discuss the abolitionist cause as an important factor in the road to emancipation. Nor did she draw great attention to white organizations supporting racial uplift. Drawing a temporal connection between the slavery era and the present, brings Chattopadhyay back to her central thesis, that to understand “the negro problem” requires a parsing out of the “factor [...] which serves as the foundation for a social system which militates against the negroes on all fronts, the Economic.”<sup>55</sup> Understand-

53. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, 6.

54. *Ibid.*, 36.

55. *Ibid.*, 192.

ing the present, in other words, means understanding the interrelation between “the plantation” and “the Black Belt, the survival of chattel slavery.” Still, not a thinker prone to economic reductionism, Chattopadhyay suggested that if the economic base shaped and continued to shape the landscape of Black America, then the political history of African Americans illustrates resistance to those economic forces.

“Rarely in the history did an enslaved people get so quickly democrat-minded,” Chattopadhyay writes. Throughout *Land of Superlatives*, she highlights the efforts of African Americans for political enfranchisement as a central part of American history. An abbreviated list of the events she covers: the freedmen attempt to take into possession the Sea Islands of North Carolina, the creation of the Negro Convention in 1865 and the Negro Workers’ Convention in 1869, the formation of Black citizen militias in defense of Reconstruction-era violence (namely, the terrorism of the K.K.K.), and the cultural development of the Harlem Renaissance. All the while, she exposes the structural and economic reasons for the persistence of oppression, a kind of latent slavery experienced by African Americans. The effect is a narrative of American history in which African Americans are the active agents of historical change, rather than simply the fixed victims of slavery. Compared to the foolhardy Puritans, whose “new life” was a path betrayed, Black struggle points towards a future of emancipation, not only for the U.S. but the globe as whole.

Indeed, throughout *Land of Superlatives* Chattopadhyay framed “The Negro Problem” as an issue larger than the U.S., writing that Black “emancipation-revolution has a world importance far beyond its local and national character.”<sup>56</sup> In terms that resembled Du Bois, Chattopadhyay suggested that “The Negro Problem” was one facet of the colonial question, pointing towards the imperialist origins of the slave trade as she had in viewing the slave trade as a legacy of imperialist development in the New World, and the interconnectedness of Native displacement and slavery. But Chattopadhyay seems to be after something else, when she writes, “The negro question is in many ways a part of the larger question of the struggle between the dispossessed coloured world and the ruling white.”<sup>57</sup> Here, race, and not simply labor, is the operative ideology that sustains a set

56. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, 177.

57. *Ibid.*, 178.

of relations – the disenfranchised African American and the dispossessed, “coloured” colonized. For the anti-imperialist, Chattopadhyay, an analogy to India would not have been very far away. In fact, she repeats this idea of a racially bifurcation of the world in clearer terms in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, in an editorial sent directly to “reach out,” she explained, to a Black readership: “To my mind, the world is divided into two blocks... not the Anglo-American and the Soviet... that is only a superficial and apparent division but in reality in the exploiter and exploited.” She continues, wishing the end of “racial exploitation of one part of the world ruling over another.”<sup>58</sup> This was not simply Chattopadhyay’s romantic ideal for a race-free world, but in fact, a very historically situated position, which she outlines herself. Addressing again the “Negro Problem,” she writes, somewhat vaguely, if “World War I deepened the shade of the conflict, World War II [made] it almost the crucial issue,” a statement she repeated years later in an essay titled “The People of Africa” (“Just as political emphasis shifted to Asia in World War I, the emphasis since World War II has been shifting to Africa [...] the dice in the imperialist game tomorrow.”<sup>59</sup>)

The continuous allusions to Asia and Africa, and to a world divided on racial lines, anticipates in many ways the emergence of a Third World imaginary. Nine years after the publication of *Land of Superlatives*, a conference in Bandung, Indonesia opened up the grounds for the articulation of the Third World project. It was at this Afro-Asian conference that national representatives of the recently decolonized nations of Africa and Asia – including her friendly rival, Jawaharlal Nehru – formed the significant, if also contentious, non-aligned movement, rejecting neocolonial alliances with either of the Western superpowers, the U.S. or the Soviet Union (the inefficacy of Pakistan’s disavowal makes up part of my discussion in the next chapter).

Her imagined alliances moved beyond a Third Worldist Afro-Asian imaginary, however. In discussing the colonization of Africa, Chattopadhyay returns to a word that, for her, signified justification of Native American displacement and slaughter, a word that signaled the logic of white supremacy: “civilization.”<sup>60</sup> The colonial discourse and justification of “civilizing” had, according

58. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, “Determining Social Status by Color... Antiquated,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 1, 1949, 8.

59. Chattopadhyay, *At the Cross-Roads*, 186.

60. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, 205.

to Chattopadhyay, created its own racial bifurcation of the world. Eviscerating Kipling's infamous maxim, she writes, sarcastically, "It is so convenient to dismiss the thorny subject of the colonials by calling them barbarians and asking the world to believe that the white man in a magnanimous moment loaded himself with this heavy burden."<sup>61</sup> Such a description could apply to the Native America, whose colonization was also justified through the discourse of "civilization."

Might we read Chattopadhyay's continuous allusions to the shared experience of the Asian, African, Native American, and African American as an imagining of a global subaltern subject? One formed out of the experience of facing both imperialist and racist histories? Such a position, of course, potentially flattens a set of very different experiences of oppression, reducing all imperialist subjugation to one order. And here, I am mindful of the sharp critique offered by Frank Wilderson, who points to the inalienable difference of Black and Native political antagonism to the U.S. from other national struggles – class struggle, gender conflict, immigrants' rights.<sup>62</sup> The point here is not to assert the validity of Chattopadhyay's metaphors – or my assumptions of them – but rather, to try to understand the historical contingencies and the broader imaginative desire that created them.

In fact, her strongest statement on this issue, appearing towards the end of her chapter on Black life, completely reverses the history of the "Negro Problem." Defining a new kind of historical subject, she places one racial discursive frame over another, turning the nationally-bound "Negro problem" into a global vision of the post-war world.

The chains rolled off their arms and feet, the banner of freedom rose over Latin America, Negro Republics sprang up [...] the coloured man began to "come back." Soon Africa too, will come back, and come into her own, and the dark ones will cease to be the 'untouchables' of the world. The international colourline has been challenged and stormed by Asia. No more the colonials will allow themselves to be jim-crowded the world over and their country looted under pseudo-slogans. The Negro problem will cease when the colourline of imperialism vanishes.

Chattopadhyay narrates an optimistic, if also romanticized, future of the 20th century, almost

61. Chattopadhyay, *America: Land of Superlatives*, 207.

62. Frank Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

as if responding to Du Bois' famous warning in *Souls of Black Folk* that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the color line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea." Hers is a global history of progress. This progress, it should be mentioned, is not the Nehruvian movement from France to America to India (as I mention in the introduction), but a revolutionary muse progressing from the New World, to Asia, and with the promise of Africa looming in its horizon. Latin America, and not France, becomes the harbinger of liberation for the colored masses, even if Chattopadhyay qualifies her exuberance by pointing out that "the mulattoes sat as dictators and ruled over their countries."

Nevertheless, the passage is interesting for other reasons, too. First, notice how Chattopadhyay layers a set of racial positions – the "coloured man" as Latin American, African, Asian, and "Negro." These geospecific identities are folded into a larger caste-marked identity, "the untouchables" of the world. We have seen this metaphor before in Lajpat Rai's 1913 volume, *The United States of America: A Hindu's Impressions and Study*, when he declared, "[t]he Negro is the PARIAH of America." But Chattopadhyay uses "untouchability" to cast a wider net. Untouchability – the birth-determined condition of inferiority and oppression – had come to describe the colonized subject. This was no longer the case, as the decolonized subject would no longer be marked from birth by inferiority. Interestingly, the metaphor of caste as a means to describe colonialism was used famously by fellow Indian Socialist Party member Rammanohar Lohia. Writing from the U.S. in 1954, Lohia stated his vision of the geopolitical terrain of the Cold War as an "international caste system of five Brahmin nations and over sixty pariah nations."<sup>63</sup> There are political limits to Chattopadhyay's use of the metaphor, as Nico Slate rightfully points out, "fighting caste oppression would prove less of a priority for her than supporting women's struggles or the fight against racism."<sup>64</sup>

But there is something else important to note here the stacking of various frameworks of oppression. By making "the untouchable" the umbrella term for what is, ostensibly, the Third World, Chattopadhyay locates a non-nationalist subjectivity at the center of world history. As with her in-

63. Harris Wofford, *Lohia and America Meet* (Bombay: Sindhu Publications, 1987), 30.

64. Slate, "I am a colored woman': Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya in the United States, 1939-1941," 16.

terest in the Native American, in the history of African Americans, Chattopadhyay sought in the American subaltern an alternative subject of history, beyond the bourgeois nationalist, a theme she would take up in her writings on India in the decades to come.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

To conclude, in Chattopadhyay's anti-imperialist reading of the U.S. two major frameworks are at play: on one hand, she emphasized America's imperialistic history, and on the other, she valorized the history of the Black and Native American subaltern. In both examples, Chattopadhyay's reading contested the nationalist self-narratives of the U.S., including the myth of American exceptionalism. Central to her constructions of the U.S. is the absence of a revolutionary history of the national-bourgeois patriot – a figure that had had a certain amount of cache with earlier Indian nationalists for their obvious, analogous pairing. Instead, Chattopadhyay located the revolutionary subject of American history in the racialized subaltern.

This framework was one that could be mapped onto an Indian history, as well. In a 1947 essay titled "The Indian National Movement," Chattopadhyay issued a warning of the transition that would come at the nation's moment of arrival in directly polemical terms:

Our attention has been focussed so long and so intensely on our British enemy, that we are apt to overlook their counterparts in this country the Indian big interests [*sic*] who have been the pillars that have supported the foreign-initiated and imperialist-dominated economic structure notwithstanding their patriotic protestations. They have allied themselves with the independence struggle only in so far as political power can be translated in terms of their own future advancement. [...] We have only to look at countries like America which though highly developed and very wealthy, still sport the same basic problems of ourselves.<sup>65</sup>

The comparisons that Chattopadhyay drew between the United States and India – the budding post-war superpower and the recently decolonized nation – were striking in their similarity. Her insistence that "countries like America [...] still sport the same basic problems of ourselves" resembles the older nationalist Lala Lajpat Rai, who wrote in 1916 that "the problems of the United

65. Chattopadhyay, *At the Cross-Roads*, 49.



States are very similar to those that face us in India.”<sup>66</sup> Unlike earlier Indian nationalists, whose comparisons between the U.S. and India were based off the tenuous threads of racial typologies and the shared symbolic struggle against the British, Chattopadhyay was not looking for a direction for the Indian nation in the history of the U.S. In fact, the history of the U.S. seemed to possess a set of dead-ends for the postcolonial nation.

Her comparison is a curious but also complex one, and speaks to the structure of her politics. To put it simply, Chattopadhyay was suspicious of a national bourgeois leadership, a fact that prevented her from celebrating any history of American revolution or India’s closely approaching independence. A *New York Times* report of a lecture she had given at the Congregation of the Community Church records her arguing that the larger suffering of the nation came at the hands of “the ruling classes dominated by the British but absorbing certain members of the Indian population.” Her anti-imperialism was not a nativist response.

In this way, Chattopadhyay’s critique resembles what Donald Pease has called the discourse of “global-localism.” Donald Pease explains that while “critics of imperialism usually endorse a reading of the emergence of Third World colonies into nation-states as a more or less effective anti-imperialist project, global-localism construes Third World nationalism as itself a moment of colonial domination, and it understands social relations in the so-called Third World to be at once more complicated, unbounded, and interconnected than the anti-imperialist reading permits.”<sup>67</sup> Indeed, for Chattopadhyay, national independence would not flatten the class dynamic of Indian society, just as it never had in America.

66. Rai, *The United States of America: A Hindu’s Impressions and Study*, 1.

67. Donald E. Pease, “New Perspectives on U.S. Culture and Imperialism,” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 26.

## Chapter 5

# Your Obedient Nephew: The Recolonized National Subject in Saadat Hasan Manto's "Letters to Uncle Sam," 1951-1954

"If I seem a little bizarre, remember the wild profusion of my inheritance... perhaps, if one wishes to remain an individual in the midst of the teeming multitudes, one must make oneself grotesque."

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Saleem Sinai, *Midnight's Children* (1981)

### 5.1 "Dear Uncle"

Affecting the objective perspective of the historian, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's writings on the United States revealed the transformed geopolitical landscape of empire after the Second World War, with the U.S. standing in as the new, ideological, imperial center. But American empire was experienced as far more penetrating force for the fledgling nation-state of Pakistan, after its founding in August 1947, officially one day before India. In the decade that followed the independence of India and Pakistan, the two countries quickly struggled to define themselves outside of the long "force lines" of the British Empire, and 1954, as it turned out, would be a fateful year.

Seven years had elapsed since the British Raj was split into two neighboring (and occasionally overlapping) independent nations, one war already fought between them over the disputed region of Kashmir. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, was just months from a historic visit to

Bandung, Indonesia, where he would pose as the symbolic leader of the Third World, urging the formerly colonized nations in Asia and Africa to adopt a platform of “non-alignment” with Soviet and American powers. Across the border, the Interior Minister of Pakistan, Iskander Mirza, was a year away from his first term as Governor General and from signing a pair of military pacts with the United States with the proposed aim of creating a barrier against Soviet aggression on the Northern frontier. In truth, the treaty only plunged the country into its role as “imperialism’s frontline state” for decades to come.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, tucked away in his flat on Hall Road in Lahore, the Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto, who had crossed the border from India to Pakistan some years earlier, was forging his own relationship with the U.S. through a series of open letters addressed to Uncle Sam (*Chachā Sam*). The fourth of nine such letters, dated February 21, 1954, began as follows:

Dear Uncle,

I wrote to you only a few days ago and here I am writing again. My admiration and respect for you are going up at about the same rate as your progress towards a decision to grant military aid to Pakistan. I tell you I feel like writing a letter a day to you.

Regardless of India and the fuss it is making, you must sign a military pact with Pakistan because you are seriously concerned about the stability of the world’s largest Islamic state since our mullah is the best antidote to Russian communism. Once military aid starts flowing, the first people you should arm are these mullahs. They would also need American-made rosaries and prayer-mats, not to forget small stones that they use to soak up the after-drops following a call of nature. Cut-throat razors and scissors should be top of the list, as well as American hair-colour lotions. That should keep these fellows happy and in business.<sup>2</sup>

In a few biting and satiric opening paragraphs, Manto lays out a partial list of the characters in his Cold War narrative of South Asia: Uncle Sam stands as the grandstanding patriarch, India as a pesky neighbor, Russian communism a threatening disease that requires “antidote,” and the

1. The two defense pacts made Pakistan a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), adopted in 1954, and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), adopted in 1955. For a discussion of the effects of the SEATO act, see Ayesha Jalal’s *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan’s Political Economy of Defence*; and for a more polemical take, Tariq Ali’s *The Duel: Pakistan on Flight*. Morrice James’ Pakistan Chronicle discusses SEATO and CENTO, from the perspective of a British official. For a discussion of the ongoing influence of American policy on Pakistan see Aasim Akhtar’s “Pakistan: Crisis of a Frontline State” in *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 40, no.1 (2009): 105-122

2. Saadat Hasan Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, trans. Khalid Hasan (New Delhi: Penguin, 2008), 624.

mullahs of Pakistan appear as both manic consumers of Brand America and potentially murderous pawns. This unlikely marriage between the U.S. and the “world’s largest Islamic state” came at the juncture of the American policy of containment and the Pakistani government’s need for arms. And while Manto fell short on his threat of a letter a day, delivering only five more over the next two months, each letter that followed matched that same note of sarcasm, swiftly turning pleas for American military intervention into American consumerist interventions, each signed off with deferential salutations – “Your obedient nephew,” “Your poor nephew,” or simply “Your nephew, Saadat Hasan Manto.”<sup>3</sup>

Written between December 1951 and April 1954, a period that marked Pakistan’s increasing entanglement with financial and military aid from the United States, “Letters to Uncle Sam” were originally collected in the volume of essays *Upar, Niche aur Darmiyan* (Above, Below, and In Between, 1954), and are among the last works that Manto ever published. Jobless after being uprooted from Bombay years earlier, Manto’s alcoholism soon spiraled out of control in Lahore and by 1954, his habit of imbibing cheap, locally distilled liquor had ravaged his liver so thoroughly (a matter Manto documented in the letters), he suffered a fatal hemorrhage the following January. His death marked the end of a highly esteemed if also controversial literary career, which spanned three turbulent decades in South Asia. Beginning in the 1940s, Manto was tried several times over the alleged obscene content of six of his stories, including his canonical tales of partition, “Cold Meat” (*Thanda Ghosht*), “Smoke” (*Dhuan*), “Open It” (*Khol Do*). Since his death, Manto has become a staple of anthologies on Partition literature, gaining even the infamous distinction of being the only non-English writer to be selected in Rushdie’s anthology of post-Independence fiction. Moreover, critics now regularly write of how Manto’s fiction “expos[ed] the hollowness of middle class morality,”<sup>4</sup> how it explored the then “unmarked terrain of masculinity,”<sup>5</sup> and reflected

3. I am using the Khalid Hasan’s English translations of Manto’s letters and stories for this chapter, unless otherwise indicated.

4. Gopi Chand Narang, “Manto Reconsidered,” in *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, ed. Alok Bhalla (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1997), 1.

5. Leslie A. Flemming, *Another Lonely Voice: The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, trans. Tahira Naqvi (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1985), 33.

“realistically, changed social conditions.”<sup>6</sup> The scholar and blogger Daisy Rockwell put it bluntly: “Everyone wants to be Manto. He is the gold standard of South Asian fiction.”<sup>7</sup>

Less has been made of Manto’s treatment of Pakistan, and almost nothing has been written about his treatment of the United States. Indeed, one of the great values of “Letters to Uncle Sam” is the glimpse they provide of his attempt to make sense of the identity of Pakistan, and his identity as a citizen of Pakistan in the fallout after the partition of colonial India. In the letters, Manto tracks Pakistan’s early struggles with establishing itself as a Republic and producing a constitution, the ongoing debate on what role secular and religious elements would play in the country’s identity. Interestingly, this search for a Pakistani identity is figured not through an interrogation of the historical movement for Pakistan, nor did Manto press the role of cultural texts that gave rise to the Idea of Pakistan, as did a later writer like Salman Rushdie, whose 1983 novel *Shame* created a myth of Pakistan’s origins through a fabulist allegory rife with “Angrez colonialists” and the Persian poets like Omar Khayyam.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Manto’s search for the meaning of Pakistan is largely figured through the nation’s relationship with the United States.

From the first letter onward, Manto as “the nephew” juggled several affective roles, playing political jester in one line and melodramatic suicide in the other. Starting with his addressee Uncle Sam, Manto wrote this nephew into a far-reaching family tree of avuncular national personifications, drawing relations between the U.S., the U.K. (“your brother John Bull”), and the U.S.S.R. (“Uncle Malenkov”). In the process, the letters interrogate the very nature of postcolonial independence and subjectivity. What was the postcolonial nation? What did political independence mean for Pakistan, whose national identity was partially determined by British Empire, and now imbricated in imperial forces in Washington and Moscow? What did America and Uncle Sam signify for this central literary figure of the subcontinent’s letters? This chapter is anomalous in the project, not only in that it deals with a writer who never stepped foot in the U.S., but because it treats America’s actual political and material role in shaping South Asia. Unlike Chattopad-

6. Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence* (London: Routledge, 2007), 90.

7. Lapata, “The Reluctant Feudalist.” *Chapati Mystery*. <http://chapatimystery.com>.

8. Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (New York: Picador, 1983), 38.

hyay, Rai, Bose, et al., who used narratives of the United States as a discursive site to understand India, Manto narrated the way in which American foreign policy was, quite literally, defining the national identity of the newly-born Pakistani state.

Aamir Mufti says this about Manto: what was truly “obscene” about his work was its “undermin[ing] of the narrative resolutions through which the representative – that is, national – self is produced.” This chapter traces the way in which Manto *did* continue to produce a national subject, but that subject was never the autonomous, sovereign self. In this sense, Manto was the quintessential postcolonial writer, who ensured his protagonists were always weighted down by the forces that tried to turn them into subjects, be that a national or colonial subject. Drawing a line from his early writings in the 1930s to “Letters to Uncle Sam” from the 1950s allows us to consider Manto’s exploration this condition of colonial and national subjection. Specifically, I look at Manto’s rogue gallery of characters, from the subaltern and “progressive” Indian turned colonized subject to the Muslim, Sikh, and Hindus turned national subject during Partition and its aftermath. In what follows, I read Manto’s work leading up to his critique of the U.S. with an eye toward the allegorical textures of Manto’s fiction, considering how allegory itself, served as a kind of critique of the incomplete function of nationalism. We read his early work, then, considering critically what Manto had to say about the nation form.

## 5.2 Nationalist Subjection

It wasn’t the American Revolution of 1776 that captured young Manto’s imagination, but the Revolution of 1917. As a college student at Hindu Sabha University, Manto soon developed an interest in the nationalist movement in part from the influence of the Leftist journalist Abdul Bari Alig, who educated both Manto and writer Hasan Abbas in all things political and literary. Amritsar, where Manto and Abbas studied, was already at the time a hotbed of nationalist activity, and Manto soon daydreamed about playing a role. Writes Manto: “Hasan Abbas and I were not brand new revolutionaries. In the tenth class we took out our world map many times and made

plans to go to Russia by the overland route. [...] We imagined Amritsar in the streets and lanes to be Moscow, and we wanted to see the warning-filled end of independent and tyrannical rulers. In Katara Jamil Singh, Kumaraon Deorhi, or Farid Chowk, we dragged the coffin of czarism wanting to hammer the last nail into it.”<sup>9</sup> With the Russian Revolution tugging on his imagination, it is no surprise then that Manto’s foray into writing began with translating political, Western literature. After translating Victor Hugo’s *Last Days of a Condemned Man* (1829) and Oscar Wilde’s *Vera* (1880) – a melodrama about a Nihilist uprising in Czarist Russia, incidentally – Manto translated into Urdu an anthology of Russian stories by Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Gorki. Soon after this early apprenticeship, Manto began trying his hand at his own fiction. His earliest short stories were modeled, more or less, on the generic tropes of social realist narratives. In *Sparks* (*Ātish Pāre*, 1936), Manto’s first collection, the stories were earnest if also moralistic, featuring the stock characters of the social realism: oppressive bosses pitted against upstanding coolies, unemployed laborers, poor fisherfolk, and alienated students with revolutionary inklings. These stories earned him the early approval of writers from the All-India Progressive Writers’ Association (AIPWA), with whom he made contact as a writer in film studios in Bombay and with All-India Radio. A collective of writers who abided by an anti-imperialist, nationalist, and leftist agenda, the AIPWA initially saw Manto’s work in step with their social realist aesthetic agenda. At the Second All-India Progressive Writers’ Conference in Calcutta 1939, the novelist Mulk Raj Anand explained the group’s aesthetic program with, coincidentally, his own set of familial metaphors:

The task of building up a national culture out of the debris of the past, so that it takes roots in the realities of the present is the only way by which we will take our place among those writers of the world who are facing with us the bitterest struggle in history, the struggle of the peoples of the world against Imperialism, its twin brother Fascism, its old aunt Feudalism and all the other aunts who refuse to let the new shoots of life burst into the future.”<sup>10</sup>

Manto’s stories, with their focus on the lumpen elements of society – thieves, prostitutes, pimps, and Johns – however, quickly transgressed the norms of the somewhat pious progressive

9. Flemming, *Another Lonely Voice: The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, 4-6.

10. Talat Ahmed, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nationalism: The Progressive Episode in South Asia, 1932-56* (New Delhi: Routledge India, 2008), 13.

aesthetic, undermining altogether the narratives of unified nationhood that marked the AIPWA agenda.

As early as 1937, Manto began to plot out stories that critiqued the aesthetic demands of nationalist writing, discourse like Anand's which sought in fiction the "building up [of] a national culture." "The New Law" (*Nayā Qanun*), an early and exemplary story, involves a poor, unschooled, and occasionally mercurial tonga driver named Mangu, who discovers firsthand the discrepancy between the discourse of nationalism and its actual practice. Mid-story, Mangu overhears two Marwari barristers speak of a "new law, the India Act" to be enacted on April 1st, which would allegedly "free Hindustan." Delighted by the news, Mangu eventually tests the waters of this newfound freedom by charging an arbitrarily high fare to a wealthy, Anglo passenger – presumably a colonial official – who had incensed Mangu earlier. When the passenger orders Mangu down from the carriage, Mangu beats him and is immediately arrested. Pleading to the police constables about the new law, Mangu is told, "What the hell are you talking about? The law is still the same."<sup>11</sup> Aamir Mufti reads this final ironic twist as an illustration of the "differing relationships of the subaltern and the bourgeois nationalist to colonial political 'reform.'"<sup>12</sup> Mufti suggests that the Marwari barristers, who Mangu picks up from the district court, control and negotiate the language of nationalism while Mangu comically misinterprets it, believing in "the new dignity and status ('citizen') he thinks it is promising him, only to be roundly disabused of that illusion."<sup>13</sup> This is certainly a fair reading. But another theme that threads through the story comes from Mangu's consistent misreadings of the language, signs, and abstractions of political discourse, more generally.

Mangu, we learn early on, has gained the respect of his fellow tonga-drivers by passing off news he overhears from his fares as his own. His peers at the carriage stand regard him as "knowledgeable," "a vast store of information," a chronicler of "worldly matters."<sup>14</sup> At the story's outset,

11. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 208.

12. Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 192.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 206.



we witness a typical scene – Mangu overhears a passenger’s forecast of the Spanish Revolution and warns his friend Gama Choudhry that “A war will break out in Spain shortly!” When Gama Choudhry asks where Spain is, Mangu replies, “In vilayat, where else?”<sup>15</sup>

Mangu’s declaration about Spain’s impending civil war betrays his actual ignorance of the war’s context or even Spain’s location, which he places in the imaginary space of “vilayat.” The term “vilayat,” itself, is a loaded one. An Urdu word that broadly translates as “foreign land,” “vilayat” was also shorthand for “England” during the colonial Indian period. (Incidentally, the word is the etymological root for the English slang term “blighty.”<sup>16</sup>) Mangu’s misidentification is part of the punchline; the Spanish revolution is, through his ignorance, transformed into internal British strife. But Mangu’s use of “vilayat” also cleverly plays on Mangu’s parochial worldview, in which all the “worldly matters,” for which his fellow tonga drivers praise him, are framed by the antagonistic relationship between Britain and India. A later scene highlights Mangu’s confusion over the discourse of world politics:

[Mangu] sat down with his friends [...] and said in a worried voice, “It is no doubt the result of a holy man’s curse that Hindus and Muslims keep slashing each other up every other day. I have heard it said by my elders that Akbar Badshah once showed disrespect to a saint, who angrily cursed him in these words: “Get out of my sight! And yes, your Hindustan will always be plagued by riots and disorder.” [...]

“These Congressites want to win India its freedom. Well, you take my word, they will get nowhere even if they keep bashing their heads against the wall for a thousand years. At the most, the Angrez will leave, but then you will get maybe the Italywala or the Russiawala. I have heard the Russiawala is one tough fellow. But Hindustan will always remain enslaved. Yes, I forgot to tell you that part of the saint’s curse on Akbar which said that India will always be ruled by foreigners.”<sup>17</sup>

The conflicts described in this passage are both domestic and global. Mangu mentions the internally bound Hindu-Muslim violence, as well as the imperialist power grabs by Italy, Russia, and Britain. But in searching for causes, Mangu defines both communal violence and colonial domination as the result of a curse inaugurated by the 16th century Mughal emperor Akbar, who,

15. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 206.

16. “Blighty | blighty, n.” OED Online. June 2011. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com>. (accessed June 19, 2011).

17. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 206-207.

not incidentally, has been celebrated for his syncretism. Manto establishes a schism between the disenchanted world of his modern reader and Mangu's private worldview, enchanted by the supernatural and haunted by centuries-old pasts.

As the story progresses, Mangu picks up two Marwari barristers from the district courts, and overhears their conversation about a new constitution, "the India Act," which would set Indians "free" on April 1. Mangu distrusts the wealthy Marwaris, who wonder aloud whether the interest rates will change due to the new constitution – yet another barb by Manto against the class interest of nationalism. The news of the India Act sets Mangu off to spread the word. In what follows, however, Mangu confuses a set of national and international events – the Russian revolution, on one end, and on the other, the Red Shirt movement (Khudai Khimatgar), a nonviolent anti-imperialist movement led by the Gandhian Pashto Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and known for donning red-dyed overshirts.

Ustad Mangu had heard many stories about the socialist system the Soviets had set up. There were many things he liked about their new laws and many of the new things they were doing, which was what had made him link the king of Russia with the India Act or the new constitution. He was convinced that the changes being brought in on 1 April were a direct result of the influence on the Russian King.<sup>18</sup>

Mangu's version of the Russian revolution renders Soviet socialism into a feudalistic system, run by a Russian king (*bādashāh*). This is further confused by Mangu's references to the Red Shirt movement in Peshawar: "To Ustad Mangu, this movement was all tied up with the 'king of Russia' and, naturally, with the new constitution."<sup>19</sup> Mangu's condemnation hinges not only, as Aamir Mufti suggests, on the "differing relationships of the subaltern and the bourgeois nationalist to colonial political 'reform,'" then, but on the incomprehension that the abstract political signs of historical change hold for him.<sup>20</sup>

This critique of political incomprehension was not solely directed towards the subaltern. Manto reworks the theme in his 1941 short story "Progressive" (*Tarāqqi Pasand*), a satirical tale of his

18. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 209.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, 192.

peers in the Progressive Writers' Movement. Based on an actual incident involving two AIPWA writers, the story revolves around a self-described "Progressive" writer, Juginder Singh, whose constant use of English words and allusions ("Aflatoon was referred to as Plato now, Arastoo was Aristotle, and Dr. Sigmund Freud, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were often quoted") are constantly misread by his wife and comic foil, Amrit.<sup>21</sup> Early in the story, Singh attempts to define "Progressive," after Amrit inquires about the word's definition:

Progressive... you won't understand the word right away. A "progressive" is a person who believes in progress. The word is of Persian origin. In English such a person is called "radical." Writers who advocate progress are referred to as "progressive writers." At present there are only three or four progressive writers, and I'm one of them.<sup>22</sup>

The story revolves around the single signifier "Progressive" (*tarāqqi*) expressed in a foreign tongue, literally incomprehensible to Singh's wife, and as the story continues, conceptually incomprehensible to Juginder himself. Manto's critique of the Progressive writer is not just an attack of the pedantic mode of his protagonist, but his uncritical adaptation of Western political discourse. As with Mangu's conflation and confusion of several historical streams (Spanish Revolution as British Civil War, Russian Revolution as a product of Russian King and the Red Shirt movement), the signifier seems to turn against Singh and eventually oppresses him. When Juginder invites the admired Progressive writer and folklorist Harendranath Tirpathi (the most esteemed among the other "three or four") to his home, Juginder constantly measures the latter's degree of "progressiveness" against his own: Tirpathi's black beard is "twenty times longer than his own," Tirpathi's hands are "coarse like a farmer's."<sup>23</sup> Eventually, Juginder Singh's identification with the "progressive" label forces him to listen to the increasingly domineering Tirpathi, who recites his own tedious poetry every night after Juginder comes home from his job at the post office. Eventually Tirpathi takes his recitations into the bedroom, where he shares Juginder's bed and forces Amrit out. The satirizing of the Progressive writer was a theme that returns to Manto throughout his career, including in the later "Letters to Uncle Sam." There were personal reasons for this,

21. Flemming, *Another Lonely Voice: The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, 221.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, 225.

too. Mufti explains that by “the time of his death his connections to the [AIPWA] had long been severed, his erstwhile friends now accusing him of having abandoned realism, of being obsessed with abnormal personality and morbid.”<sup>24</sup> The Marxist writer Sajjad Zaheer, at the 1944 All-India Urdu Congress in Hyderabad wrote, “A few of his stories are counted among the best stories of our literature, but it also true that some of his stories are bad. Some are even reactionary.”<sup>25</sup> Whereas Manto’s subaltern characters try to decipher the encoded language of politics and nationhood, the Progressive writer encodes reality into those abstractions, all the while identifying with the subaltern.

We might, for a moment, consider Manto’s politics here. One can argue that his protagonists, Mangu and Juginder, are an example of those Indian subjects stuck in, what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls, the “waiting room of history,” passive agents to wide-scale social change. But I think Manto’s critique is not directed towards the urban poor nor even the bourgeois nationalist, per se. Rather, Manto draws the discrepancy between articulations of a nationalist politics (Mangu’s excitement over the New Act, Juginder’s blowhard endorsement of the term “progressive”) and its actual manifestation. Political life had been made incomprehensible, a theme only magnified in Manto’s Partition stories.

### 5.3 Becoming the National Allegory

It is a massive understatement to say that the Partition of India in 1947 deeply shaped Manto’s career as a writer. That year, Manto left his apartment in Byculla, Bombay to Lahore for the first time, only to return shortly after when he was recruited as a writer for the film production company, Bombay Talkies. That return was short-lived, however, after communal tensions surrounding the partition spilled into the city and facing threats of arson from Hindu communalists, the studio fired its Muslim employees. Not long after, Manto returned to Lahore, where he became a Pakistani citizen after a being a self-described “British subject” all his life. When he arrived in La-

24. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, 177.

25. Flemming, *Another Lonely Voice: The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, 28-9.

hore in 1948, he described a kind of psychological discombobulation that played out as confusion of personal geography. He described it later in an essay:

For three months my mind was in a strange state. I couldn't understand where I was... For three months my mind couldn't make any decision. It was as if several films were running simultaneously on one screen, all mixed up. Sometimes the bazaars and streets of Bombay, sometimes Karachi... sometimes the noisy restaurants of Lahore. I couldn't understand where I was.<sup>26</sup>

Flipping from one city to the next, layering the detailed landscapes of Bombay, Karachi and Lahore onto one another, Manto's confusion was soon framed in abstracted national terms.

Despite great effort, I couldn't separate India from Pakistan. Repeatedly I was troubled by the same question: will the literature of Pakistan be a literature apart? If so, what will it be like? All that was written in undivided India, who is now its owner? Will that, too, be partitioned?<sup>27</sup>

Suffering a spell of writer's block for three months, Manto soon found a form for his impressions of the Partition by writing short sketches and story fragments that ranged from a few pages to a few sentences. Later collected in *Black Margins (Siyah Hashiye)*, the short sketches of *Black Margins* were filled with ironic inversions, descriptions of violence, and anticipated in many ways the fully realized partition stories of his later collections – stories such as “Toba Tek Singh,” “Cold Meat” (*Thandh Ghosht*), and “A Note on 1919” (*1919 Ki Ek Baat*). Moreover, the sketches were deeply allegorical. In a sharp, structural sketch titled “Division” (*Qasim*), Manto describes two thieves who decide to aid each other in stealing a trunk. When they begin to argue over the division of spoils, Manto offers an ironic twist.

Once they were there and the chest had been safely on the ground, the man who had done all the hard work said, “I want to know what my share is.”  
“One-fourth,” came the reply.  
“That's not enough!”  
“No? But remember it was I who found it.”  
“Yes, but it was I who brought it all the way here on my back.”

26. Flemming, *Another Lonely Voice: The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, 17.

27. *Ibid.*

“What about fifty-fifty?”

“That’s a deal. Let’s see what is inside.”

What came out was a man with a sword, with which he immediately subdivided the two shareholders into four.<sup>28</sup>

The two thieves map neatly onto a flattened history of partition as the interests of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, squabbling for pieces of the subcontinental map, eventually agreeing to divide the spoils “fifty-fifty” (although such a fraction could hardly correspond to the “moth-eaten” regions, as Mohammad Ali Jinnah called them, inherited by Pakistan). The man with the sword who emerges from inside and chops the “shareholders” into four doubles the neat division of the national allegory. The division of spoils (colonial India) was neatly mirrored in the division of the thieves (India and Pakistan), and yet, the violence of that former division only registers to the reader after the men’s bodies are chopped into halves.

The point of these partition stories and sketches, it seems, was not only to describe the grotesque, absurd and obscene violence that occurred on both sides of the border, but to illustrate the allegorical sweep of partition. Identity had, more or less, become metonymy of these new nations – the individual had become a Hindu or Sikh Indian, or a Muslim Pakistani – cut along the lines of national division, severed like those two thieves in “Division.” At times, Manto poked fun at the superficial divisions that created such metonymic subjects, as in the brief sketch “Pathanistan,” in which a man claiming to be a “Musalmeen” proves his loyalty by incorrectly identifying his prophet as “Mohammad Khan” (the 19th century emir of Afghanistan). He is let go, as the Muslim mob, for whom such a question ostensibly defined belonging, knows no better. At other times, the absurdity and violence of these metonyms come across in sketches that focus on the bodily markers of religion. The sketches “Sorry” and “Mistake Removed” both focus on the circumcised penis as a sign of Muslim masculinity, the national difference literally marked on the male body.

But by far, Manto’s most richly conceived working out of these “national allegories” came in his magisterial Partition story, “Toba Tek Singh,” and the “Dog of Tetwal” (*Tetwal ka Kutta*) a story set during the first war between Pakistan and India.

28. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 401-402.

In the former story, the protagonist, Bishen Singh, an inmate in an insane asylum, goes by the name of Toba Tek Singh, a district in Punjab, which after Partition had become a part of Pakistan. By the end of the story, he is caught in physical limbo between Pakistan and India: “There, behind barbed wire, on one side, lay India and behind more barbed wire,” and, “on the other side, lay Pakistan. In between on a bit of earth, which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.”<sup>29</sup> Throughout, there is confusion with his name. Bishen Singh asks, “Where is Toba Tek Singh? In India or Pakistan?” to which a guard responds, “Pakistan.”<sup>30</sup> Bishen’s steadfast identification with only the local marker Toba Tek Singh, however, disrupts the guards and officials need to metonymically identify him as Pakistani or Indian.

In this way, Bishen Singh comes across as the only one in the asylum, either inmate or guard, able to resist the assault of history. Yet the consequences are that he becomes a martyr in the no-man’s land between the two nation-states. Ravikant and Tarun K. Saint write that “‘Toba Tek Singh’ is a triumph of ambivalence and a great story because it proclaims the in-betweenness of its protagonist and his triumph over those who want to fix his identity.”<sup>31</sup> There is very little that is triumphant about the story, however. The ambivalence that Bishen Singh expresses about conforming to national identity affords him a certain amount of agency within the confines of the prison, but as with the characters that precede him, his death is more a product of an inability to comprehend than it is some triumphalist “resistance.” Importantly, if Singh articulates resistance it is still incomprehensible to us, and conveyed only through the character’s Punjabi-inflected gibberish, “Opar di gar-gar di annex di bedhyana di mung di dāl of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan.”<sup>32</sup>

“The Dog of Tetwal” relies on a similar trope, centered now on a stray dog standing in the no-man’s land between Pakistan and India’s borders. Entrenched on either side of the line of control, soldiers tease and coax the dog in their direction, before finally shooting it dead in between the national borders. Key to this story is that like Bishen Singh, the dog is unable to communicate, and essentially dies as the assaulted victim of history. One of the Pakistani soldiers, looking at the

29. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 15.

30. *Ibid.*, 13.

31. Ravikant and Tarun K. Saint, *Translating Partition* (New Delhi: Katha, 2001), xvi.

32. Saadat Hasan Manto, *Mantonāmā*, trans. Devendra Issar (Delhi: Indraprastha Prakashan, 1991), 199.

dead dog, in fact, elevates the significance of the dead stray, when his dialogue closes the story: “The poor bugger has been martyred.”<sup>33</sup>

A thematic thread that ties together the characters in Manto’s earlier work is their general incomprehension of the political forces that bear down on them: Pulled away by the colonial Indian police, Ustad Mangu yells out “New Constitution” while a spectator explains there is no such thing; Bishen Singh responds to the officials of the insane asylum with gibberish before collapsing to his death on the border between Pakistan and India; the two thieves in “Partition” are severed into halves without once suspecting the executioner who springs from the chest. In these stories and sketches, Manto creates a world in which the abstract language of politics and nationhood (“new law,” “India,” “Pakistan”) lead, paradoxically, to violent ends. The script of political modernity is indecipherable to their characters and their fate rests upon a series of misreadings.

So far, I have offered a chronological and selective account of Manto’s protagonists as a way to approach the “Letters to Uncle Sam.” For the sake of argument, I’ve highlighted how Manto undermined the coherence of the Indian subject through the historical moments of colonialism, nationalism, and partition. Common to these characters are two important ideas: their incomprehension (and illegibility) of nationalist discourse, and their unwitting, allegorical embodiment of the nation. Mangu, Bishen Singh, even the dog of Tetwal bear the weight of colonialism, and nationalism, yet they don’t understand it. Moreover, Manto shows how their subjectivity is at once constituted and oppressed by these histories.

## 5.4 From One Colony to Another

How does “Letters to Uncle Sam” fit into all of this? First, as it will become clear, in “Letters,” as in his short stories, Manto composes another defiant critique of narratives of nationhood. Only, the landscape had changed; gone were the gulleys and chowks of Bombay and Delhi or the Punjabi borderlands that his earlier characters inhabited. “Letters” situated Pakistan (and in a more muted

33. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 197.



way, India) in what appeared to be a radically changed global order, one where American culture, policy, and military encroached on the tenuous borders carved after decolonization. At times, the letters toss around allusions to companies like Coca-Cola, Hollywood stars like Gregory Peck and starlets like Rita Hayworth; elsewhere, Manto parrots the House of Un-American Activities, poking fun of high profile American Communists like Charlie Chaplin and Paul Robeson. The shift was something akin to what Arjun Appadurai describes in *Modernity at Large* as “drifting from one sort of postcolonial subjectivity [...] to another,” from “the England [...] imbibed in my Victorian schoolbooks” to “Harold Robbins, *Time*, and social science, American style.”<sup>34</sup> But if “Letters” captures a shift in subjectivities, it was from one form of colonial subjectivity to another. Part of what “Letters” questions is the lived reality of the “post” in post-independence. Was Manto anymore free than in the moment before the independence of India and Pakistan? And who was this new colonial subject?

We might begin to approach “Letters” by considering Manto’s choice of a framing device: what does the form of the letter do that the short story did not? Moreover, what are the historical resonances that the letter as a form have? The issue of form is always tied up with larger questions of national identity, and as Mufti explains, the short story (or Urdu *afšana*, the dominant prose form in Urdu literary culture, is located ambivalently at the cusp of “nation” and “minority.”<sup>35</sup> The “open” letter as a colonial petition itself has its own long history in the British Empire. In his study of 19th century South African textual responses to colonial narratives, Leon de Kock points to letters from the African elite to missionaries as examples of split-voicing, or “subversive subservience,” in which “transgressive elements of colonial mimicry can be discerned behind masks of conformity.”<sup>36</sup> The “letters” to Uncle Sam, obviously, were never actual letters but rhetorical performances for an audience of Urdu readers, who would have approached the introduction of *Above, Below, and In Between* (*Upar, Niche, Aur Darmiyan*) with a sense of the piece as parody.<sup>37</sup>

34. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996), 2-3.

35. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, 208.

36. Leon de Kock, *Civilizing Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), 107.

37. The “letters” did not circulate among an English-reading public until a more recent translation of the text was

Nevertheless, de Kock's insight is useful, and we can trace in "Letters" as similar tension between "masks of conformity," "colonial mimicry," and transgression. The very performance of letter writing creates a set of structuring elements – addressees, greetings, salutations – which encode a set of colonial relationships. The nephew's first letter, dated December 16, 1951, begins:

Dear Uncle,

Greetings! This letter comes to you from your Pakistani nephew whom you do not know, nor does anyone else in your land of seven freedoms.<sup>38</sup>

And ends:

If I caused you offence, I beg your forgiveness. With the utmost respect,

Your poor nephew,  
Saadat Hasan Manto  
Resident of Pakistan

(This letter could not be mailed because of lack of postage)<sup>39</sup>

A performative conformity is at play here, as Manto creates a tension between hyperbolic honorifics and the nephew's own deference. First, in the opening lines, he establishes the metaphoric relationship between nations ("Uncle" and "nephew"), the self-effacing posture ("your Pakistani nephew whom you do not know") and the signs of subservience ("If caused you offence, I beg your forgiveness.") Manto ends with the parenthetical aside informing the reader that the letter could not be sent – a moment that suspends the plausibility of the letter, but nonetheless establishes the speaker's poverty and the futility of the letter itself, whose addressee will never read it. The first letter to Uncle Sam, then, characterizes through its epistolary performance the lopsided differential of power between these two nation-states, Pakistan and the U.S., whose relationship in geopolitical terms might have been defined as "allies," but in actuality was neocolonial "client."<sup>40</sup>

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made available by Khalid Hasan in 2001. See Saadat Hasan Manto, *Letters to Uncle Sam*, trans. Khalid Hasan (Islamabad: Alhamra, 2001).

38. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 610.

39. *Ibid.*, 615.

40. Manto used the genre of the letter once more in a "letter" addressed to "Pandit" Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, which appeared as a foreword to Manto's novelette *Beghair Unwaan Ke* (Without a Topic, 1954). Dated August 2, 1954, the letter was topical, discussing Kashmir, and the Canal Water Dispute between India and Pakistan,

More subtly, in contrast to the bewildered protagonists of his Partition stories, the letter repeatedly ossifies the nephew Manto's position as the representative of the Pakistani nation. The letter opens with a series of statements that reveal his acceptance of the terms of partition. "You should know why my country, sliced away from India, came into being and gained independence [...] you can well imagine the freedom a bird whose wings have been clipped can enjoy," Manto writes, establishing the bond between both the nation and the self, and national trauma and the self.<sup>41</sup> As the letter continues, the "nephew" Manto defines himself along the national coordinates of partition.

My name is Saadat Hasan Manto and I was born in a place that is now in India. My mother is buried there. My father is buried there. My firstborn is also resting in that bit of earth. However, that place is no longer my country. My country now is Pakistan, which I had only seen five or six times before as a British subject.<sup>42</sup>

Manto's clipped syntax and sequential logic obscure the turmoil that the overwrought historical process of Partition had held in his previous writings. In a few succinct sentences, Manto wrenches his genealogy through a constellation of geographical, political, and historical sites that destabilize the notion of home (India, Pakistan) and the fixed colonial/national subject (British, Indian, or Pakistani). A few sentences later, Manto explains with the same neat logic that "I used to be All India's Great Short-Story Writer. Now I am Pakistan's Great Short-Story Writer."<sup>43</sup> The history of Indian and Pakistani independence is recorded through a series of curt statements – the national moment of arrival has become reality, and the geographical boundaries that confused and consumed his characters before are now made definitive, concrete.

In truth, the boundaries defining Pakistan were still unstable by 1951. War with India in the first two years of independence over the disputed princely state of Jammu and Kashmir had already

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in which India threatened to divert the Indus River water away from Pakistan unless they received payment. Like "Letters to Uncle Sam," Manto begins by bringing the United States in as a figure of appeal: "By the grace of god," Manto addresses Nehru, "you are considered very handsome by the Americans. Well, my features are not exactly bad either. If I go to America, perhaps I will be accorded the same status." Saadat Hasan Manto, "Pandit Manto's First Letter to Pandit Nehru," in *Black Margins*, ed. Muhammad Umar Memon, trans. M. Asaduddin (New Delhi: Katha, 2001), 271.

41. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 610.

42. *Ibid.*, 612.

43. *Ibid.*, 610.

drained the nation's resources. Moreover, unlike India, which inherited the British structure of central governance, Pakistan was burdened with the task of creating a new governing apparatus, one capable of running a nation-state which was geographically split on either end of India. The country had yet to establish itself as a republic, a point which Manto wrote about in a letter to Uncle Sam dated March 15, 1954: "We can't seem to be able to draft a constitution. Do kindly ship us some experts because while a nation can manage without a national anthem, it cannot do without a constitution, unless such is your wish."<sup>44</sup>

That parting shot – "unless such is your wish" – also speaks to how Pakistani self-governance was already determined by American foreign policy. By the early 1950s, as Pakistani leaders increasingly enmeshed the country into the United States's cold war policies, critics in the Pakistani press took notice. The journalist Mazhar Ali Khan (father of the New Left figure Tariq Ali) had written a slate of editorials from 1948 onward tracking Pakistan's dalliance with U.S. policy. In the July 3, 1948 *Pakistan Times* editorial, "American Aid," Khan writes:

To independent observers it has become abundantly clear that the receipt of dollars, whether as a gift or loan, not only involves complete economic subjugation of the aided country but also its political tutelage to America. [...] Having achieved deliverance from British imperialism, it would be extremely shortsighted to allow our country to be enmeshed in the net of America's dollar imperialism in return for an illusory progress.<sup>45</sup>

Khan's mention of "America's dollar imperialism" brings to mind Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's description of a new formation of empire, no longer the territorial rule of an earlier era but extraterritorial control through aid in terms of financial loans and surplus goods. This strategy of providing "aid" for political favors, as Tariq Ali explains, was spelled out in no uncertain terms by Washington: "Technical Assistance is not something to be done, as a Government enterprise, for its own sake or for the sake of others [...] these tools of foreign policy include economic aid, military assistance [and] surplus agricultural commodities."<sup>46</sup>

44. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 623.

45. Mazhar Ali Khan, *Pakistan: The First Twelve Years* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 411-412.

46. Tariq Ali, *Can Pakistan Survive? The Death of a State* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1983), 51.

When in 1953, President Truman proposed the Middle East Defense Organization (MEDO), courting Pakistan as an ally ostensibly to stave off a “Soviet threat,” Khan wrote yet another editorial, describing how the deal had involved a simple barter: American wheat for Pakistani political loyalty. He writes, “The latest among many alternative suggestions is that Pakistan should sign a bilateral military pact with the United States and thus act as a decoy duck for the other Middle East countries. Since Pakistan accepted U.S. rations of wheat, American efforts to make it ‘a second Turkey’ have been intensified.”<sup>47</sup> Turkey, of course, the original “decoy duck,” had allied itself with the United States after the war, having gained monetary and military aid in exchange for its aggressive anti-Sovietism.

This idea of “dollar diplomacy” or “dollar imperialism” also shapes the narrative structure of “Letters to Uncle Sam.” As if in a confessional, the “nephew” admits to receiving three hundred rupees from an American, a sum he promises to return in increments, like a debtor Third World nation beholden to the Western powers. After being debted financially, the nephew incurs additional debts to the U.S. for the country’s wheat contribution, writing in his second letters, “As long as Pakistan needs wheat, I cannot be impertinent to you.”<sup>48</sup> His obedience soon turns to faith in the fifth, when he writes, “While only God knows what lies in your future, I for one have faith in you because I have eaten your wheat.”<sup>49</sup> The nephew’s pledge of obedience, his vow of faith, comes at the cost of autonomy, and as the letters continue, at two separate instances, he writes that the cost of these debts is the gradual “Americanization” of the Pakistani body. In letter seven, dated April 14, 1954, the nephew writes, “leaflets were handed out saying you had done us a great favour. It is another matter that to digest your wheat, we have had to Americanize our stomachs.”<sup>50</sup> That Americanization finds its full realization when he writes,

You will be pleased to know that my stomach is now quite used to American wheat. Your wheat and our eating habits seem to be compatible because we turn your wheat into chapattis. As a gesture of goodwill, you should also import some Pakistani wheat.

47. Khan, *Pakistan: The First Twelve Years*, 450.

48. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 618.

49. *Ibid.*, 629.

50. *Ibid.*, 636.

Your soil being fertile, this new variety of Pakistani-American wheat will take root easily. It may even result in the birth of a new man whose progeny may be different from ours.<sup>51</sup>

I will return to this “new man” a little later, but what is worth noting in this passage is the nephew’s show of happiness in complicity, rendering what is clearly a lopsided international agreement into an equal exchange, or an exchange based on compatibility. We know – and Manto’s readers know – of course, that this is nonsense. American wheat forces a change in Pakistani “eating habits,” while America, on the other hand, is not changed at all. The nephew’s stomach now Americanized – the stomach being, if we extend the corporeal metaphor, the organ that consumes, grows, and fattens the body – signals a Pakistan whose very life-organs, its survival and growth, are tied to American surplus and foreign aid. The nephew’s body, and hence Pakistan’s sovereignty, can no longer sustain itself on Pakistani wheat; the two are dependent to the U.S. But critically, the nephew’s Americanness is only partial; he quite metaphorically “embodies” the rule of colonial difference. If we transplant the metaphor to an earlier historical period, we see that nephew’s new Americanized self is different from the colonized subject of the British empire. In contrast to the nephew’s colonial subjectification, consider for a moment Lord Macaulay’s infamous minute on Indian education from 1835, in which he explained the ideal for producing colonized subjects by focusing on transforming Indian subjectivity. According to Macaulay, the duty of the colonial regime was to produce “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinion, in morals and in intellect.”<sup>52</sup> If the colonial subject of the British empire was imagined to be borne out after a psychic colonization of desires, then the colonial subject of America was created after a colonization of, to put it crudely, the gut.

Again the nephew futilely insists on closing the gap of colonial difference – imagining himself an American subject – by returning again to the possibility of Americanizing, piece by piece, the Pakistani body:

I will ask you to airmail me a typical American grin, which I will glue to my so that I

51. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 627.

52. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1983), 87.

can receive them properly.

Such a grin can have a thousand meanings. For instance, “you are an ass.” “You are exceptionally brilliant.” “I derived nothing but mental discomfort from this meeting.” “You are a casual-wear shirt made in America.” “You are a box of matches made in Pakistan.” “You are a home-made herbal tonic.” “You are Coca-Cola,” etc. etc.

I want to live in Pakistan because I love this bit of earth, dust from which, incidentally, has lodged itself permanently in my lungs. [...] Barring my lungs, every other organ in my body, I will hand over to your experts and ask them to turn them American.<sup>53</sup>

Manto’s language is wonderfully sarcastic, each sentence piling up on the next as he riffs on the vacuity of American expression. The insult (“you are an ass”) turns to compliment (“you are exceptionally brilliant”) turns to the commodity (“you are Coca-Cola”). Clearly, here, the nephew is revealing his cards, letting the reader in on his disingenuousness as he plays the pro-American sycophant. As the references to American commodities increase, Manto underscores the extent of American hegemony. Notably, however, the nephew’s demands have also increased: he now asks for a full-on bodily transfusion, to bridge the distance of the colonized Pakistani subject and the metropolitan American subject. It is no surprise, then, that the letter receives no reply; the metropolitan center must maintain an essential difference between itself and the colonial subject. History repeated, Manto’s new Pakistani subject – like the colonized Indians of a decade earlier – is a subject without agency, batted around by the political forces around him.

Taken as a whole, “Letters to Uncle Sam” form a strange coming-of-age narrative for the nephew, from his moment of birth as a “British subject [...] born in a place that is now India” to his grotesque transformation into an Americanized Pakistani subject. He isn’t the only one becoming Americanized, either. Throughout the letters, Manto describes various facets of Pakistani life, which counter the idea of post-independence autonomy or the popular front vision of the AIPWA. He highlights class divisions between the Packard-driving and Max Factor-wearing elite and the poor who cannot “afford more than two meals,” linking the signs of American commodities to class division. He describes the parliamentary turmoil that marked Pakistan’s early years (“We have a change of ministers every other day”), the confluence of politics and religion (“Here there

53. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 621.

are those who claim that they are born to be prophets [...] Here their followers can become foreign ministers”).<sup>54</sup> Over the course of nine letters, a narrative sequence emerges in which both Pakistan and the nephew evolve, becoming increasingly pro-American as he approaches his death (this latter point being at least partly autobiographical, as Manto’s health declined). In the process, Manto also plots certain storylines, like a missing sixth letter, which he comments on across several letters. But more importantly, the letters tell the story of America’s increasing global hegemony, its dangerous faceoff with the U.S.S.R., which poses the threat of nuclear annihilation to the rest of the world.

The nephew is, metaphorically, passed from one colonized subjectivity to another. In the ninth and final letter, Manto swears his allegiance to Uncle Sam, “by your seven freedoms and your dollars,” disavowing any links to communism and claiming the unique privilege of being “your most obedient nephew [...] indebted to you in more ways than one.”<sup>55</sup> To pledge loyalty, Manto uses the language of the Red Scare to ridicule his peers in the leftist Progressive Writers’ Movement, for whom he had more reason than ever to criticize. After the partition, the progressive writers in Pakistan had reassembled as the All-Pakistani Progressive Writers Association (APPWA), and held their first conference in Lahore in November 1949. During one session, the group presented a manifesto, criticizing a litany of writer types: the pro-state and ruling class writers, “reactionary writers,” Freudian writers, and Pakistani nationalists, who promoted “obscurantism” and “the virtues of traditional asceticism.”<sup>56</sup> Alongside the manifesto, the APPWA adopted a resolution condemning a group of “bourgeois writers,” including Manto, while urging editors of progressive literary magazines not to publish their work.

By March 1951, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, accused the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) of having conspired to overthrow the government with the aid of military officials. After a public trial, two progressive writers, Sajjad Zaheer and the poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz, were arrested, marking a period that saw an onslaught of persecution against the Pakistani Left.

54. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 628; Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 629.

55. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 650.

56. Hafeez Malik, “The Marxist Literary Movement in India and Pakistan,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 1 (4 1967): 661-662.



The Ministry of Interior declared the APPWA a political party, and in 1954, banned the CPP and instructed employers to fire communist workers.<sup>57</sup> In more ways than one, then, Pakistan was literally beginning to resemble the United States.

The nephew Manto, it appeared, enjoyed wreaking his revenge. At one point, he writes of Marxist thinker Sibte Hasan, “Please get him abducted because is a friend of mine and I am afraid, given his soft and charming way of talking, he may one day turn me into a communist.” Elsewhere, Manto produces a list of writers who ought to be arrested, including “Comrade” Ferozuddin Mansoor, Mian Iftikharuddin (the editor of left-leaning newspaper *Imroz*), Ahmed Rahi (for being a “dangerous communist”), and Ahmed Nadim Qasmi for “making fun of you in his column.”<sup>58</sup> The letters, however, mock not only his peers of communist persuasion, but satirize the language of the Red Scare in the U.S.

Further playing with the form of the letters, Manto’s sixth letter – only two lines long – explains that his message was lost in the mail. Continuing that plot line in the following letters, Manto invents the idea that the communists stole them and urged him to start a correspondence with “Malenkov,” adopting the Russian Premier as an uncle. Here, Manto becomes the ambivalent allegory of Pakistan, caught between First and Second World loyalties.

In his fifth letter to Uncle Sam, Manto describes the ideological propaganda that Pakistan was receiving from both American and Russian ends. His narrative of the Cold War is rendered into comic blend of chemical parts:

Uncle, what is this hydrogen bomb anyway? In the eighth grade we were taught that hydrogen was a gas lighter than air. Can you please tell me what country’s weight do you want the earth to be relieved of? Russia?

I have heard that Russia is making a nitrogen bomb. In the eighth grade we were told that nitrogen was a gas a human being could not breathe and not die. I think your answer to the nitrogen bomb would be an oxygen bomb. We were taught in the eighth grade that when nitrogen and oxygen meet, they turn into water. Won’t the world have fun with all the water when the Russian lob their nitrogen bomb and you throw your oxygen bomb?<sup>59</sup>

57. Ali, *Can Pakistan Survive? The Death of a State*, 47.

58. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 640-1.

59. *Ibid.*, 629.

But rather than ending this satirical take on the Cold War on the note of zero-sum neutrality, the nephew continues with a critique of the rhetoric of American diplomacy. “I hear that you have made your hydrogen bomb so that there would be lasting peace in the world,” he writes, before adding the punchline: “For this lasting peace to be established, how many countries will need to be removed from the face of the earth?” Again asserting Pakistan’s willed collusion with the United States – its about face on the issue of “non-alignment” – the nephew begs Uncle Sam to “rid the earth of Russia to begin with” because of his “natural aversion.”<sup>60</sup>

Unraveling the discourse of American diplomacy, Manto turns his gaze towards America’s relationship to India, writing, “Your man in charge of South Asian and African affairs has recently spoken warmly of India and it would appear as if Washington was desperate to win Delhi’s goodwill. While I know that by trying to please both Pakistan and India, you want to nurture the flickering lamp of democracy, one way of doing that would be to pour so much oil in this lamp that never again would you have to listen to another complaint about shortage of oil. Right, uncle?” America’s neocolonial “diplomacy” affected not only Pakistan, then, but the entirety of the decolonizing world — regions in Asia and Africa that had only recently wrested their independence from Britain. A new empire was on the rise, Manto implied, and it would spawn many nephews in return.

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Of course, this discussion of national allegories brings up the old but instructive debate dating back to Frederic Jameson’s essay, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism.” It was in that essay that Jameson had infamously stated the maxim that “All Third World Literatures are necessarily [...] allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*.”<sup>61</sup> One of Jameson’s most powerful critiques came from the Marxist critic Aijaz Ahmad, who argued that “since Jameson defines the so-called Third World in terms of its ‘experience of colonialism and imperialism,’ the political category that necessarily follows from this

60. Manto, *Bitter Fruit*, 629.

61. Frederic Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text* (15 1986): 69.

exclusive emphasis is that of ‘the nation,’ with nationalism as the peculiarly valorized ideology.”<sup>62</sup> Jameson’s assertion was surely a strange one and always seemed to speak more to the metropolitan critics’ interpretive strategies, a critic who *reads* all Third World literature as national allegories, rather than any innate thematic unity between literature that emerges out of decolonized zones.

And yet, what “Letters to Uncle Sam” presents is exactly what Jameson describes – a narrator defined by both his relationship to imperialism and to the nation, two dominant and domineering forces in the postcolonial world. The “nephew” is the newly formed traumatized figure, an allegory for the Pakistani nation, whose grotesqueness is formed out of a set of world forces larger than himself. He is like Manto’s earlier characters, who grappled with bourgeois nationalism, progressive posturing, the experience of the partition – only he possesses the power of the jester, who is able to write, if not fight, back.

Of all the things we might argue about “Letters to Uncle Sam,” we can agree that the nephew in the letters appears as some sort of national, allegorical subject (a living Bishen Singh), and that his identification with Pakistan highlights the bullying nature of both nation and empire. The “nephew Manto” is Pakistan, but he is a troubled Pakistan – a sycophant of the U.S., who nevertheless, like a jester in the durbar, speaks up to his American badshah.

What’s truly remarkable about “Letters to Uncle Sam” is not only the way they anticipate Jameson’s thesis about Third World national allegories thirty years before the fact, but that, written between 1951 and 1954, they also precede the widespread conception of the Third World, itself. As Vijay Prashad has documented in his popular history *Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World*, at its inception the “Third World project” attempted to carve a politics of non-alignment to avoid falling into the end-game scenarios and the neo-imperial possibilities of the Cold War.<sup>63</sup> Manto’s nephew offers a bitter corrective; if non-alignment ultimately describes the nephew and Pakistan’s capacity for political agency, then it is clear, from the onset in 1951, neither had any to begin with. The nephew is the newly colonized subject, whose grotesqueness was the product of the historical moment, rather than – as the APPWA might have argued – any

62. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), 98.

63. Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007).

reactionary idiosyncracies from the writer.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Manto used the language of satire to expose the power relations that lurked behind the cultural ubiquity and political ties of the U.S. to Cold War Pakistan. In effect, “Letters to Uncle Sam” documented Manto’s critique of a new kind of colonial subjectivity – a Pakistani identity no longer defined by the ideal narrative of Pakistan self-determination, nor the wound of Partition, nor even the wound of the British Empire, but rather, by a newly colonized relationship to the U.S. Understanding “Letters to Uncle Sam” in the context of geopolitical shifts of the 1950s force us to come to terms with the overwhelming presence of the United States role in the imperial imaginary of post-independence South Asia.

It bears mention that as I close this chapter five decades after Manto first addressed Uncle Sam in 1951, Pakistan is embroiled in American military policy more than ever. For the past six years, the North-West frontier of Pakistan has bore the brunt of American unmanned airships that, like some gadget out of a comic book or Bond film, expel a cascade of missiles onto perceived targets with the convenience of a remote control. Of course, unlike the carefully choreographed scenes from the action film, the missiles have an inconvenient tendency to also land on civilian homes or shops, and disrupt any narratives of superhero victories. One wonders how Manto, who captured the vulnerability of his protagonists destroyed by decisions made in government offices, might have responded to Uncle Sam’s latest misadventure in South Asia. How would the nephew address his Uncle today?

## Chapter 6

# Caste in Black and White: The Translation of America in Dalit Literary Criticism, 1965-74

### 6.1 Introduction

In 1965, Manohar Namdeo Wankhade was putting the finishing touches on his dissertation, “Walt Whitman and Tantrism: A Comparative Study.” An unlikely University of Florida graduate student, Wankhade was born into the Mahar caste – a Dalit or “Untouchable” – from Western India. He was forty-one years old at the time, already something of an established academic in India, writing in both Marathi and English, on subjects as eclectic as the Marathi folk-drama *tamasha* and the Beat Generation’s relationship to Zen Buddhism.

One year later in 1966, Wankhade had returned to India with his American doctorate, resuming his position as the Principal of Milind College, an institution created to educate lower caste youth and founded by the pioneering Dalit leader, B. R. Ambedkar. That year, Wankhade published a Marathi essay in the weekly periodical *Prabuddha Bharat* titled “Dalitāno Vidrohi Wāngmay Liha” (दलितानो विद्रोही वांगमय लिहा), a manifesto-like command that translates as “Dalits, Write Rebel Literature.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite the title’s imperative, the essay mentioned nothing about Dalit writers, nothing about India for that matter, until the penultimate paragraph. Instead, Wankhade narrated an abridged history of slavery in the United States, focusing on the emergence of a key duality (द्विध्वा) in the nation between two communities, the “Negro” (नीग्रो) and the “White” (गोरा):<sup>2</sup>

1. M.N. Wankhade, *Dalitāno Vidrohi Wāngmay*, ed. Viman Nimbalkar and Yashvant Manohar (Nagpur: Prabodhan Prakashan, 1981).

2. In an effort to make my translations of the Marathi as transparent as possible, I have included the original text

Brought as slaves, they were not deemed men. At first, they were forced into labor, and kept on the land to work. But later the relationship between owner and slave did not remain the same. Soon the *dāyā*, meaning the Negro woman, began to stay inside the homes of white people, taking care of their children, even breastfeeding them. All the kitchens were run by Negro people. And because of this, a strange relationship arose: on one hand there was inflamed anger and on the other, affection; on one hand they were enemies, on the other indispensable members of the family.

त्यांना माणूस म्हणून कोणी जगूच दिले नाही. आपल्या शेतावर काम करणारे दास म्हणून सुरवातीला त्यांना राबिवण्यात आले. पुढे पुढे मालक आणि दास असाच नुसता संबंध राहिला नाही. गोऱ्या लोकांच्या घरात दाया म्हणून निग्रो बाया राहू लागल्या, गोऱ्यांची मुले त्या दायांच्या अंगावर पिऊ लागली. गोऱ्या कुटुंबात स्वयंपाकी म्हणून निग्रो माणूस चालू लागला. तेव्हा एका बाजूला संताप चीड आणि दुसऱ्या बाजूला गोऱ्या लोकांबद्दल प्रेम अशी द्विधा अवस्था निग्रोची झाली. त्यामुळे एकीकडे कुटुंबाचा अविभाज्य घटक तर दुसरीकडे शत्रुत्व असे चमत्कारिक नाते त्यांच्यात निर्माण झाले.<sup>3</sup>

What followed from Wankhade's description of the plantation home was a narrative that traced the development of African American literature and politics – from the “loathing” (विकृत), “incomplete,” (विसंगतिपूर्ण), clown-like (विदूषकारसारखा) “Jim Crow” representations of African Americans written by white writers in the antebellum era, to the “fiery” (ज्वलंत), “angered” (चीड), “enraged” (संताप) quality of “Negro literature” of today.<sup>4</sup> Drawing a relationship between Black literature and the history of African American enslavement, Wankhade explained how the earlier duality that split the plantation also split the Black subject. In terms reminiscent of Du Bois' “double consciousness,” Wankhade wrote of a “cultural dualism” between the “Negro's older African culture and White culture” (संस्कृती). At this point in the essay, Wankhade finally addressed the Dalit reader directly, projecting the terms of White and Black onto the “*madhyam varg*” (middle class) and the “*bahujan samāj*” (majority community), a term that, by the 1960s, was synonymous with Dalit. Wankhade wrote:

Now we have seen the example of rebel Negro literature. How do Marathi writers of the majority community (*bahujan samāj*) write? Do they express anger or insurgence relating to these injustices? If they don't, then why don't they?

आता निग्रोतील विद्रोही वाङ्मय आपण पाहिले. मराठीतील बहुजनसमाजाचे लेखक कसे लहितात? त्यांच्यात अन्यायासंबंधी बंड, चीड आहे का? ते जर त्यांच्यात नसेल तर त्याचे कारण काय आहे?<sup>5</sup>

in Devanagari and included transliterations for any key terms, such as *asmita* and *ādarsh*, which recur and would be particularly useful for those unable to read Devanagari.

3. Wankhade, *Dalitānno Vidrohi Wāngmay*, 1.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 4.

In response, Wankhade's answer drew on a metaphor that would prove formative for his own critical thought, and that of the Dalit writers who responded in the subsequent decades. He wrote,

Because the mirror (ādarsh) of the majority community (bahujan samāj) writers is the same as the mirror of the middle class (madhyam varg), and as long as they stand before that mirror, they cannot discover their Identity.

बहुजन समाजातील लेखकांचे आदर्श हे मध्यम वर्गच्या आदर्शासारखे असतात आणि ह्या आदर्शाच्य मागे लाल्लयामुळे त्यांना त्यांची Identity सापडलेली नाही.<sup>6</sup>

There is a resonance in the word mirror here. The “discovery” of a bahujan samāj, or Dalit cultural identity was perceived as a matter of rejecting the middle class gaze – and here double consciousness once again comes to mind, the mirror of the middle class resembling that “sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, by a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”<sup>7</sup> Wankhade's solution to this paradox was simple. He prescribed the need to “create writing that awakens the asmitā or identity of the majority community (bahujan samāj).” In essence, Wankhade sought to replace the false middle class mirror that had historically distorted and degraded the Dalit self.

But what to replace it with? How much of what Wankhade desired for a new form of “insurgent” literature came out of his cultural translations of America's racial history? In other words, how did he project the house that race built, to borrow Toni Morrison's eloquent phrase, onto the village of caste?

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So far in this dissertation, I have narrated historical cases in which a “national subject” interprets and assembles a text of America. While writers like Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Saadat Hasan Manto critiqued the privileging of national subjectivity, they still wrote from that position, using narratives of the U.S. to better understand their subject-position as Indian or as Pakistani. And while Lajpat Rai became increasingly interested in the counter-narratives of the American

6. Wankhade, *Dalitānno Vidrohi Wāngmay*, 4.

7. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, 3.

nation, he too wrote from the nationalist's perch, paying little attention to the counternarratives back home. For Chattopadhyay and Rai, in particular, the sign of "Blackness" itself carried a double analogy: both described the African American subject as analogous to the "untouchable" or "pariah," while at the same time suggesting that the African American subject stood in for a global "coloured" subject. Even if Rai and Chattopadhyay were sensitive to the ways in which the Black subject could be analogized to the internal oppression of the Dalit subject within the nation, their perspective changed the character of the analogy. For them, the Black subject in America was a figure to contemplate the *Untouchable problem*; for Wankhade, and the Dalit writers who were inspired by him, the Black subject led to an imagined solution. The story that I present in this chapter, about Wankhade and his translations of African American literature, then, considers a different kind of transmission of narratives than we have seen thus far: the translation of one subaltern (the African American) by another (the Dalit).

Wankhade's writing and Dalit writing, in general, forces us to reconsider the way that subaltern subjectivities transform in their movement through national frames. Let me give you an example: In 1974, Daya Pawar published a poem "From Los Angeles You Wrote—" (लॉस एंजल्सवरून तू लिहिलंस—). The poem describes an Indian writing home from L.A. – what might constitute a common trope in South Asian American literature – but the poem soon reveals a disparity between the letter writer, a high caste Hindu, and the speaker, a Dalit.

“Here, in the stores, in the hotel, all around,  
 they measure Indians and dogs the same.  
 ‘Nigger,’ ‘Blacks,’ they call me, cursing  
 And deep within, a thousand scorpions sting.”  
 Reading all this felt *so* good.  
 What we suffered for generations in this country  
 has now come to you, in small share....

“इथे भर हाटात, हॉटलात, अवतीभवती  
 इंडियन आणि कुत्ते एकाच मापाने मोजतात  
 निगर काळे म्हणून शिवी हासडतात  
 आतल्या आत सहस्र डंगळ्या डसतात.”  
 हे सारं सारं बाचून फाऽर बरं बाटलं.  
 या देशात पिढ्यान् पिढ्या आम्ही जे भोगलं



ते थोडंसं तुझ्याही वाट्याला आलं....<sup>8</sup>

In Pawar's poem, a messy set of new meanings arise in the traffic of epithets from America to India. The upper caste, brown-skinned Indian is interpellated in public by the racial and racist gaze of the U.S., who reads his body as "Nigger" and "Black." But he undergoes a second interpellation in the poem's ironic ending as the long-suffering caste-marked Dalit. The upper-caste Indian, through his experience of American racism, can now feel Dalit suffering. Pawar's poem, then, forces us to consider multiple frames at once – race and caste, American and Indian – which effectively complicates the privileging of the national over the subaltern. Moreover, Pawar draws both an equivalence between racialized American discrimination and caste-marked oppression in South Asia, but in the process also de-essentializes both structures of power.

This is a kind of transnationalism, which scholars like Yunte Huang and Wai Chee Dimock have gestured towards in recent years, considering how networks of textual travel destabilize the framework of national borders that constricts national literature. Dimock points out that, "Rather than being a discrete entity, [literature] is better seen as a crisscrossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures."<sup>9</sup> In what follows, I trace how African American literature was woven, linguistically and culturally, into the geography of 1960s and 1970s India.

Specifically, I present close-readings of key moments in the criticism of Wankhade, in which his translations reveal a particular caste-centered reading – what we might consider a "dalit hermeneutic" – of Black literature: First, I look at Wankhade's translation of "whiteness," in which he navigated the political fields of caste and colonialism; second, I examine again the metaphor of the "mirror" (ādarsh) and its relationship to racial and Dalit identity formation; and third, I discuss Wankhade's reading of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and how it was interpreted not just as an allegory of American racial politics but as a narrative that could speak to the historical trauma and alienation from labor that come from the practice of "untouchability." In posing these three

8. Daya Pawar, *Kondwada* (Pune: Mehta Publishing House, 1974), 14.

9. Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 3.

examples, I challenge us to consider these translations not as ethnocentric readings but rather as examples of how the process of translation can forge connections across cultural, linguistic, and national difference. Before getting to that, however, I spend some time providing earlier iterations of the Black-Dalit connection, and Wankhade's readings of Anglo-American literature.

## 6.2 Earlier Intersections

When Wankhade wrote his essay "Dalits, Write Rebel Literature" (दलितानो विद्रोही वांगमय लिहा) in 1966, the terms of Dalit political identity were already heavily contested. The term "Dalit," itself, which literally translates to "ground down" or "broken down," was a historically situated and politically charged act of naming. During colonial rule, the British had used the term "depressed classes" as an umbrella term for all untouchable communities, and by 1935, introduced the term "scheduled castes" to designate those caste communities eligible for constitutional safeguards. Around the same time, Gandhi, who introduced certain reform efforts to eradicate the practice of untouchability, also invented the term "Harijan," or "children of god" – a term which was and is rejected by most Dalits for its condescension. The term "Dalit" was first introduced in the late 1920s by B.R. Ambedkar, but gained widespread use in the 1960s, coinciding with the rise of a generation of younger activists and writers, who were actively redefining the culture of Dalit politics. As Anupama Rao explains, the term Dalit "defines the historical structures and practices of dispossession that experientially mark someone as Dalit and simultaneously identifies the Dalit as someone seeking to escape those same structures."<sup>10</sup> The category of "Dalit literature" or "Dalit Sahitya," championed by Wankhade and others, was not only a central node in forging a new cultural politics around this identity, but it also claimed the sphere of literature, historically the domain of upper-caste or Brahminical cultural production.

Less than a year later, Wankhade and his peers, led by the Dalit critic Gangadhar Pantawane, attempted to create a space for the type of "insurgent Dalit literature" he appealed for. He and

10. Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India*, 16.

Pantawane founded an influential, monthly Marathi Dalit journal titled *Asmitā*, published out of Milind College. Learning that the title *Asmitā* was already copyrighted by another literary journal, they aptly renamed it *Asmitādarsh*, a title that conjoined Wankhade's earlier metaphors of identity (*asmitā*) and its mirror (*ādarsh*). Over the course of the decade, *Asmitādarsh* became a crucible for the emerging tradition of Dalit literature, providing a space for younger Dalit writers to publish poetry and short stories, and for the development of a literary criticism that ideologically shaped and chronicled the movement. Wankhade's first entry into this journal, not surprisingly, was yet another essay in Black literature, this one titled "American Negro Wangmay," or American Negro Literature, a longer survey of Black literature, which focused primarily on the figures of Baldwin, Wright, and Ellison.

Because of the timing, these early essays on Black literature might be viewed as a key moment in the development of the Dalit literary movement. In the years that followed, as Dalit literature exploded in the state of Maharashtra and later across the entire country in Hindi, Gujarati, Kannada, Punjabi, and Tamil, so too did its allusions to African American history. References to writers like Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, places like Harlem, began to turn up in Marathi Dalit poems. Black symbology crossed over into the political sphere, not long after. In 1972, the Dalit Panther, a radical political organization in Bombay led by writers Raja Dhale, Namdeo Dhasal, and Arjun Dangle, mobilized lower caste youth in symbolic protests and political rallies throughout the city (see Introduction).

Wankhade's student and peer Janardhan Waghmare, would continue to publish editorials in *Asmitādarsh* throughout the late '60s onwards under headings like "American Negro: Blood and Tears" (अमेरिकन नीग्रो रक्त आणि आश्रु, 1967), "The Search for Black Identity: Black Power," (नीग्रोंच्या अस्मितेचा शोध: ब्लॉक पावर, 1976), and "Richard Wright: One Burning Sky" (रिचर्ड राईट: एक पेटलेले आकाश, 1977). In short, as Dalit literature began to inscribe narratives of selfhood and as Dalit political activists asserted their position as revolutionary subjects in postcolonial India, the discursive figure of the African American subject stood curiously beside them. Narratives of Black literature and of the history of African Americans were translated and transformed by the context

of the Indian nation-state, translated from English into Marathi and transformed to speak to the caste-marked subaltern.

Wankhade's essay was not the first time a lower caste-African American connection had been articulated. In 1873, Jotirao Phule, an early caste reformer from Maharashtra, began his polemic *Slavery* (गुलामगिरी) with a dedication to the American abolitionists, "in an earnest desire that my countrymen may take their noble example as their guide in the emancipation of their Sudra Brethren from the trammels of Brahmin thralldom."<sup>11</sup>

Belonging to the Sudra caste (just one varna above the Dalit), Phule founded the Satyashodak Samaj (Truth-seeking Society), which developed a sharp critique of both the secular and religious role of Brahmin oppression of the lower castes, as both collaborating with the British in securing positions of administrative elite and maintaining the caste hierarchy of Hindu society. Long preceding Fanon's articulation of the role of the national bourgeois in postcolonial society, Phule argued that the Congress-led nationalist movement, which was Brahmin-dominated, sought simply to replace the British with the Brahmin without any broader transformations of the social relations of Indian society. While the Satyashodak Samaj folded in 1930, one of its lasting historical contribution was its introduction of the term "bahujan samāj" – which Wankhade used in my opening example – to denote a political identity, bringing together both the lower castes Dalits and Sudras.

The Dalit leader, B.R. Ambedkar, who studied at Columbia University in 1913, throughout his political career, made brief comparisons and distinctions between African Americans and Dalits, and more broadly, the relations of race and caste (see Chapter 2). In an early essay titled "Which is Worse? Slavery or Untouchability?" Ambedkar rebuked Lala Lajpat Rai, an acquaintance in New York, for insisting that "untouchability was nothing as compared with slavery [through an uneven] comparison of the Negro in America with the untouchables in India" in *Unhappy India*.<sup>12</sup>

That example might suggest that Ambedkar actively rejected any conflation, or even compari-

11. Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, 26.

12. B.R. Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, Volume 12*, ed. Vasant Moon (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 2002), 742.

son, of race and caste. However, it is worth noting that while he may have distinguished between the historical origins of race and caste using sociological criteria, Ambedkar could recognize the similar threat of violence and political disenfranchisement that both African American and Dalit communities faced within both modern civil and political society. In an essay written in 1943, for example, Ambedkar argued that although liberal thought (exemplified by “the American Constitution” and “Revolutionary France”) may forward the concept of universal rights by law, it was ultimately civil society, and not political society, that determined whether the ideals of freedom and equality will be met: “As experience proves, rights are protected not by law but by the social and moral conscience of society. What is the use of the fundamental rights to the Negroes in America, to the Jews in Germany and to the Untouchables in India?”<sup>13</sup> Ambedkar, then, exposes a central kink in the logic of liberal political thought: even if the political society of the state may construe its subjects within the framework of the universal citizen-subject, those marked by difference (racial, caste, religious) are ultimately kept outside of that promised universal. In modern society, the form that the promised universal of the citizen-subject took was the nation-state. This concern also led Ambedkar to contact W.E.B. Du Bois in 1946 to inquire about the National Negro Congress petition to the U.N., which attempted to secure minority rights through the U.N. council (See Figure ??). Ambedkar wrote:

Although I have not met you personally, I know you by name as every one does who is working in the cause of securing liberty to the oppressed people. I belong to the Untouchables of India and perhaps you might have heard my name. I have been a student of the Negro problem and have read your writings throughout. There is so much similarity between the position of the Untouchables in India and the position of the Negroes in America that the study of the latter is not only but necessary.<sup>14</sup>

In a letter dated July 31, 1946, Du Bois responded, claiming he had “every sympathy with the Untouchables of India,” but no further correspondence exists.

Wankhade’s essays, which appeared in Marathi, I would argue, were far more formative, having reached a new audience of educated Dalits. For example, Daya Pawar, the author of “From Los An-

13. Ambedkar, *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, 178.

14. Both letters are housed at the W.E.B. Du Bois Archives at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst. I am grateful to Gary Tartakov for sharing his copies of the letters with me.

ges You Wrote,” explained in the introduction to his first book of poems *Cattle Pen* (कोंडवाडा) that “it was really through Wankhade that I was exposed to the literature of Negroes.” Wankhade’s Black literature, translated into Marathi, was, for all intents and purposes, the major narrative of Black literature that these writers had access to in the late 60s. Throughout his essays, Wankhade mentioned that Black literature could provide inspiration and “direction” for Dalit writers. But his practice of translation, as well as interpretation, also suffused both Black and Anglo-American literature with the language of caste, which allowed them to be in conversation with debates around Dalit identity.

### 6.3 Recasting Whitman’s Democracy

Wankhade’s publication history reveals an eclectic thinker. He had written essays on “T.S. Eliot’s Wasteland” (1959), “Zen and the Beat Generation” (1961), the Marathi tradition of Powada (1965), all before completing his longest study to date, “Walt Whitman and Tantrism” (1965). The absence of any criticism on Dalit literature in his list of publications before his return to India is surprising, and speaks to the lack of a strongly defined Dalit literary culture before 1965. But it also speaks potentially to the politicizing effect that his time in the U.S., then in the midst of the Civil Rights movement, may have had on him. Two years after completing his M.A. in English at Indiana University in 1963, he was admitted to the Ph.D. program at the University of Florida. In Gainesville, he wrote his dissertation under the guidance of the Americanist Harry R. Warfel, who had pointed out “the need and value of doing the present study in the context of more attention being given to Whitman by the Indian academicians at present.”<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, around the period of Wankhade’s graduate education in the U.S., Whitman seemed to undergo a critical resurgence. A spurt of visiting Indian graduate students and scholars, who had been granted Fulbright fellowships, took up the study of Whitman’s relationship to Vedic thought.<sup>16</sup> T.R. Rajasekharaiah at the University of Minnesota, conducted an exhaustive source

15. M.N. Wankhade, “Walt Whitman and Tantrism” (PhD diss., University of Florida, 1965), iii.

16. Whitman had an earlier symbolic value for the Indian nationalist Benoy Kumar Sarkar, who last appeared in

study, concluding that Whitman had amassed a body of Orientalist knowledge that aided the spiritual dimensions of *Leaves of Grass*.<sup>17</sup> O.K. Nambiar, a Columbia graduate, wrote a manuscript titled *Walt Whitman and Yoga* (1966), a self-professed “response from a Hindu,” that concluded that “Whitman was an authentic spiritual genius, a Maha Yogi.”<sup>18</sup> V. Sachithanandan, an Indiana student from Tamil Nadu (who must have crossed paths with Wankhade) was interested in the connection between Walt Whitman and Tamil poetry. Key to Sachithanandan’s reading was that Whitman was a vedantist, interested in creating a “spiritual democracy, an inner complement to the outer world of liberty, equality and fraternity.”<sup>19</sup>

Wankhade must have succumbed to the pressure put on Indian scholars at the time, who were encouraged by American academics to engage, like native informants, in the difficult task of decoding Whitman’s “Eastern” mysticism. Yet even in the seemingly benign question of whether the American poet could be read within the framework of vedantic thought, a political subtext emerges from Wankhade’s analysis. Directly contesting Chari’s readings, which rendered Whitman into a vedantic writer, Wankhade argued that while superficial similarities existed between Whitman and the Vedas, a key difference was the undemocratic character of the Vedas. For example, Wankhade wrote, “the world-affirming attitude,” which is a central tenet to Whitmanian thought is contradicted in the Vedas.<sup>20</sup> Only in Tantra, he argues, “a later development of Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism,” is such a stream of thought present.”<sup>21</sup>

By 1965, when his dissertation was completed, the political discourse of Dalits, which extended from the work of B.R. Ambedkar, had already centered on a disavowal of Hinduism and an embrace of Buddhism as an egalitarian religion. In his own writings, Ambedkar had criticized the Vedas, “the sacred book of the Hindus,” as containing the justification for the caste system.<sup>22</sup>

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this dissertation in Chapter 2, on the voyage to New York with Lajpat Rai. Sarkar published a book of poetry, *Bliss of a Moment* (1918), in which he wrote a poem titled “Walt Whitman.” The poem begins, “No human being indeed is Walt Whitman, / Yankeestan’s Niagara Falls is he; / Impetuosity of cataracts / And tumult cataclysmal fill his being.”

17. T.R. Rajasekhariah, *The Roots of Whitman’s Grass* (North Carolina: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1970).

18. O.K. Nambiar, *Maha Yogi Walt Whitman: New Light on Yoga* (Bangalore: Jeevan Publications, 1978).

19. V. Sachithanandan, *Whitman and Bharati: A Comparative Study* (Bombay: Macmillan, 1978).

20. Wankhade, “Walt Whitman and Tantrism,” 6.

21. *Ibid.*, 12.

22. Ambedkar, *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, 128.

The political critique of vedantic thought comes to a head in Wankhade's discussion of Whitman's concept of democracy, where he writes "[t]here is no equality of human beings in the Vedas or the *Gita*; in both, God is said to have himself created the four castes. [...] The political concept of democracy was absent in the Vedas and in the *Gita*, as it is in the Tantras, where, however, equality of all is stressed on metaphysical grounds."<sup>23</sup> Wankhade goes on to explain how Tantrism "does not recognize distinctions of sex, caste, religion, or color." And in his citations from Barada Kanta Majumdar and Arthur Avalon – two scholars of Tantric philosophy – he underscores how the Shudra and Dalit subjects (the collective bahunjan samāj) were discriminated against in vedic thought but championed in Tantra.

Majumdar says: "The Veda withheld the privileges of a Dvija [Brahmin caste] from the fourth caste (Sudra), but the Tantra throws the portals of initiation wide open to every man and woman, whoever he or she may be. The Candala [lower caste] and all others are the children of the Divine Mother, the milk of whose eternal breast is sucked by every living being." [...] Avalon says: "We only find the question of fitness or worthiness (Adhikara-tattva) in the Tantra... that is why the Candala Purnananda is a Brahmana."<sup>24</sup>

The lower caste subject, bracketed in these quotations next to the specific example of "the Candala" (a term that was once synonymous with "Untouchable") is used as a way to underscore the incompatibility of democracy and the Vedas. This point becomes the basis for Wankhade's argument that Whitman could not have been a vedantic thinker, because his universal concept of self directly contradicts vedic categorizations of caste distinction.

Wankhade reads Whitman's ideal of democracy in a selective and idiosyncratic way. Interpreting the Reconstruction-era essay *Democratic Vistas* (1871), and the poems "By Blue Ontario's Shore," "Starting from Paumanok," and "Salut au Monde!," collected in *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Wankhade emphasizes not only Whitman's "spiritualized" concept of democracy, but also the "common man pursuing an humble occupation" who stands as the foundation of democratic society. He writes, "for [Whitman] to sing of democracy, 'total, result of centuries,' was to go in

23. Wankhade, "Walt Whitman and Tantrism," 133-134.

24. *Ibid.*, 138.



raptures: 'O such themes – equalities! O divine average!' This 'divine average,' the boatman, the carpenter, the shoemaker, the hunter, the common man pursuing an humble occupation, the backbone of democracy, appears endlessly in Whitman's writings."<sup>25</sup>

Wankhade's deliberate underscoring of the occupations of the "common man" – "the boatman," "the carpenter," "the shoemaker," even the puzzling inclusion of "the hunter," reads like a breakdown of bahujan samāj occupations. Moreover, the "divine average" is written as the "backbone" or subject of democracy. And when Wankhade emphasizes a point made by previous scholars, that Whitman's concept of democracy was in effect grounded in his own sense of the "spiritual," it is hard not to be reminded of Ambedkar. In a speech broadcast in October 1954, Ambedkar explained, "my social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: liberty, equality, and fraternity. Let no one however say that I have borrowed my philosophy from the French Revolution. I have not. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science."<sup>26</sup> Without ever announcing it in the dissertation, Wankhade interprets through a kind of "dalit hermeneutic," which constructs out of *Democratic Vistas* an Ambedkarite Whitman.

I am not arguing so much that Wankhade saw in Tantra the possibilities of an egalitarian philosophy that was unseen in Ambedkar's version of Buddhism. After all, returning from the United States, Wankhade never wrote about Tantra again. Instead, I take Wankhade's comparative study of Whitman and Tantrism as an example of how his interpretations of American texts were infused with a Dalit critique of Hinduism, a resemblance of the Ambedkarite position on the spiritual foundation of democratic ideals. Whitman resurfaces in Wankhade's speech at the 1976 Dalit Sahitya Sammelan in Nagpur, in which he narrated the development of the Dalit literary movement. Discussing the role of the writer in Indian society, Wankhade states that "the task of creating a democratic society can be effectively accomplished only by the writer," and further, that "it is the Dalit writer's duty to launch an intellectual attack on society in which there is no equality, justice or brotherhood."<sup>27</sup> Quoting Walt Whitman, "that singer of democracy, equality and community"

25. Wankhade, "Walt Whitman and Tantrism," 138.

26. Sharankumar Limbale, *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature: Histories, Controversies, and Considerations* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 2004), 47.

27. Wankhade, *Dalitānno Vidrohi Wāngmay*, 78.

(लोकशाहीची, समतेची मुक्तिगीते वॉल्ट व्हिटमन), Wankhade defines the power of the committed writer.

He can make every word he speaks draw blood. Whatever stagnates in the fiat of custom or obedience of legislation, he never stagnates... If he breathes into anything that was before thought small it dilates with the grandeur and life of the universe.” Whitman, in essence, is translated from the “vedantic thinker” of Indian scholars in America to a revolutionary writer, one who sings of democracy and equality, and writes against custom.

त्याचा प्रत्येक शब्द गोळीप्रमाणे जिव्हारी बसला पाहिजे. रिती-रिवाज, अंधश्रद्धा व कायद्याच्या गाळात तो रुतून बसत नाही. छोट्या व त्याच्या समजल्या जाणाऱ्या विषयांना जर त्याने आपल्या श्वासाने जिवंत केले तर ते सुद्धा विश्वाच्या सौंदर्याने व महानतेने नटून येते.

“Custom” in this original quotation, which comes from the preface of *Leaves of Grass*, might have been interpreted in the American context as Judeo-Christian tradition or even the formalistic conventions of English poetry. However, within the context of Dalit Sahitya Sammelan, “custom” becomes a loaded signifier of Hinduism and the practices of the caste system.

Wankhade lists a kind of roll call of Dalit writers, from the early Marxist Annabhau Sathe to critics like Janardhan Waghmare and poets like Namdeo Dhasal and Daya Pawar, all of whom are described as being carriers of the “the consciousness of Whitman” (व्हिटमनने वर्णन केलेली जाणीव). Whitman, in Wankhade’s Marathi rendering, in a way, becomes an unlikely ideal for the Dalit writer himself.

## 6.4 Whiteness, Mirrors, Invisibility

As with his interpretations of Whitman, Wankhade’s translations suffused Black literature with the language of caste, which allowed them, in turn, to be interpreted allegorically as Dalit narratives.

An example, from his 1971 essay “The New Insurrection in Marathi Literature,” gets at what I mean by this. In that essay, Wankhade used several examples to demonstrate the possibility of a new “vidrohi” or insurgent language – he discussed the works of LeRoi Jones, and Don L. Lee, but perhaps most interesting was his partial translation of the poet Gil Scott-Heron’s 1970

poem “Whitey on the Moon,” which, at first glance, could seemingly say nothing about the Indian nation-state, which had not yet propelled a rocket into the stratosphere. Scott-Heron’s poem begins as follows:

A rat done bit my sister Nell  
(with Whitey on the moon)  
Her face and arms began to swell  
(and Whitey’s on the moon)  
I can’t pay no doctor bills  
(but Whitey’s on the moon)  
Ten years from now I’ll be payin’ still  
(while Whitey’s on the moon)<sup>28</sup>

Published just a year after the U.S. moon landing, “Whitey on the Moon” presented a sardonic critique of the national pride that surrounded the Apollo 11. Throughout the poem the speaker relates his impoverished material conditions (“no hot water, no toilets, no lights,” “taxes takin’ my whole damn check”) coupled with the refrain “Whitey’s on the moon.” And together, these pairing completes a sentence. For instance, “Her face and arms began to swell / (and Whitey’s on the moon),” “The man just upped my rent last night / cuz Whitey’s on the moon,” with short conjunctions (and, but, cuz, with) connecting the parts. The poem ends with a transformation in the relationship between the two parts. Scott-Heron writes, “I think I’ll send these doctor bills / airmail special / to Whitey on the moon.” The poem is simple and wonderfully biting critique of the nation’s priorities, but it also presents certain challenges to the translator. How does one translate the elements of Black vernacular – “cuz,” “done bit,” and so on – not to mention the central epithet, “Whitey”?

In his translation, Wankhade includes the first four lines of the poem in English, right below his Marathi translation. A literal translation reads as follows:

To my sister – to Nell – a rat bit.  
(white skin-wala went on the moon)

28. Gil Scott-Heron, *Small Talk at 125th and Lenox: A Collection of Black Poems* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1970).

her face and hand started to swell  
(white skin-wala went on the moon)

माझ्या बहिणीला – नेलेलाला – उंदीर चावला  
(पांढऱ्या कातडीवाला चंद्रावर गेला.)  
तिचा चेहरा व हात सुजून आले.  
(पांढऱ्या कातडीवाला चंद्रावर गेला.)

There are a few subtle changes in Wankhade's translation, the most noticeable being his decision to clip the conjunctions, "but," "while," "cuz." But more interesting is the particular choice Wankhade made in translating "Whitey." He used a neologism "pāndhryā kātdivālā" (पांढऱ्या कातडीवाला), literally white-skinwala, or white-skinned one. The term "gorā" (गोरा) may have been the easier translation, and Wankhade had used it earlier in his glosses of American history to mean "white." Yet "gorā" fits easily into already existing paradigms of the Indian nation-state. "Gorā" is an epithet that denotes Euro-American whiteness and foreignness within the Indian colonial and nationalist context. "Pāndhryā kātdivālā," on the other hand, more closely resembles the term "pāndharpeśā" (पांढरपेसा), a word that translates to "a member of the higher classes as distinct from the mere cultivator; [i.e.,] the Brahman." The translation, then, offers a kind of nexus between the Americanized racial epithetic form ("whitey"), the racialized caste-marker (pāndhryā kātdivālā), and its echo of caste formation (pāndharpeśā). Wankhade's translation, in other words, cuts through three two racial-caste frames, much like Pawar's poem on "Los Angeles," making possible a rendering of Scott-Heron's poem that would fit within a Dalit social context. "Whitey" now signified upper caste.

Beyond these subtle "adaptations" through translation, however, Wankhade's interpretation of Black literature more forcibly provided a model for understanding the multiple discourses that operated to define Dalit subjectivity. The concept of the "mirror," which turned up everywhere in his oeuvre, was central to Wankhade's understanding of Black literature, and central to his understanding of Dalit identity formation.

The importance that Wankhade placed on the metaphor of "mirror" comes out in his reading of James Baldwin, published in his 1967 essay "American Negro Wangmay." In the essay, Wankhade praises and translates selected quotations from Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, describ-

ing it as a shift from his debut novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), which he deemed assimilationist. Its premise, Wankhade argued, was based on the assumption that “Negro culture is part of American culture.”<sup>29</sup> *The Fire Next Time*, on the other hand, presented an ideological shift, not separatist exactly, but recognizing the dualistic crisis between Black and White America. To support his point, Wankhade translated a portion of the first essay in the collection, “My Dungeon Shook,” which was originally written as a letter by Baldwin to his nephew. Here, I quote from Baldwin’s original.

You were born into a society, which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in many ways as possible that you were a worthless being. [...] Know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go. The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you.<sup>30</sup>

Wankhade’s translation was relatively faithful to the original, except for the final line, which he translated, “There is no reason to keep the white man’s mirror in front of your eyes” (गोच्या लोकांचा आदर्श डोळ्यापुढे ठेवण्याचे तुला काही कारण नाही.<sup>31</sup>) There are a few changes here worth mentioning. First, Wankhade shifted the tone: where Baldwin issued a warning, Wankhade issued a command, and where Baldwin focused on the oral (what white people say), Wankhade focused on the visual. But more striking is the way he inserted the metaphor of the mirror into Baldwin’s text. The “details and symbols of your life” which “have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say” has been replaced completely by “ādarsh,” mirror. In this translation, Baldwin’s statement placing the African American subject in front of the “white man’s mirror” read nearly analogous to Wankhade’s earlier statement on the majority society (bahun samāj) subject standing in front of the middle class (madhyam varg) mirror.

Through translation, and through the clever insertion of “mirror” (ādarsh) into Baldwin’s text, Wankhade underscores the shared alienation of the Black and Dalit subject. By revoicing “mirror,” the word assumes an almost intertextual valence with his other writing, reiterating the essential

29. M.N. Wankhade, “Dalitānce Vidrohi Wāngmay Lihā,” in *Dalitānno Vidrohi Wāngmay*, ed. Viman Nimbalkar and Yashvant Manohar (Nagpur: Prabodhan Prakashan, 1981), 41.

30. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Random House, 1963), 9.

31. Wankhade, *Dalitānno Vidrohi Wāngmay*, 41.

twoness, the “double consciousness” or “cultural dualism” that fragmented the Black and Dalit subject within the plantation, the village, the nation-state, yielding no true self-consciousness. The historical moment for this model of Black identity seems important here. As critics like Adolph Reed and Wahneema Lubiano have argued, Black aesthetic criticism of the 1970s remobilized Du Bois’ “double consciousness” to express the contradiction between the terms of its “twoness.” The Black Arts Movement critic Addison Gayle Jr., for instance, characterized the Black writer as mired in the dialectic of double consciousness, writing with “the white public in mind” and constantly “measur[ing] his production [by] its acceptance or rejection by white people.”<sup>32</sup> In the aesthetic project of the Black Arts Movement, critics attempted to resolve that contradiction through a symbolic “de-Americanization of black people” and the development of independent aesthetic criteria for Black Arts.

In “The New Insurrection within Marathi Literature,” Wankhade had urged Dalit writers to follow the linguistic experimentation forged by this new generation of Black writers. He emphasized, for instance, the “explosive language” of James Baldwin, the “rebellious” and fiery language of young Black writers, and discussed the way in which this language provided a criticism of the hypocritical democracy of American. He wrote, “although it is English, Negro language is less understood outside of the Negro ‘ghetto.’ In that language is new life, inspiration.”<sup>33</sup>

Yet in spite of all the similarities Wankhade drew between the Black Arts Movement and his vision for the Dalit literary movement, we see in Wankhade’s criticism some glaring excisions. For instance, throughout Wankhade’s account of the history of African American culture, never did he mention a word for “race” as a category, either in Marathi or in English. Moreover, while intellectuals of the Black Arts and Black Power movement described the Black condition as a colonial one, and symbolically drew similarities from Third World nationalist models, Wankhade’s interpretation avoided these frameworks altogether. The reasons for that elision are not that difficult to perceive. Imagining African American political subjectivity as “colonized” would necessarily

32. Addison Gayle Jr., *The Addison Gayle Jr. Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment (Champaign: University of Illinois, 2009), 301.

33. Wankhade, *Dalitānno Vidrohi Wāngmay*, 58.

collapse all those within the Indian nation-state as equal victims within the larger framework of colonialism and white supremacy, and would ignore altogether the internal inequalities created by caste.

Instead, the Black history Wankhade described more closely resembled narratives on the origins of untouchability. Recall, from my first example, that Wankhade's narrative of Black history begins in the plantation home, emphasizing both the alienation from labor experienced by slaves, and the necessity of that labor for the survival of the plantation. Similarly, vernacular histories of untouchability – particularly the Mahar caste, to which Wankhade, Ambedkar, and the majority of Marathi Dalit writers belonged – also emphasized both Dalit alienation from labor *and* its functional necessity within the Indian village. In his 1948 work “The Untouchables,” Ambedkar described the origins of untouchability as a product of the shift from nomadic to settled communities; warfare between nomadic and settled tribes had led to a community of “broken people” forced into servitude; these broken people, the ancestors of untouchables, were oppressed both materially, in terms of their relegation to the most degrading labor – handling carrion, providing sanitation – and symbolically, in terms of their stigmatized status, which deemed their physical touch polluting. The historian Anupama Rao makes this point well. “Dalit history,” she argues, “reveals a sophisticated attempt to make historic suffering and humiliation central to Dalit identity.”<sup>34</sup> I would add to this that Dalit interpretations of Black literature, attempted to recenter “historic suffering” as constitutive to Black identity, and emphasized the symbolic trauma of their labor.

This type of reading of Black identity is especially prominent in Wankhade's discussion of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. In his 1967 essay “American Negro Literature,” Wankhade provided a plot summary of the novel in crude strokes:

The story of the novel's protagonist starts from his school life. He is a smart student. But from that day forward, he gets an idea of how white people behaved towards the Negro. After receiving a scholarship, he goes to University. There he witnesses, through scenes in his life, the ways that the culture of white people dehumanized

34. Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India*, 16.

the Negro man. Even though the president of this Negro University, Dr. Bledsoe, is a Negro himself, he still has a true idea of the power of white people. For some reason, the protagonist is released from the University. Dr. Bledsoe writes letters of recommendation and keeps them in a closed packet for the protagonist, who comes to New York, looking for a job. By mistake, his attention falls on one of the letters in the packet, and then he opens each letter up. In all of these letters, Dr. Bledsoe had written, “Keep this nigger boy running.” This is just one example of the kind of harassment a Negro can experience from his own kind.<sup>35</sup>

या कादंबरीच्या नायकाची कहाणी त्याच्या विद्यालयीन जीवनापासून सुरू होते. तो एक हुशार विद्यार्थी असतो. परंतु तेव्हापासूनच त्याला गोऱ्या लोकाकडून निग्रोला कसे बागविले जाते याची कल्पना येते. तो शिष्यवृत्ती मिळवून महाविद्यालयात जातो. तिथे त्याला निग्रो माणसाला गोऱ्या संस्कृतीने कसे अमानुष (डिह्युमनाईझ्ड) केलेले आहे, ह्याची बरीचशी अशी जिवंत चित्रे दिसतात. या निग्रो महाविद्यालयाचा प्रमुख डॉ. ब्लेडसो जरी निग्रो असला, तरी त्याला गोऱ्या लोकांच्या शक्तीची खरी कल्पना असते. काही कारणास्तव नायकाला ते महाविद्यालय सोडावे लागते. तो खिशांत डॉ. ब्लेडसोने निरनिराळ्या लोकांना लिहिलेली व पाकिटात बंद केलेली पत्रे, ओळखपत्रे घेऊन नोकरीच्या शोधात न्युयॉर्कला येतो. चुकीने एका पाकिटातील पत्र त्याच्या नजरेस पडते व तो मग सगळी पत्रे फोडून वाचतो. त्या सर्व पत्रात डॉ. ब्लेडसोने लिहिलेले असते “किप धिस निगर बॉय रनींग” निग्रोला त्याच्याच माणसाकडून कसा त्रास होतो याचे हे एक ऊदाहरण आहे.

The narrative that Wankhade constructs closely resembles the genre of the Dalit autobiography, which after poetry, was the most prevalent form of Dalit literature. As Sarah Beth has written, Dalit autobiographical narratives often “progress through a series of painful experiences of caste discrimination punctuated by certain spatial shifts. [...] The broader move from the village to the city depicts an unexpected continuation of untouchability as the protagonist continues to face ‘the ghost of caste.’”<sup>36</sup> In his reading of *Invisible Man*, Wankhade presents an unmarked student, forced to negotiate the dehumanization of white culture, of which “his own kind” – like Dr. Bledsoe – might also participate. Even as the protagonist ascends the social ladder – moving from the South to the North, like the Dalit migration from village to the city– he is haunted by the racist ideology of the nation that desires to “keep this nigger boy running.” Afterwards, he is faced once more with symbolically oppressive labor, when he arrives at the Liberty Paint company. Wankhade continues, summarizing that famous chapter in greater detail.

In New York, he finds a job at a paint factory. His work entails dripping ten drops of black paint into a vat of white paint, mixing and stirring it so much that not a single

35. M.N. Wankhade, “American Negro Wāngmay,” *Asmitā* 1 (1 1967): 53–58.

36. Sarah Beth, “Hindi Dalit Autobiography: An Exploration of Identity,” *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 3 (2008): 548–549.



trace of black paint should remain. Spoken in plain terms, the meaning of this scene is to make Negro people (who constitute one-tenth of the population) invisible. While doing this work, he stays in a Negro slum. A day later, he gets into a fight with his union, and after receiving a wound, he has to go the hospital. Upon arriving at the hospital, he feels a new birth. But with it, a question of identity stirs constantly in his head. “Who am I?” It is precisely this question that pertains to all Negroes. [...] In the end, he runs away and hides, remaining in a dark, shaded room. The experiences up to that point have left him tired. There in the room, he forgets the past, he becomes invisible, and in that illusion, he falls asleep. The novel ends there.

न्यूयॉर्कमध्ये त्याला एका रंगाच्या कारखान्यात नोकरी लागते. त्याचे काम म्हणजे पांढरा रंग असलेल्या वादलीत काळ्या रंगाचे दहा थेंब टाकणे व ते मिश्रण इतके ढवळायचे, की त्यात काळ्या रंगाचा मागमूसही राहू नये. साध्या शब्दात सांगायचे म्हणजे ह्या दृष्टांताचा अर्थ निग्रो लोकांना (जे एकूण लोकसंख्येचा एकदशांश आहेत.) अदृश्य करणे. हे काम करीत असतांना तो निग्रोच्या झोपडीत राहतो. नंतर एके दिवशी त्याच्या युनियनमध्ये त्याचे भांडण होऊन जखमी स्थितीत त्याला हॉस्पिटलमध्ये जावे लागते. हॉस्पिटलमधून परत आल्यावर जणू काही त्याचा नवीन जन्म होतो. परंतु त्याबरोबरच “मी कोण”? हा आयडेनटीचा (*sic*) प्रश्न त्याचा डोक्यात सतत घोळत असतो. कारण हाच प्रश्न सगळ्या निग्रोंचा आहे. तो शेवटी तेथून पळून जातो व एका अंधाच्या, कोळशाच्या खोलीत तो स्थळकाळ विसरतो व आपण अदृश्य झालो अशा आभासात झोपी जातो. इथे कादंबरी संपते.<sup>37</sup>

Wankhade’s interpretation is blunt; the sweep of his summary loses much of the novel’s humor, allusions, and symbolism. The one symbol that Wankhade deciphers in his gloss is the meaning of the ten drops of black paint in the vat of white paint, a metaphor, which he argues, represents the social invisibility of African Americans as one-tenth of the American population. From its very introduction in Ellison’s novel, the Paint factory is cast in shades of the surreal and allegorical. The factory stands amidst “drifting strands of fog,” its electric sign is emblazoned, “KEEP AMERICA PURE WITH LIBERTY PAINTS.”<sup>38</sup> In truth, Ellison’s paint metaphor, as we know, is far more multi-faceted: the vat of white paint can be read as both the idealized American body and America’s body politic. With his narrator casting drops of black into a vat of white paint, Ellison signifies on the “one-drop rule,” the social and legal classification of people as Black on the basis of any line of African ancestry. But the “Optic White” paint is already marked by the metaphorical language of the nation: we learn that it is “made exclusively for the government,” “white as George Washington’s Sunday-go-to-meetin’ wig,” “sound as the all-mighty dollar,” “the purest white that

37. Wankhade, “American Negro Wāngmay.”

38. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage International, 1995), 196.

can be found,” and that is “heading for a national monument.”<sup>39</sup> That the narrator puts exactly ten drops of paint within the mixture until it disappears does say something about the “invisibility” of African Americans, just as Wankhade argues, and that disappearance is registered in the national narrative, embodied in all the allusions to the nation’s capitol (Washington, dollar bills, national monument, etc.) More importantly, the ten drops of black are required to constitute white. Ellison seems to be alluding to the idea that the discourse that surrounds whiteness – its purity, its history – requires its dialectical opposite. Whiteness is only white in reference to blackness, which is why, when the narrator accidentally adds remover instead of black drops to the paint, the results are not white but a sticky, unusable, gray goo.

Instead of focusing on these nuances of “whiteness” or Ellison’s play on America’s Manichean racial categories, Wankhade’s emphasis is placed instead on the question that confronts the invisible man in the hospital. In Ellison’s novel, the scene plays out as follows: the protagonist is confronted with a series of questions, written on a card by the doctors who had just put him through a round of electroshock treatment: “What is your name?” “Who are you?” The invisible man cannot remember. “Each time I found myself back in the clinging white mist and my name just beyond my fingertips,” he explains, “Left alone, I lay fretting over my identity.”<sup>40</sup>

Wankhade’s emphasis on the question of identity (“who am I?,” “मी कोन?”) follows closely his discussion of the need for an affirmative Dalit identity. In his summary of *Invisible Man*, the question becomes a broad self-interrogation for African Americans coming to terms with their group identity, historically defined by the discourses, the symbols, the roles that “whiteness” has constructed for them.

But what is key to understanding Wankhade’s interpretation is the penultimate line of his summary. “There in the room, he forgets the past, he becomes invisible, and in that illusion, he falls asleep” (तो शेवटी तेथून पळून जातो व एका अंधाच्या, कोळशाच्या खोलीत तो स्थळकाळ विसरतो व आपण अदृश्य झालो अशा आभासात झोपी जातो.) Throughout Wankhade’s description of Dalit literature, there is a constant emphasis on becoming visible, to be able to see oneself clearly – not from the mirror of

39. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 201-202.

40. *Ibid.*, 241.

the middle class, but from one's own mirror. As I have been arguing, central to that new mirror of identity is understanding the "historic suffering" that has been constitutive of Dalit identity. The invisible man, in Wankhade's gloss, finds relief in sleep, but he also sleeps in illusion, in his invisibility, precisely because he has forgotten the past. In a way, Wankhade turns the narrator of the *Invisible Man* into the unconscious Dalit writer in his 1966 essay, unable to yield true consciousness, or into Baldwin's nephew, who must constantly avoid seeing one self through "the mirror of white people."

Years later, the influence of Wankhade's essay could be felt as the trope of invisibility surfaced in subsequent Marathi Dalit writings. B. Rangarao's poem "On a Desolate Night like This," uses the "invisible man" as a contrast to his self-affirmation. He writes, "I gleam unobstructed / or else I too would be here invisible / like Ralph Ellison's invisible man."<sup>41</sup>

In 1972, the poet Daya Pawar explained in the introduction to his first book of poetry that his knowledge of *Invisible Man* came directly out of Wankhade's essays. In his introduction, Pawar interprets *Invisible Man* as Ellison's own life story, and perhaps unwittingly, blurs the border between novel and autobiography in interpretation. Pawar explains how at one of his first jobs, after returning from the village to Bombay, he worked as a clerk at a veterinary laboratory, by all accounts a modern occupation. Despite all the outward markers of progress, however, Pawar was relegated to handling dead lab animals, a sharp echo of his stigmatized caste labor as a Mahar. As historian Eleanor Zelliot explains, within the village economy, "the Mahar [caste] duties were performed in the context of his untouchability."<sup>42</sup> Handling carrion, a Mahar's touch was considered polluting, and hence, he was forbidden to come into direct contact with a caste Hindu, a Hindu temple, or a Hindu home. Even after the legal abolition of untouchability, the stigma remained, as it psychologically did for Pawar. Forced into labor that required contact with carcasses, Pawar was once again interpellated as an untouchable, as a Mahar. This prompts a recollection of *Invisible Man* for Pawar, who explains that he "remember[s] an incident in the life of the Negro writer

41. B. Rangarao, "On a Desolate Night Like This," in *Poisoned Bread: Marathi Dalit Literature*, ed. Arjun Dangle (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1992), 46.

42. Eleanor Zelliot, "Learning the Use of Political Means – The Mahars of Maharashtra," in *Caste in Indian Politics*, ed. Rajni Kothari (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1985), 31.

Ralph Ellison.”<sup>43</sup> He then repeats a passage from Wankhade’s essay, “American Negro Literature,” almost verbatim.

[I]n New York, the protagonist worked in a paint factory, where he was to put drops of black paint in a bucket of white paint. He was to stir the mixture so that the black paint should not reveal a trace. To turn Negroes invisible, not to take notice of them – this was the sharp wound he felt. In some ways, this is what happened to us.

उमेदीच्या काळात न्यूयॉर्क येथे रंगाच्या कारखान्यात तो कामाला. त्याचे काम म्हणजे पांढरा रंग असलेल्या बादलीत काळ्या रंगाचे थेंब टाकणे. हे मिश्रण इतके ढवळणे, की काळ्या रंगाचा थांगपत्ता लागू नये. निग्रोंना अदृश्य करणे, त्यांची दखल न घेणे, असेच त्याला तिब्रतेने वाटले. तसेच थओडेफार आपले झाले.<sup>44</sup>

The invisibility here can be read as lack of recognition, or the absence of political representation. But the wound of the Negro’s invisibility seems to also signify the paradoxical wound of an identity that requires remembering the traumatic past, a past structured by the American history of white supremacy. Pawar continues, and offers a central message Dalit writers can glean from the African American example:

Just like the cultural strife in America between Whites and Blacks, as long as the contradictions between Dalit and non-Dalit continue, so too will the dispute continue.<sup>45</sup>

अमेरिकेतील गोरे आणि काळे यांच्यातील सांस्कृतिक द्वंद्व, त्याचप्रमाणे येथेही दलित आणि दितेतर ह्यांत हा विरोधाभास, हे जोपर्यंत चालू आहे, तोपर्यंत जाणिवेच्या पातळीवर हा झगडा कायम आहे.

In Pawar’s reading of Wankhade’s essay, African American society becomes a metaphor for a divided Indian society, split between Dalit and non-Dalit lines. Just as Wankhade had depicted in that 1966 essay – the Du Boisian concept of “double consciousness,” refigured in his concept of “cultural dualism” – had become a site for Dalit writers to interrogate their own experience of duality within Indian society. Moreover, the terms of that split have shifted from Wankhade’s “majority community” and “middle class” categories to the more sharply defined “Dalit” and non-Dalit. Within the span of six years, then, Wankhade’s call to literary arms appeared to have been answered.

43. Pawar, *Kondwada*, 8.

44. *Ibid.*, 8-9.

45. *Ibid.*, xiv.



Figure 6.1: Still from the film *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar* (2000)

## 6.5 Conclusion: Reimagining the Black-Dalit Past

Wankhade did not live long after his publications in *Asmitādarsh*. In 1976, he became the president of the first Dalit Sahitya Sammelan, and two years later, he died during a visit to Houston, Texas. His essays, however, still stand as an influential moment in Dalit letters, an early instance in which Dalit identity was imagined through the idioms of Black literature. His student Janardhan Waghmare continued to publish, opening his study *The Quest for Black Identity* (2001) with a dedication to Wankhade “for taking me to the dark and deep woods of American Black literature.”<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the Black-Dalit imaginary that Wankhade, Waghmare, Pawar and other Dalit writers of that era, constructed in the 1960s and 1970s have now become commonplace, as one published study after another has drawn the comparison.<sup>47</sup> One of the most recent and most creative reimaginings of this Black-Dalit imaginary appeared in the 2000 film *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar*, a biopic that follows the life of its eponymous Dalit leader, jointly written by Daya Pawar, Arun Sadhu (*Sinhasan*), and Soonni Taraporevala (*Saalaam Bombay*).

The opening sequence establishes both the violence of the practice of untouchability, and its continuing presence in the modern Indian nation-state. We witness a Dalit man trying to enter a

46. Janardhan Waghmare, *The Quest for Black Identity* (Pune: Sugava Prakashan, 2001), vii.

47. See V.T. Rajshekhar *Dalit: The Black Untouchables of India* (1979) AND MORE

temple, forcibly pushed out and then beaten to unconsciousness by a group of upper-caste men, while a group of school children, oblivious to the scene some yards away, wave Indian flags for a national holiday. Immediately after the sequence, the film rewinds to an earlier moment in Dalit history, as it begins Ambedkar's narrative with a scene in a library. It is 1915, and Ambedkar is studying at Columbia University. An Indian in a white turban and coat approaches the suited Ambedkar, resting his hand on his shoulder. "You're the first one here in the morning, and you're the last one to leave," he says, before introducing himself. "I'm Lajpat Rai."

As the scene progresses, Rai invites Ambedkar to participate in his India Home Rule League in New York, but Ambedkar declines, citing his responsibilities to his studies. One scene later, Ambedkar is gently chastised by Edwin Seligman, an acquaintance of Lajpat Rai, who tells Ambedkar that the purpose of education is "not just to understand the world, but to change it," citing, somewhat boastfully, his own participation in the Negro Urban League as an example. In these initial interactions with actual historical acquaintances, the film constructs the young Ambedkar as an ambivalent figure, rejecting Rai's nationalism and not entirely impressed by the white Seligman's patriarchal anti-racist politics.

But the film takes a dramatic departure from historical authenticity in the following scene, where Ambedkar is seen in the kitchen of a restaurant cleaning dishes with a Black co-worker, a friend later identified as Steve Brown. The two discuss the difference between untouchability and racism:

"I couldn't sleep last night thinking about what you told me. I just don't get it. It's so unreal. They literally won't touch you?"

"That's the least of it. At least you have the freedom to..."

"We got no freedom. What're you talking about?"

"At least you have the Fourteenth Amendment."

"Fat lot of good it's done us. Think about it. You're from India and you can go to Columbia University. I'm an American, I can't be a student there. I'm smart, talented – but hey, let's just keep that Fourteenth Amendment stuff in the Constitution 'cause in the real world, Black is Black and White is White, and never the twain shall meet."

This curious scene is purely a historical invention.<sup>48</sup> Ambedkar did not keep a journal during his visit to the United States, and beside the thesis he wrote at Columbia University, there is scant textual record that captures what he saw, thought, and felt about life in America. Nevertheless, the film, which narrates Ambedkar's development toward an affirmative caste consciousness, underscores scenes with Brown as the major catalyst towards that position. In their dialogue, Ambedkar and Brown hold up their two subject-positions for comparison. Brown frames the African American condition as a form of colonialism, using Kipling's infamous description of colonial difference: "never the twain shall meet." Ambedkar cites the Fourteenth Amendment as an ameliorative the state can provide, echoing, in some ways, his eventual work to ensure caste reservations in the Indian constitution. But this communal comparative practice reaches its apotheosis moments later, when Ambedkar and Brown witness with blank stares a white policeman beating a Black man in plain sight. In the dramatic sequence that follow, Ambedkar appears in his room, reading the text *Manusmriti*, while his voice-over narrates the caste "law" that defined untouchability, and he recalls his early experience facing caste discrimination as a Dalit. In the background, we hear Ambedkar's voice: "Manu says, the only occupation prescribed to the low castes is to meekly serve the other three castes. No collection of wealth must be made by the low castes even if they are able to do so." At this point onward, in the film, we come to understand Ambedkar as a politicized character.

Through a series of quick cuts and juxtapositions, the film presents an argument about the relationship between Black and Dalit subjectivity. In the first ten minutes of *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar*, the viewer witnesses upper-caste violence towards a Dalit man, white state violence towards a Black man, and immediately after, Ambedkar's politicization, as he delves into the historical rationalization of caste hierarchy. The film plots Ambedkar's experience of witnessing anti-Black racism as the catalyst for his political epiphany.

In some ways, the argument of the film maps onto Wankhade's metaphor of the mirror. Wankhade

48. Sooni Taraporewala, one of the screenwriters of the film, explained that the scene was one of three completely fictional moments in the film, created for director Jabbar Patel, who had wanted to emphasize the Black-Dalit connection. Sooni Taraporewala, e-mail message to author, May 25, 2011.

explicitly never attempted to find the homology between race and caste, or blackness and untouchability, but saw, instead, that understanding Dalit identity through Black idioms could lead to imagining a new subjectivity, that was neither just caste nor race.



## Chapter 7

# Afterword: American History Through an Inverted Telescope

From Lajpat Rai to M.N. Wankhade, the writers in this study interpreted and reassembled American narratives with a comparative unconscious. As they wrote their versions of the U.S., selectively emphasizing specific narratives and specific modes of narration, they were also reflecting back on the conditions, the social relations, and the problems back home. For Lajpat Rai, who appears throughout this dissertation, the United States was an evolving site for national analogies, as he shifted from an earlier valorization of the American revolution as an anti-imperialist history to a later assessment of the United States as another iteration of empire in his rebuttal to Katherine Mayo. Such contradictions reflected the ambivalent relationship that Rai had towards a racial politics, certainly. But the contradictions also reflect the multiple meanings of the United States as a signifier. This is the thrust of this study's argument, that for Indian writers in the 20th century, the U.S. was a complex, multitudinous signifying space, which allowed them to rewrite political subjectivities in new "American" idioms.

Yet this practice of reading and writing "America" was never a tidy process, and as each chapter shows, race was a central if also confused category that writers from India contended with, reading racialized bodies in the U.S. as analogous pairs to the colonized subject, the caste-marked subaltern, and the postcolonial subject of history. There is a value, I argue, in the multiplicity of meanings that come out of these translations of social concepts.

If comparisons to the United States remade the image of India for the writers in this study, in other words, these "Indian Americas" also had and continue to have a strange, disorienting effect

on the U.S. itself. Bringing various South Asian frameworks, idioms, social relations as analytics to the United States has the capacity to unsettle entrenched narratives of race, class, and nationhood in the U.S. In what ways, for instance, might Wankhade's reinterpretation of Whitman, Ellison, and the Black Arts Writers change our own perceptions of the American literary history? How can Chattopadhyay's reading of the Native American as the subject of modern history alter our perception of American history? The effect, I hope, is that in the process of reading these Indian constructions of the United States, we find new ways of reading American history against the grain.

There is an anecdote that opens Benedict Anderson's *Spectre of Comparison*, which might help illuminate what I mean by this. Visiting Indonesia in the early 1960s, Anderson found himself at the University of Indonesia interpreting a speech by President Sukarno for a European diplomat. Sukarno's speech plodded along expectedly until he began to discuss Hitler, and much to Anderson and the diplomat's astonishment, he spoke of him "not as mass murderer, no[r] even as a fascist and anti-Semite, but as a nationalist." The diplomat stormed off, but Anderson stayed, feeling something he could only describe as vertiginous. "For the first time in my young life I had been invited to see my Europe as through an inverted telescope. [...] It was going to be difficult from now on to think of 'my' Hitler in the old way," he explains. Years later, Anderson found a phrase that captured that feeling in Filipino writer Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*:

There is a dizzying moment early in the narrative when the young mestizo hero, recently returned to the colonial Manila of the 1880s from a long sojourn in Europe, looks out of his carriage window at the municipal botanical gardens, and finds that he too is [...] at the end of an inverted telescope. [...] The novelist arrestingly names the agent of this incurable doubled vision *el demonio de las comparaciones*, "the specter of comparisons."<sup>1</sup>

Anderson's metaphor of the "inverted telescope" as a way of describing his experience hearing European history narrated through the lens of the Indonesian nationalism is particularly apt for this study. Each of the writers I discussed presented a version of American history through the lens of their own political, geographical and historically determined subject position, each complicating an ingrained narrative of the U.S.

1. Benedict Anderson, *Spectre of Comparison* (New York: Verso, 1999).

The inverted telescope version of history, moreover, returns us to where we began, the image with which Pandita Ramabai started us off: “India and America are located on opposite sides of the earth; therefore it is natural for America to think that we walk upside down, and for us to think that Americans walk upside down.”<sup>2</sup> In the context of Anderson, we can revisit Ramabai’s comments not as description of the essentialized cultural difference between the two nations, but rather, as a metaphor for the productive, unsettling function that the view of India’s United States, the “United States of India,” offers us.

2. Ramabai, *Pandita Ramabai’s American Encounter: The People of the United States (1889)*, 136.

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