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5

Queer Formations in (Hindu) Nationalism*

Paola Bacchetta

In our times, a number of insightful feminist analyses have worked to explain the place of gender and sexuality in formations of nationalisms, Empire, and postcoloniality. To date, a great many such analytics of nationalism either explicitly state or carry the underlying presupposition that heterosexuality is integral to nation formation, even if they are increasingly beginning to uncover the place of homosexuality. In the analytics of heterosexualities, the nation is most often understood as an oppressive family writ large (McClintock 1995). For some it is primarily characterized by sexism (Yuval-Davis 1997); and for still others mainly by heterosexism (Peterson 2000). Some more recent analytics of homosexuality in nationalisms, all of which centre on Empire, highlight State political deployments of dominant, acceptable, heterosexual-modelled, nationalized homosexualities, or what Puar has called 'homonationalism', mainly to construct a divide between incorporable lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) subjects and queered others (Bacchetta and Haritaworn 2011; Haritaworn 2008; Kuntsman 2009; Puar 2007). However, to date there is not one study of homosexuality in postcolonial nationalisms.

With these useful prior analytics as a point of departure, this chapter attempts to initiate a discussion on the place of, specifically, queer

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genders, sexualities, and relationalities in a postcolonial nationalist formation. This is done by engaging with right-wing Hindu nationalism in India. However, throughout, it will be helpful to keep this in mind: instead of particularizing Hindu nationalism, or any other form of Indian nationalism, or even postcolonial nationalisms more widely, it is hoped that this analysis, or perhaps parts thereof, might resonate for understanding nationalisms well beyond its immediate national, regional, and specific geo-political contexts.

Hindu nationalism is perhaps most renown in India and transnationally for its high profile, extremist anti-Other practices. That is, in contrast to Indian nationalism (India's official nationalism) which is pluralist and includes Indians of all faiths as citizens, Hindu nationalism seeks to eliminate all non-Hindus from the Indian citizen-body. It primarily excludes Indian Muslims, along with Indian Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis, Jains, Christians, Jews, and so on. In addition, it excludes Hindus who do not conform to the Hindu nationalist definition of the term Hinduism.

Briefly, the following sections will present three interrelated arguments. First, both queerphobia and queerphilia, and not queerphobia alone as might be expected, are integral to the formation, maintenance, and deployment of Hindu nationalism. Second, Hindu nationalist constructions of queerphobic (de-valorized queer) genders, sexualities, and affective relationalities are mainly effects of Hindu nationalist reworkings of *colonial* misogynist notions of gender and sexual normativity; in contrast, queerphilic (hyper-valorized queer) constructions found in Hindu nationalism draw largely on reproductions and reworkings of genders and sexualities as they appear in (a range of) *Hindu religious* symbolics. Third, the primary Othered figures of Hindu nationalist discourse are both, equally, Indian Muslims and Hindu queers. But largely by extension, Hindu nationalists assign de-valorized queer gender and sexuality to all the (queer and the unqueer) Others of the Hindu nation. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, queer gender, sexualities, and affective relationalities are found not only on the 'They' side of Hindu nationalism's 'We vs. They' binary as might be expected, but also on the 'We' side as well.

The following operations are integral to the arguments presented in this chapter: *xenophobic queerphobia*, *queerphobic xenophobia*, and *queerphilic idealization*. Xenophobic queerphobia implies a particular form of queerphobia that justifies itself by constructing the self-identified Indian queer as originating outside the nation. In this logic, Hindu

nationalists claim that queer is 'not Indian' and that the British brought homosexuality to India. This claim reverberates with yet another xenophobic queerphobic operation, in which the colonial British designated British homosexuality as the oriental vice, the result of excessive British immersion in India. In turn, *queerphobic xenophobia* signifies a particular type of xenophobia in which queer genders and sexualities are assigned (often metaphorically) to all the designated Others of the nation regardless of their sexual conduct or identity. The primary objects of Hindu nationalist queerphobic xenophobic operations have been Muslim men. The self-identified queer Muslim (or other Other) stands at the intersection of xenophobic queerphobia and queerphobic xenophobia. Finally, *queerphilic idealization* signals that the glorified leader-as-symbol, who is always above the masses, can be represented as incorporating both hetero-genders (masculinity and femininity) into his/her persona.

Some additional points of precision, again in the form of definitions, are in order, beginning with terms that are not employed (much) in this chapter: homosexual, lesbian, and gay. Foucault (1980), followed by many others, has demonstrated that the identitary term homosexual (and by extension lesbian and gay in current usage) are recent inventions in Western languages, with their genealogy in the nineteenth century shifting from the notion of same-sex sexuality as a genital act, to the idea that same-sex acts are a function of specific identities or personality types. Similarly, Thadani (1996), Kanchana (1988), Khan (in the 1991 film *Khush* by Pratibha Parmar), and Rao-Kavi (in the 1990 film *An Evening with Bombay Dost* by Geeta Saxena) have all remarked that equivalent terms to homosexuals are currently absent in Indian languages, though Indian languages include the term hijra (transgender and/or transsexual men/males to women/females). Historically, Indian activists and academics have attempted to forge, recuperate, or revive terms relevant to specific queer identities, such as *khush* (happy, gay), *bhagini* (vaginal sister), *sakhi* (woman friend of a woman), *samlingkama* (desirous of the same sex), *dost* (male friend of a male), *jankha* (effeminate gay man, man to woman transvestite), *gandhu* (insulting term: one who has sex through anal penetration), *zenana* (effeminate gay man), *chay number* (number six: outrageous flaming gay man) (Cohen 1995; Thadani 1996). As yet, no Indian term has surfaced or been invented under which could be united the whole range of dissidently gendered and sexed subjects, practices, lifestyles, and identities. Thus, as a transient measure, this chapter deploys the term queer insofar as, among other things, it can be made to signal inclusivity in the language that is being

used—English. Yet, it is important to flag that this is inadequate in the South Asian context, for it does not consider the complexities of Indian gender, sexual, subject, and relational formations contextually. Further, it is also necessary to ‘out’ the adoption of queer to avoid what Patel (1997: 135–9) has insightfully termed ‘dichotomized fluency’, or the situation in which the reality of a local discourse is translated/reframed in terms of a universalized discourse without acknowledgement of the process, resulting in two very different representations, with the dominant effacing the local. Perhaps one way to attempt to circumvent such effacement would be to confront the dominant discourse, be mindful of contextualization, and re-fractionalize and reunify the term queer itself in the text where relevant.

The sources employed here are the internal publications of primarily two Hindu nationalist organizations: the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS translated in English as the ‘National Self-Volunteer Organization’), India’s most extensive Hindu nationalist formation, founded in 1925, which at present has about 2.5 million members and has an additional 200 affiliated organizations; and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP translated in English as the ‘Indian People’s Party’), the RSS’ electoral wing founded in 1980. To a lesser extent, this chapter will also draw from the separate, but related, Hindu Shiv Sena (‘Hindu Army of Shiva’). Elsewhere, I have demonstrated that there are gendered differences, and even incompatibilities, between Hindu nationalist men’s and women’s discourse and practice (Bacchetta 2004). Therefore, it is important to specify that this present chapter concerns exclusively Hindu nationalist men’s discourse and practice, and not women’s. Indeed, the RSS forms the central organ for the production of Hindu nationalist ideology, with its publishing companies, bookstores, and distribution networks.

The first section contextualizes the traffic (from Britain to India) in forms of queerphobia that later surface in Hindu nationalism. The second presents queer exiled figures in Hindu nationalist discourse; and the third focuses on the paradoxical reinsertion of queerness in Hindu nationalism, before arriving at some concluding remarks.

THE TRAFFIC IN QUEERPHOBIA: GENEALOGIES

Indian repression of dissident genders and sexualities certainly predates colonialism, as should become evident in the sections that follow. However, pre-colonial repression differs from current forms in extent and in content. Pre-colonial queer repression occurred in local, limited

time/spaces, and coexisted with queer acceptance elsewhere within the borders of space currently delineated as India. Today, the Indian queer repression is temporally eternalized and territorially generalized through inscription in national laws. Where pre-colonial conduct was punished, sanctions did not include permanent exile. Yet, from the colonial period until the adoption of anti-sodomy provisions in IPC 377 in 2009, queer sexualities were criminalized.

Though the genealogy of current forms of Hindu nationalist queerphobic xenophobia is vast and multidimensional, this chapter will point to two areas: orientalist discourse (Said 1978; Sprinkler 1992) and colonial law. As Prakash (1995) has remarked, Indian orientalism was a completely European enterprise, embedded in colonial relations of power, from its inception. Beginning in 1757, it operated to reconstruct ‘knowledge’ of India. This process was multifaceted; but what concerns us here is the fact that orientalism worked to condemn or marginalize what now are designated as dissident genders and sexualities, as it reconstituted and redefined the Hindu symbolic. To make sense of the multitude of Hindu sacred texts, oral traditions and practices, orientalists divided them into two categories which are still reproduced today in some circles: a ‘Great Tradition’ (comprised of texts of the Brahmin elite, or 3 per cent of the Hindu population); and a ‘Little Tradition’ (Hinduisms of the masses). Orientalists selectively translated ‘Great Tradition’ works and left ‘Little Tradition’ works by the wayside. As Chakravarti (1989) and Nandy (1983) have argued, orientalist selectivity centred texts in which male subjectivities could be understood in conformity with British notions of masculine virility and where femininity and women could be marginalized. In doing so, they put in place the forms of misogyny that would underlie postcolonial queerphobia. Some examples are the epics Mahabharata (c. eighth to fifth century BC) and Ramayana (c. second century BC), where wars provide a backdrop for interpretive procedures regarding masculinity.

However, the same ‘Great Tradition’ texts that circumscribe ‘proper’ gender, also marginalize, condemn, or propose punishment for queer conduct and figurations. This, for instance, is the case of the two epics, and some of the *dharmashastras* (law books) such as the *Manusmriti* (AD c. second century). Orientalists ignored the vast array of sources that accept or even celebrate queer within their own categories of ‘Great Tradition’ and ‘Little Tradition’. Some examples are the *Kamasutra* (AD fourth to fifth century) which includes a chapter entitled ‘Auparishtaka’ (Oral Congress) valorizing same-sex relations; lesbian folk tales from

Himachal Pradesh (Thadani 1996); practices such as *maitri karar* (friendship agreement, a form of marriage between women); and iconography such as in the Tara-Taratini temple of Orissa.

Orientalist selectivity proceeded, yet coincided, with administrative efforts to maintain colonial rule; they were based in a common grid of intelligibility. As Nandy (1983) demonstrates, to sustain their rule, the British discredited Brahmins (who held symbolic power), co-opted rajas of princely states (who held material power), and formed a class of Indian collaborators for the army and the civil service. To this effect, the British constructed Brahmin men as effeminate, and created a category of Indian 'martial races' as the ideal of Hindu masculinity based on Kshatriya (warrior and princely caste) manhood (Sinha 1997). To justify colonialism to their own people in England, the British framed their colonial presence in terms of a civilizing mission—a notion that rested in part on the construction of upper caste Hindu men as oppressive to women and lower-caste Indian men as sexually promiscuous. This invention was part of a wider grid of intelligibility in which the colonizers conceptualized the colonies as what McClintock (1995: 22) has called the 'porno-tropics', or 'a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears'.

Colonial administrative policy towards queer sexuality was an exemplary Foucauldian (1980) operation involving surveillance, deterrence, repression, and punishment of men's queer conduct, albeit in a reworked order. Women, considered passionless and sexually passive in the Victorian grid of intelligibility without sexual subjectivity, were not encompassed in these operations. The first targets of what we might call today *queer cleansing* were the British themselves, beginning with the Imperial Army. For instance, as Ballhatchet (1980: 10, 162) notes, British administrators officially organized an Indian female prostitution apparatus to prevent same-sex acts between male British soldiers. They preferred that their men engage in inter-racial extra-marital hetero sex instead of intra-racial hom(m)o sex. When the prostitution solution proved ineffective to deter their peers' queer practices, British administrators passed the Army Act of 1850 which punished British hom(m)o sex with imprisonment of up to seven years.

It was not until 1861, with the imposition of the British legal system in India (Indian Penal Code, IPC) that sodomy, and thus same-sex acts (again, among men), were outlawed among Indians across the whole of the British-held subcontinental territory (via IPC Article 377). Soon thereafter, the colonial administration organized surveillance of

upper-class Indian men with whom the British were in frequent contact. As Ballhatchet (1980: 120) remarks, Lord Curzon, Viceroy from 1899 to 1905, 'had grimly drawn up a list of princes with homosexual tastes' to survey and attempted to dissuade them.

QUEER EXILE

Against that backdrop, this chapter will address two large zones of queer exile: that of internal and external subjects to the Hindu nation as the RSS conceptualizes it.

The Hindu Nationalist Citizen-Body

The RSS describes its citizen-body, the Hindu People, in masculine terms: 'the men born in the land of Bharat' and 'sons of the soil' (Golwalkar 1980: 107, 208). Even as the RSS ideologues insert neutral terms, they still signify the masculine (Irigaray 1990: 12; Spender 1980: 145). Thus, the citizen-body is a male hom(m)osocial entity, to the exclusion of women. It is, in the sense of McClintock's (1995) gendered interpretation of Anderson's (1991) formulation: 'a fraternity of men' characterized by 'deep horizontal comradeship'. In the words of M.S. Golwalkar (1980: 291), the major RSS ideologue and second *sarsanghchalak* (RSS supreme leader) from 1940 to 1973:

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

The category 'Hindu nationalist men' is of course a subgroup, an avant-garde, within the Hindu citizen-body. Read at the connotative level, the united Hindu nationalist men are a metaphor for the Hindu nationalist phallus: mighty, alert, invincibly powerful, and of course, 'erect'. The RSS' ideal bond of 'love' rests on the Hindu male repression of hom(m)osexuality. But, as Lane (1995: 21) argues in another context, drawing on Derrida's (1988) notion of friendship as *philia* and its distinction from *eros*, heterosexuality is also a threat because it risks disrupting male to male hom(m)osocial intimacy. Thus, for the RSS, the operative sexuality binary for Hindu nationalist men is not so much hetero versus homo; rather, it is asexuality versus both hetero and hom(m)o sexuality.

In this logic, the most committed of Hindu nationalist men must avoid all sexual contact in order to remain faithful to the collectivity of Hindu men. Accordingly, the self-proclaimed celibate sarsanghchalak, *pracharaks* (full-time RSS workers), and *swayamsevaks* (RSS members) who have permanently renounced *garhasthya* (the life of the married householder) are the most ideal of all Hindu men. The BJP's highest level leaders are also self-proclaimed celibates, including Atal Bihari Vajpayee, India's former Prime Minister from the BJP, who was also India's first unmarried Prime Minister.

Hindu Nationalist Man

In the RSS conception, the ideal rank and file Hindu nationalist man is the central unit of the Hindu People. The RSS describes him as: a virile, chivalrous warrior along Kshatriya lines; celibate along Brahminical *sannyasin* (wanderer detached from material world) lines, and 'respectful of women' (Golwalkar 1980: 449, 588). This model actually disrupts heterosexual normativity because it posits asexual virility as ideal, but reinserts heterosexual normativity at the level of gendered identity, insofar as virility itself rests on a hetero gender-sex-sexuality binary. Several operations underlie this construction: (i) the RSS resistance to colonial constructions of the Brahmin as effete through positing Hindu male virility, which coincides with (ii) the RSS reproduction of the colonial Kshatriya model; and finally (iii) the RSS resistance to the colonial notion of Indian hypersexuality through its opposite, asexuality, which intersects with (iv) the RSS selectivity of the sannyasin model of asexuality in the dominant 'Great Tradition' Hindu symbolic.

The negative characteristics that the RSS disassociates and rejects from itself are in turn assigned to their notion of the unacceptable Hindu male. Thus, the unacceptable Hindu man is anti-national, sexually promiscuous, materialistic, Westernized and, worse, he embodies the physical and mental characteristics readable as feminine in the modern bilingual elite discourse informed by Western notions of gender and sexuality (Golwalkar 1980, 1996).

For the RSS, all Hindu men could be ideal if they would peel away the layers of *maya* (illusion) which blind them to their essential Hindu nationalist selves. This processual concept of achieving the ideal identity reproduces the Brahminical Hindu discourse on spiritual realization as a process of unknowing the material world. It also re-inscribes, albeit in reverse, the Western liberal notion of 'Progress'

as it operates in Enlightenment and current development narratives of Third World 'progress' (Shanin 1997). That is, for the RSS, the ideal is to be achieved through a linear movement back to a point in time prior to colonialism.

M.S. Golwalkar presents this processual transformation in his major text, *Bunch of Thoughts* (1996: 372) through the use of a gendered analogy in a story entitled 'How "Woman" Became a Soldier?' It took place in World War I (WWI) when the English recalled retired Indian soldiers back to the army. One such soldier does not wish to return, so the police search for him.

When the soldier came to know of this he put on a woman's clothes and hid himself in the house. When the police came, his wife told them that he was not in the house.... But the police suspected deception. They called out that 'sister,' found out the truth and took him away. The soldier was sent to his old platoon. He was then given the army dress and made to join the ranks. When he stood there with the soldier's dress on, he was asked whether he would like to return home. He replied with a new resolve in his voice that he was now a soldier... he would now only go to a battlefield. Indeed the dress had made all the difference!

In this almost Althusserian passage, Golwalkar presents the figure in progression: soldier to husband, to a man in feminine drag and back to soldier again. The gender and sex trajectory is made to be dependent upon clothing as an interpellative element. The achievement of the ideal via shedding feminine clothing parallels the (Hindu) notion of peeling away *maya* for self-realization. But, in addition, the achievement of masculinity requires an inverted movement of re-clothing (as the before and after soldier) through self-effort. Thus both femininity and masculinity are associated with *maya*. The RSS puts the principle of gender as costume and performance into practice with the uniform that is obligatory for *swayamsevaks*. Also in the passage, Golwalkar associates *garhasthya* with failed masculinity: the truly masculine Hindu man leaves his wife and home to become (again) a soldier. Here, a certain dichotomy is reproduced: on the one hand, there is ideal asexuality (soldier); and on the other, an unacceptable hetero and queer combine (the man's relation to his wife requires being in feminine drag).

Today, RSS notions of ideal masculinity and transformation are translated into practice in the BJP's 'promotion of a robust sports and physical culture' for youth (BJP 1998: 41). This includes making 'physical education and sports coaching compulsory' in schools, organizing

sports meets, allocating state funds for Olympic Games preparation, and requiring one year of rigorous service from all Indian youth (BJP 1998: 41).

Muslim Men

The ideal Hindu nationalist citizen-body rests upon the exclusion of a series of Others who embody, albeit differentially, improper gendering, sexuality, and nationalization. Thus, in an operation based on auto-referentiality, in the sense of Guillaumin (1972), the RSS projects the gender of Indian Muslims as masculine, parallel to the Hindu nationalist hom(m)osexual citizen-body. The RSS divides Indian Muslim men into three categories (Bacchetta 2004; 1996; 1994): (i) Muslim-as-Foreign-Invader, which designates the upper class and the political leadership; (ii) Muslim-as-ex-Hindu-Convert, as lower caste; and (iii) Hindu-Muslims, a new invention, designating hypothetical Muslims who—insofar as their conduct would be consistent with Hindu nationalism's religious, nationalist, gender, and sexual normativity—could be assimilated back into the Hindu nation. Underlying the first two categories are three common characteristics: hypermasculinity, hypersexuality, and anti-(Hindu) nationalism. The RSS maintains that Muslim men engage in 'riots, rapes, looting, raping, and all sorts of orgies' as they seek to undermine the Hindu nation (Golwalkar 1980: 234–5).

The RSS produces its notion of Muslim men as hyper-masculine-sexual by shifting orientalist and British administrative discourse about Hindus onto Muslims. The RSS reiterates the colonial idea that Hindu and Muslim 'communities' are incompatible, which, as historians Chandra (1992), Pandey (1992), and others have amply demonstrated, served Britain's official divide and rule policy. The RSS also projects onto Muslims the promiscuity and aggression that the British had earlier assigned to lower-caste Hindus, and diverts its anger towards them. The RSS states about Muslims: 'Times without number we had to gulp down insult and humiliation at their hands' (Golwalkar 1980: 413). Here, the RSS portrays active-hypermasculine Muslim men rendering Hindu men passive-effeminate in a not-so-disguised hom(m)osexualized relation. To elaborate, Golwalkar states (1996: 147):

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

were wanted by both the British and the nationalists and their price was rising higher and higher.

Here, the RSS presents Muslims as hypermasculine ('aggressive') to the point of animality (with sharp 'teeth and claws') and as subjects of both British and Congress party men's attraction. Yet, the terms of the hom(m)osexual relationship are displaced. In this new three-some, Muslim men feature as male prostitutes whose price rises as the British and Congress men bid for their favour, while RSS men are positioned as voyeurs.

Western Men and Westernized Hindu Elites

The RSS similarly constructs the nations and citizen-bodies of the West in hyper-masculine-sexual terms (Golwalkar 1980: 14–15):

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

Here, in an inversion of the colonizer's construction of India as the 'porno-tropics', the RSS represents the West as what this chapter will address as a *porno-West*. Its unleashed sexuality threatens to feminize and engulf the Hindu nation in a scenario that reads like rape.

Closer to home, the RSS is very interested in denouncing 'westernized Hindu men'. The porno-West serves as its backdrop for this operation. Let us hear, for example, the Hindu nationalist response to Deepa Mehta's film *Fire*, in which two sisters-in-law in a joint family develop a lesbian relationship. In December 1998, after *Fire* was released in India, Hindu Shiv Sena activists protested by trashing the cinemas in which it was shown. The RSS declared:

The Shiv Sena chief Bal Thakeray may be accused of using force and 'lumpen methodology' to suppress the voices that do not suit his cultural worldview. But the attack on the indigenous value-system by the ultra-westernized elite, who regard the nation as not more than a piece of land with a bundle of cultural and political rights, is more appalling than the action of the Shiv sainiks. (Sinha 1997: 17)

Further, the RSS stated that Indian 'ultra-westernized elite' leftists had:

...resort to explicit lesbianism and other perversities to challenge the traditional set up. That way one day all the pornographic flings of Mona

Lewinsky–Clinton duo may become the role model, if the aim is to disintegrate the family *a la* western society. The method may not appeal to the female fraternity in general but Deepa Mehtas and Shabana Azmis of the day must have their fling even when western feminist prophets like Germaine Greer, the writer of *The Female Eunuch*, are returning to sober, civilized, domesticated ways, accepting even male superiority as a natural course of things. (Bhatia 1998: 13)

(Shabana Azmi is a widely acclaimed actress who played one of the [Hindu] lesbians in *Fire*. She is also a Muslim, an activist, and a Congress Member of Parliament.) Here, the RSS proposes some interesting equations: the dangers of anormative heterosexuality (Lewinsky and Clinton) and lesbianism; 'civilization' (Western and Hindu nationalist) and 'male superiority'; but also domestication as the desirable 'sober' reincarnation of feminism (through the figure of Greer).

Congress Men and Their Queer Nation

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

For the RSS, the Congress' secular territorial nationalism signifies nation-miscegenation because it promotes queer fusion between Muslim and Hindu men. Golwalkar (ibid.: 197–8) describes territorial nationalism as an 'unnatural' 'hybrid nationalism' thus:

It is like attempting to create a novel animal by joining the head of a monkey and the legs of a bullock to the main body of the elephant! It can only result in a hideous corpse.... If at all some activity is seen in that body it is only of the germs and bacteria breeding in that decomposing corpse.

And so it is that we see today the germs of corruption, disintegration and dissipation eating into the vitals of our nation for having given up the natural living nationalism in the pursuit of an unnatural, unscientific and lifeless hybrid-concept of territorial nationalism.

In the passage provided earlier, Hinduism and Islam are racialized into biological categories. The Hindu nationalist citizen-body (elephant) is surgically decapitated and its lower limbs are severed; the (Hindu) head and legs are discarded and replaced with a Muslim (monkey) head and Muslim (bullock) legs. For the RSS, the cohabitation of 'incompatible' religions in the same nation-space implies a religious-race reassignment to the citizen-body that signals castration. The 'unnatural' and 'unscientific' cutting operation is reinforced by the figure of Muslims as disease eating into the RSS' 'vitals'. Thus, territorial nationalism spells the simultaneous end of Hindu masculinity and of the Hindu collective phallus; it signals death itself ('the decomposing corpse'). The sexualized metaphors of hybridity as castration and death, internality and inter-religiosity, are located at the intersection of nineteenth-century constructions of race and the homosexual, wherein, as Somerville (1997) has remarked via the term 'intermediate sex', homosexuals became the 'half breeds' of sexology. For the RSS, the Congress party's territorial nationalism forces the citizen-body to become the (castrated) 'intermediate sex' of nationalism.

Hindu Queers

Finally, the metaphoric queerness of all the Hindu nationalists' Others relies on the queerness of Hindu queer subjects as the ultimate sign of the degraded Hindu nation. In the RSS biography of Dr Hedgewar (a.k.a. Doctorji), the RSS founder, we find:

Doctorji had bought from an exhibition a couple of fans made of palm leaves and bamboo. One of them carried a picture of Chatrapati Shivaji, and on the other was a picture of the famous actor Balgandharva in a female role. Doctorji explained, 'I intentionally brought these two just to show the contrast between the condition of Maharashtra some 300 years ago, and our present times'. (Seshadri 1981: 203–4)

Shivaji Bhonsla (1627–80), a multi-ethnic historical figure, is for the RSS an exemplary Hindu nationalist man who defeated the ruling Mogul Empire and built a 'Hindu Empire'. The RSS constructs Balgandharva

(1888–1967), a celebrated male actor renown for playing romantic female roles, as a Hindu queer signifying the Hindu nation's downfall.

Further, the Hindu queer subject is transformed into a sign of western secularism, the disease that provokes the end of the Hindu nation. For example, in the *Organiser*, the RSS newspaper, following the release of the film *Fire* mentioned earlier, we find the following sarcastic humorous rendition:

Secularism cannot be served, supported and sustained unless the Hindu mindset is maligned and the Hindu tradition traduced. Funnily enough, if secularism means debunking ancient Bharat, lesbianism means upholding ancient Greece. For it was in the ancient Greek city of Lesbos that for the first time the ladies teaching at a school for girls taught homosexuality to their pupils.... It proves that modern India wants to become as modern as ancient Greece.... West is best, and nothing coming from the best, ancient or modern, can ever go out of fashion for us.... if secularism is to spread like a plague, lesbianism must spread like an epidemic, no? (Anonymous 1999: 8)

This RSS correlation of queer with the West proceeds by forgetting what the RSS has already effaced: the long genealogy and ample present of queer gender and sexual presence in India in Hindu (and other) contexts. A host of interesting scholarship has, in fact, highlighted the presence of queer symbolic representations, subjects, and conduct from the ancient period until today. To point to only a few of these: *ardhanarishwara* or the half-female half-male figure of the god Shiva, the sex change of Sikandin in Vyasa's classical Mahabharata, various figures of pregnant kings in several Hindu religious texts, or the historical to current existence of hijras (transgender male to female [MTF]), and intersex subjects across the subcontinent (Doniger O'Flaherty 1982; Thadani 1996; Vanita 2002; Vanita and Kidwai 2000).

QUEER REINSCRIPTION IN HINDU NATIONALISM

The earlier section has outlined a tremendous amount of RSS queer-phobia. Paradoxically, at certain points, the RSS *reinserts* into its own discourse forms of what it identifies elsewhere as anormative gender and sexuality. Perhaps gender and sexuality are objects of continual negotiation because of their centrality to, and variation within, the differential discourses upon which Hindu nationalist ideologues draw. Here, this chapter will point to two sites of RSS queer re-inscription.

Hindu Nationalist Leaders

We could begin with Dr Hedgewar, the deceased RSS founder, whom M.S. Golwalkar (1996: 477) describes as 'the Hindu ideal of man in flesh and blood'. For Golwalkar (*ibid.*: 469, 471, 476), Dr Hedgewar is 'irresistible', 'childlike', full of 'sweet words which appeal to the heart' such that 'the more one came near him the more one would love and adore him'. Golwalkar elaborates:

what an ocean of love he was to us!... The boundless affection of the mother's heart, the sleepless care and diligence of the father and the inspiring guidance of the guru found their culmination in that single bosom.... The worship of such a soul transcends the worship of an individual and becomes the worship of the ideal itself. He is verily my chosen deity'. (*Ibid.*: 473)

Here, one finds a bi-gendered Hedgewar ('mother's love' and father's 'diligence') who is guru and finally a divinity ('my chosen deity'). This figuration is possible in Hindu nationalism insofar as it relies on the highly valorized image of bi-gendered Hindu divinities. In fact, it is consistent with representations of other highly respected human bi-gendered figures, including those whom the RSS despises: Mahatma Gandhi, whom Hindu nationalists assassinated, is a case in point.

Similarly, the public image Hindu nationalists have constructed for India's former Prime Minister from the BJP, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, is bi-gendered. His 1998 official biography by BJP member Sharma (1998), entitled *Poet Politician: Atal Bihari Vajpayee*, insists on his sensitivity; he learned as a child that he had 'the right to cry' and that lesson was 'permanently etched on his mind' (*ibid.*: 25). He loves children and 'becomes a child amongst them' (*ibid.*: 49).

More importantly, in the title of Sharma's book, the terms poet and politician are thickly semiotic; this chapter will point to only two most pertinent associations for each. First, poet is aligned in colonial discourse with feminine flakiness and dreaminess in contrast to the prized hard male rationality, and in dominant Hindu discourses with the esteemed Brahmin as opposed to illiterate masses. Politician in India often retains an off-putting association with British rule or, by extension, corrupt post-colonial governments, and yet in Hindu nationalist discourse, politician is joined to the respected Kshatriya. While Vajpayee's biography is primarily about his political exploits, Sharma positions a poem at the beginning of every chapter and weaves the Vajpayee-the-poet thematic

throughout. For Hindu nationalists, the production of Vajpayee as both poet (Brahmin) and politician (Kshatriya) correlates him as a *rishi* (seer, sage) endowed with divine (political) inspiration, thus capable of predicting the renaissance of the Hindu nation.

In both Vajpayee and Hedgewar's representations, qualities which could be read as queer gender in a colonial grid of intelligibility are instead read through the Hindu symbolic as attributes of bi-gendered divinities. However, this is only possible because both men are always already powerful political symbols, disconnected from weakness, ideal Hindu nationalists, and most importantly, their queer gender is totally asexual. In contrast, Balgandharva is unacceptable to Hindu nationalists because he is perceived to be apolitical and highly sexual.

While Hedgewar and Vajpayee are specifically read through a Hindu nationalist lens, the principle of bi-gendered political leaders might be wider. For example, we can find analogies with other extremist right-wing representations of 'visionaries': Hitler as a sensitive artist who wished to make the world vegetarian (Nolte 1965: 370); Mussolini as an 'artist' moulding the people (Falasca-Zamponi 1997: 15-17); Maurras as creative writer; and George Bush who combines fumbling effeminacy (as a pampered son) with cowboy machismo ('hunt 'em down and smoke 'em out'). In that sense, there is something specifically Hindu nationalist about the RSS' bi-gendered construction, but also something that vastly exceeds the RSS.

Materialized Enactments

But what of queer *sexuality*? Hindu nationalist leaders and rank-and-file perform it in violent anti-Other events. Queerphobic xenophobia supplies the motivating energy for their conduct. The riot situation as a liminal space of panic which stretches the present seemingly onward forever (Patel 1998) is an exemplary locus for this acting-out operation.

A range of recent studies have documented what could be termed the Hindu nationalist reordering of Muslim gender, sex, and sexuality under the surgical knife as weapon in such conditions. To evoke two examples: in the 1947 Partition violence and in the 2002 Gujarat pogroms, Hindu nationalists cut off Muslim women's breasts and then gang raped them (Bacchetta 2010; Human Rights Watch 2002; Menon and Bhasin 1998). In the 2002 turmoil they cut Muslim women's fetuses from their wombs before murdering them. They removed Muslim women's breasts, thereby transforming them into eunuchs. They then used the

eunuch as a conduit for their own male sexual bonding through gang rape. The ripping out of fetuses ensured the discontinuation of Muslim genealogies in future time. But further, in both instances, 1947 and 2002, Hindu nationalist men castrated Muslim men before murdering them, thereby producing the cathartic reversal of the fantasmic Muslim-as-hypermasculine-hypersexual. Dismemberment frees up the now sexless Muslim ex-male body for a deferred religious reassignment and gender and sexual reordering which cannot take place (for he is dead). However, it also separates and annihilates the body parts that, in a passage provided earlier, were fantasized as fused in a deadly hybrid Congress-inspired citizen-body. In these *passages à l'acte*, Hindu nationalists move from the metaphorical-discursive queering of Muslims to their material queering. Paradoxically, far from guaranteeing the Hindu nationalist male asexual normativity, these crimes queer the perpetrators as makers and rapists of eunuchs and other anormative bodies.

To conclude, it is important to highlight two facts. First, to signal that in India, critical peoples of many political persuasions, faiths, genders, and sexualities have consistently and skilfully resisted Hindu nationalist, anti-Muslim, and anti-Queer discourses and practices, across scales (village, city, region, nation, and transnationally in the diaspora). Such work is done daily but also at specific conjunctures. To cite just one high profile example, there was massive protest against the Hindu nationalist attack on Deepa Mehta's 'lesbian' film *Fire* (2002). Besides this, the protest itself produced many effects. One of these was to provoke the formation of a wide alliance to defend the rights of Indian queers as a dimension of the larger struggle against (Hindu nationalist or other) repression, censorship, and exclusion (Bacchetta 2001).

Second, throughout, this chapter has alluded sporadically to the practices of queerphobic xenophobia, xenophobic queerphobia, and queerphilic idealization that are operative in some right-wing nationalisms beyond India. Hopefully, further research will bring to visibility their extent and forms across the globe. Such research may aid in configuring local to transnational political strategies expansive enough to undo the Other exile in its many identifiable forms and dimensions, from multiple fronts, for all. In addition, it may help to complicate the current binary in which queer acceptance is systematically associated with the left, and queer repression with the right. In fact it just may be that, not only within but also well beyond the Hindu nationalism, queer

genders, sexualities, and affectivities, and the politics of queer acceptance or repression, cannot be so neatly divided.

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6

Decriminalization as Deregulation?

Logics of Sodomy Law and the State

Jyoti Puri

On 2 July 2009, the Delhi High Court decriminalized homosexuality with its judgment on *Naz Foundation v. Government of NCT of Delhi and Others*.¹ The Naz Foundation (India) Trust had filed a public interest litigation (PIL) in 2001 seeking to alter Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) so that adult, consensual same-sex sexual activity in private would no longer be considered criminal (Civil Writ Petition No. 7455/2001). As an organization working on HIV/AIDS issues, the Naz writ emphasized the public health hazards of criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual activity. The eight-year long legal process culminated in a landmark judgment furnished by the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court. While its purview is technically limited to the jurisdiction of the Delhi High Court, it is likely to set precedent for other high courts in the country. In the meanwhile, the next phase of the struggle to decriminalize homosexuality is underway with numerous Special Leave Petitions (SLPs)² having been filed in the Supreme Court to appeal the decision and although the final outcome is by no means certain, the *Naz* judgment has undoubtedly rendered an irrevocable blow to the legal and cultural icon of homophobia.

Same-sex sexuality rights advocates and activists have embraced the *Naz* judgment not just for its outcome but also for its affirmation of democratic principles of inclusivity and equality. Perhaps, the feminist scholar and filmmaker, Shohini Ghosh, captures it best: 'It is