

BODIES AT PLAY IN THE FIELD OF THE NATION:
M.F. HUSAIN AND THE TRACE OF MODERNITY

By

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ABSTRACT

In the last four years India's most widely recognized artist, M. F. Husain has been singled out on two separate occasions by the forces of Hindutva. The ire of the Hindu right was raised over Husain's nude depictions of Hindu goddesses, which were the claimed catalyst for both the destruction of the venerated artist's work and the laying of criminal charges against him. This thesis looks to these two events and offers up an inventory of traces, which interlace through the attacks on Husain's work and its correlative relationship to the articulation of a visual and political modern in India. The Husain controversy must be situated within the traffic of images that form a visual vernacular cutting across the linguistic, regional and religious differences in India. As the pages of my narrative unfold, I weave through various examples of how the palimpsest of India's modernity has functioned within the popular imagination so that I may suggest that the Hindutva movement has recuperated the trace of former images, the memory of their importance, and the significance of their cultural and political resonance.

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*This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Wilhelm Rempel and his laughter, which still
rings in my ears.*

This is for you Bill because unlike your mother, I wear army boots.

INTRODUCTION

The starting point of a critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. Such an inventory must therefore be made at the outset.

Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*¹

With heads wound in saffron and hands brandishing *trishuls* (trident-like weapons), eight members of the Bajrang Dal entered the Herwitz gallery on October 10, 1996.² The small commercial gallery, located in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, was hosting an exhibition of paintings and tapestries created by India's well-known artist, M.F. Husain. Chanting, "*Jai Bajrang Dali! Have tame amari kamal javo!*" the Bajrang Dal, pulled tapestries from the walls, shredded delicate works on paper and smashed paintings on canvas to use as kindling for the fire they left blazing in their wake.³ Upon quitting the scene, the vandals left a self-portrait of the artist draped in a saffron shroud standing amidst the wreckage as a silent and solemn epitaph to their deed.

The destruction was allegedly in response to an image of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of learning, drawn by Husain in 1976 (figure 1). The image is surprisingly unremarkable and it is interesting that it would spawn such outrage. Husain's economical, yet expressive line traced the form of the adored goddess to realize her in a seated posture

¹ Antonio Gramsci, *A Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988): 326.

² The Bajrang Dal, a volunteer youth corps affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), constitute the strong arm of the various cultural and political units which fall under the umbrella term the Sangh Parivar. As advocates of Hindutva (political Hinduism) these various units are united in a collective ideological and political impulse toward the creation of a *rashtra* (state) whose geographical boundaries are delineated by pan cultural adherence to Hinduism.

³ "Bajrang Dal ransacks Husain's Paintings," *The Times of India*, Mumbai Edition (October 11, 1996):1. The words chanted by the Bajrang Dal translate roughly into, "Victory to the Bajrang Dal! Now see what we can do!"

wearing nothing save bangles, a necklace and a veena cradled in her lap. Saraswati is immersed in water with her traditional mount, the peacock. A lone fish languishes at her elbow and her body seems to sway rhythmically as a divine arm extends upward to pluck a lotus from the surface of the pool.

The innocuous representation of the goddess notwithstanding, the Bajrang Dal claimed that Husain's nude illustration of Saraswati inflamed religious intolerance, and was a "calculated affront to Hindu culture and tradition." Asserting "[N]o Muslim has the right to portray our deities any way he wishes," the Bajrang Dal maintained that the razing of Husain's work was a castigatory gesture for his blatant transgression of sacred propriety.⁴ Interestingly, the image was not part of the exhibition in Ahmedabad, and prior to the Bajrang Dal's attack, *Saraswati* rested in relative obscurity.⁵ Husain's depiction of the venerated goddess caught the attention of the Bajrang Dal when it was published in the Hindi periodical, *Vichar Mimansa* alongside an editorial by Om Nagpal.⁶ Nagpal's article, entitled "Is He an Artist or a Butcher?" challenged Husain's right as a Muslim to depict nude Hindu goddesses. He posed questions such as: "Why doesn't he paint his mother and his sister in this modern art style? Why does he paint a Hindu goddess in such a disrespectful manner? Why doesn't he paint Allah?"⁷ Although Nagpal's article bordered on the absurd with its suggestion that religious affiliation should determine subject matter, the issue took on a more dire tone when criminal charges were

⁴ Lyla Bavadam, "In defense of freedom in art: Against the Hindutva attack on M.F. Hussain [sic]," *Frontline* (November 15, 1996): 4-9.

⁵ It is with some hesitation that I refer to Husain's *Saraswati* in the present tense its location is not documented and as far as I have been able to ascertain, it has been reproduced in only two of the many catalogues of the artist's work. It first appeared in Daniel Herwitz, *Husain* (Bombay: Tata Steel, 1988) and then in Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni, *Husain: Riding the Lightning* (London: Sangam Books, 1996), this volume catalogue was originally published in Marathi by the same author as *Anavani: Makabula Phida Husena* (Pune: Pratima Prakasana, 1996). The image also appeared in Ila Pal's biography of Husain, *Beyond the Canvas: An Unfinished Portrait of M.F. Husain* (New Delhi: Indus, 1994).

⁶ Bavadam, 9.

⁷ Ibid.

laid against Husain under section 153A and 295A of the Indian Penal Code. The former pertains to the promotion of enmity between religious groups, while the latter relates to the deliberate and malicious intent to offend religious belief.⁸

In April 1998, the Bajrang Dal once again targeted Husain's work. On this occasion, it was in response to *Sita Rescued* (1984), a lithograph on exhibit at New Delhi's Academy of Art and Literature (figure 2).⁹ Members of the Hindu right protested outside the gallery during the course of the exhibition; however, for reasons unknown the Bajrang Dal waited until five weeks after the show closed before breaking into Husain's home in Mumbai. Once inside the artist's home, they ransacked personal belongings and artwork with equal fervor. Although the police completely overlooked the actions of the Bajrang Dal, criminal charges were laid against Husain in New Delhi on the grounds that *Sita Rescued* was obscene. Bal Thackeray, the leader of the coalition government in the state of Maharashtra, openly declared, "If Husain can enter Hindustan, why can't we enter his house?"¹⁰ Thackeray's comment affirmed the centrality of Husain's religious identity as a Muslim to the vandalism and suggested that the transgression of the artist's personal space was endorsed at a political level.

Sita Rescued is part of the Husain's famous *Ramayan* series that chronicles various scenes from the epic in vivid colour and imaginative flourishes. This particular image illustrates the moment in the narrative where Sita is liberated from the palace of her libidinous kidnapper, Ravan. The material point of this incident centres on Sita's chastity that was called into question by her extended confinement within the precincts of Ravan's abode. In order to remove the suspicion tainting her once unassailable character, Sita

⁸ "Police register case against Husain," *Times of India*, Mumbai Edition (October 9, 1996): 2.

⁹ This image is available for purchase at Ahmedabad's Archer Gallery on-line store; however, the title of the image has been changed to *Hanuman-11*. See <http://www.archer.com>.

¹⁰ Praveen Swami, "Communalism: Predatory pursuit of power," *Frontline* 15 (May 23-June 5, 1998).

must endure a trial by fire upon returning to Ayodhya. In the epic, the flames dance around the divine Sita, refusing to mark her body with the welts of adultery. Husain's image, however, transgresses the notion of Sita's incontrovertible purity. The goddess is depicted astride the great Hanuman's phallic-like tail. Moreover, like her divine sister Saraswati, Sita is shown unclothed. To be sure, Sita's overtly sexualized comportment visually challenges the popular notion of her as a pious and chaste woman.

In the two years separating the assaults on Husain's work, a significant change in India's political climate took place. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had formed a coalition government for the first time, allowing advocates of Hindutva a modicum of political legitimacy. This growing constituency of the Hindu right in Northern India accounts for the audacity of the Bajrang Dal's attacks, as well as Thackeray's unconcealed chauvinism. Significantly, the shift in politics was mirrored in the public response to the attacks on Husain's work. In 1996, the commotion over Husain's *Saraswati* was met with equal zeal from members of the artistic community across India. Artists, writers, and other members of the creative arts unanimously challenged the government to safeguard the rights and freedom of artistic expression, and a national day of demonstrations was organized in protest of the Bajrang Dal's vandalism in Ahmedabad. On this day, major galleries across India closed their doors and members of the artistic community took to the streets calling for the arrest of the miscreants who destroyed Husain's work. By 1998, the rallying cry of artists had diminished to a veritable whisper. Members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) physically assaulted the few who publicly denounced the violation of Husain's home. This sent shock waves of disbelief through the artistic community at

large, and roused concern over issues of personal safety.¹¹ The tepid and cautious response to the second attack on Husain betrays a climate whose cultural and political boundaries are heavily patrolled.



I travelled to India in the summer of 1999, my mind, and my luggage lined with the knowledge that two issues lay at the nexus of the Husain controversy.¹² The first concerned itself with Husain's artistic license to depict Hindu goddesses in the nude, while the second was inextricably bound to Husain's religious identity as a Muslim. When I arrived in Delhi, I was amazed not only by the dusty, oppressive heat of the city, but also by the public visibility of Husain's work. I found both air-conditioned refuge and a wealth of Husain's work for sale in the commercial art galleries that dot the colonnaded shopping arcades of Connaught Circle. Husain's popularity was demonstrated by the variety of his work available for sale at uptown galleries, as well as by the presence of his work within the public domain.

I discovered Husain's work in the most unlikely places. His prints lined the musty halls of the Blue Triangle Family YWCA and The Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute proudly displayed their 'Husain' on the second floor of their dimly lit office, its importance indicated by the light that illuminated its surface. The lobby of the Kanishka hotel was graced by a mural on its ceiling painted by Husain, and the artist's giant portrait

¹¹ The VHP is a Hindu cultural organization falling under the rubric of the Sangh Parivar. Jatin Das, Ajeet Caur and her daughter, Arpana, were reportedly assaulted by VHP activists while participating in a SAHMAT (Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust) demonstration in Delhi. For more, see Santwana Bhattacharya, "Painting a sorry picture: Artists Jumpy after Bajrang Dal Attack," *The India Express* (May 4, 1998). np.

¹² A Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute Research Fellowship, 1999, funded my fieldwork in India.

of Mrs. Gandhi towered over the departure lounge of the Indira Gandhi International Airport. Perhaps the most noteworthy example of the public popularity of Husain was to be found at the Indira Gandhi Memorial Museum. Within the hallowed halls of the former Prime Minister's home, I saw not only the blood stained sari she wore on the day of her assassination, but also, at the gift shop, I could purchase a cheap reproduction of a Husain painting entitled *Sixteen Petals on her Body*, which marked where the fatal bullets were lodged (figure 3).

Everything that I witnessed in Delhi suggested that this amazingly prolific artist was highly esteemed, and enjoyed unprecedented popular prestige. Clearly, Husain was an artistic force to be reckoned with. I left Delhi to begin work in the archives at the Maharaja Sayajirao University, Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda. The collection of Husain's work within the university's archives confirmed his inexhaustible oeuvre. The number of public commissions and portraits of politicians lent some credence to what I had originally dismissed out of hand as 'Husain hagiography', which constantly referred to his miraculous rise from insolvent beginnings in Indore to his posh, cosmopolitan life in Mumbai.

My trip to Baroda revealed two things that have deeply influenced the shaping of this thesis. The first was an observation that the majority of Husain's work was not dated. Dates that were included on his work usually did not mark the time of completion; rather, they were in commemoration of the events depicted. For example, *Sixteen Pedals on her Body* is dated "31 October, 1984," the day of Indira Gandhi's assassination (see figure 3). Initially, I found the absence of dates to be problematic; however, it struck me that this artistic tendency created the unique possibility for Husain's work to be reinvented or reinserted within any temporal framework. The second influential factor came in the form of a revelation as I sat having tea one afternoon with a faculty member of the Fine Arts

department. Our discussion had turned to my specific research topic and my disclosure that I was interested in Husain was met with a look of disapproval and a disdainful query, "Why are you concerned with *Him*?" It seemed that it was not only the Hindu right that had issues with Husain.



This thesis will offer up an inventory of traces, which interlace through the Bajrang Dal's attacks on Husain's work. My project has both a general and a particular concern. The former centres upon the visual expression of Indian's modernity and how images, which circulate within various publics, serve in the production of a national meta-narrative. The work of M.F. Husain sits at a nodal point in the creation of a modern visual idiom in India. Husain has been called the "artist's knight in the nation's battle for a liberal secular democracy" and in keeping with this, I would like to address how Husain's work functions within the popular imagination.¹³ As this is my major area of concern, I would like state at the outset that through the course of my argument I will draw upon images which have resonance outside the sanctioned precincts of "high art." By including examples from India's vast repository of visual culture, I hope to illustrate that Husain's images have also been in a position of dialogue both within and without various publics in India.

I began my introduction with a quote from Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. I was intrigued by his proposal that history leaves in each individual an infinity of traces; just as we pass through history, it too passes through us leaving a residue of its passage

¹³ Geeta Kapur, A Brief Review of Current Cultural Nationalism," in *Art and Life in India: The Last Four Decades*, ed. Josef James (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1989): 127.

upon our bodies. As such, Gramsci's notion allows history to function like a wax tablet, rather than a Rosetta stone. This metaphor can be employed to speak of the popular imagination in India; it functions like the wax tablet and bears the impressions of images which have marked key moments in the modern history of the country.

The use of images in the production of the Indian nation has historical precedents which date back to early twentieth century Bengal. I will argue that the employment of images in promotion of Hindutva ideology colonized this preexistent space in the popular imagination. The Hindutva movement has recuperated the trace of these former images, the memory of their importance, and the significance of their cultural and political resonance. The Husain controversy must be situated within the traffic of images that form a visual vernacular cutting across the linguistic, regional and religious differences in India. The trace of history in this case is both ephemeral and eternal enabling one to consider a historical problem like an archeologist. In this endeavour, I have cast myself as the archeologist; I have isolated a specific area of concern and I approach the excavation of history along a vertical trajectory.

ONE: Addressing the Body and the Politics of Looking

Why does he paint a Hindu goddess in such a disrespectful manner?¹⁴

In one of the first academic critiques of the attack upon Husain's work in Ahmedabad, historian Monica Juneja addresses the patriarchal underpinnings of the Bajrang Dal's allegations.¹⁵ In her analysis, Juneja focuses her sights upon the political importance of defusing *Saraswati*'s ability to offer erotic or visual pleasure. This strategy enables her not only to nullify the obscenity charges levied at Husain, but also to critique the constructions of gender and religious identity in India. Juneja argues that the ability to arouse pleasure, or more specifically stimulate visual pleasure, is reliant upon the seductive lure of colour and form. The net effect of such an artistic gesture would be to cast the female form as a tangible object of male desire. She maintains that Husain does not idealize *Saraswati*'s body in his refusal to submit her nudity to a volumetric painted surface. His linear and graphic rendering of the goddess does not allow for visual delectation; therefore, one cannot charge the image with transgressing the boundaries of social or religious propriety.

Juneja's attempt to remove the potentials of pleasure from Husain's image becomes an interesting political strategy when juxtaposed with how the Muslim male has been configured in the popular imagination. The political efficacy of casting Husain's

¹⁴ Nagpal's questions are quoted in Bavadam, 9.

¹⁵ Monica Juneja, "Reclaiming the Public Sphere: Husain's Portraits of *Saraswati* and *Draupadi*," *Economic and Political Weekly* (January 25, 1997): 155-157. Juneja seems to be suggesting that Husain radically destroyed the possibility of visual pleasure. This idea was first proposed in Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989): 14-26.

real or imagined desire for Saraswati as a veiled act of male dominance rests upon the recuperation of popular constructions of the Muslim male as a sexual aggressor. She notes,

[I]n a national context, notions of virility and masculinity tend to be associated with the image of a healthy nation, notions premised at the same time on the virtue of the nation's women which needs to be safeguarded by its male citizens. The bogey of the Muslim male as a 'phallic other,' a threat to the chastity of our women can be read as a continuation of the upper caste Hindu preoccupation with the policing of female sexuality, perceived as the central factor that would guarantee the maintenance of caste purity.¹⁶

Husain's image of *Saraswati* could have easily functioned to visually confirm the popular myth of the Muslim male's scandalous desire for Hindu women. Moreover, to some his transgression facilitated the need for a testosterone driven Hindu male to rescue an imperiled feminized nation from the libidinous, read territorial, advances of Islam. Metaphorically, Husain's visual possession of Saraswati can be read on two levels; his disrobing of the goddess can be equated to the sexual violation of the motherland, or it could be read as a rapacious assertion of Muslim territorial aggression. Juneja's analysis offers inroads into the configuration of the nation within the popular imagination and how mythic constructions of the masculine and the feminine can be enlisted to address larger concerns about the nation.

Gendered constructions of the nation carry cultural currency and the political

¹⁶ Juneja, 155-7. Contemporaneous to the Husain/Saraswati affair, certain cells of the Sangh Parivar were up in arms over the Miss World Pageant scheduled to take place that year in Bangalore. Interestingly, both the image of *Saraswati* and the Miss World Pageant faced the same complaints over the display of female bodies. The Hindu right repeatedly questioned the privilege to look upon those bodies either through the forum of the pageant or through the painted surface. It is interesting to note that a sponsor of the event, Godrej had their showroom vandalized by the Bajrang Dal in a similar fashion to the Herwitz Gallery. For more see Parvarthu Menon, "The Show Goes On: State-sponsored Security for Miss World Pageant," *Frontline* (November 29, 1996): 105-107. Also, Christopher Thomas, "Blows to Hindus as Court Permits Beauty Pageant," *The Times* (November 20, 1996).

viability of archetypal gender constructions is evidenced in an image of *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) that I found circulating within the “virtual” public sphere (figure 4).¹⁷ The image graces the home page of A. Ghosh, a publisher of Hindutva literature based in the United States. Opposite the publisher’s name is a cartouche, its text gravely declaring, “Ignorance is weakness. Self-Inflicted ignorance is suicide.” Beneath is the text is an image of *Bharat Mata*, as if to function as the visual evidence of Ghosh’s pronouncement. The revered goddess is revealed to us restrained by heavy chains and wearing a white sari, the garment traditionally reserved for Hindu widows. *Bharat Mata*’s hair is unbound and disheveled; the outline of her body roughly conforms to the geographic borders of the South Asian sub-continent. The shackles render her body powerless to fend off the advances of the four men surrounding her. Those who assail the goddess are representative of past and present ideological or geographical trespassers. The Marxist-Leninist armed with a hammer and a sickle prohibits her movement forward; a pontiff hovers behind *Bharat Mata* wielding a cross as if it were a formidable weapon; the mustachioed, generic Indian man brandishes a club; and a properly clad Muslim drives his sword into the heart of the goddess.

The men in the image can also be read as propagandistic articulations of various perceived political problems faced by India. A typographic reading of the figures fuels the pictorial allusion to the religious, political, and ideological pollution of the South Asian subcontinent. Mother India is besieged on all sides, already dressed in the garments

¹⁷ The website itself offers no information regarding the origin of the image. The page itself is linked to *The Sword of Truth* an e-journal devoted to the Hindutva movement in India. See, <http://members.aol.com/aghoshpub/index.html>.

of widowhood with her hair unbound, her impurity is visually affirmed.¹⁸ She must break out of the chains that bind her to these aggressive ideologies if she is to ever reclaim her esteemed place. The image indicates the currency of gendered constructions of the nation within the popular imagination both in India and amongst the Diaspora abroad. It also suggests that India is molested from all sides and it is not only the Muslim male who looms large and menacing at her borders. The goddess awaits the arrival of Hindutva's valorous foot soldiers to liberate her from these corporeal and ideological restraints.

Chetan Bhatt notes that the vocabulary of authoritarian religious movements tends to employ the human body as a metaphor for the nation. "Partition, for example, is frequently illustrated in the Hindu revivalist literature as the beheading of India; Muslim minorities are described as the 'poison' in the blood of India. . ."¹⁹ Bhatt also observes that the metonymic function of *Bharat Mata* is key to the Hindutva movement, "India is represented as a frequently chained, bound or gagged woman and the Muslim presence within it thus signifies 'a pollution', 'a rape'."²⁰ Ghosh's *Bharat Mata*, in keeping with Hindutva's targeting of Christians and other minorities in India, presents a more comprehensive and totalizing image of the threats to the South Asian subcontinent. An image such as Ghosh's *Bharat Mata* marks a point of visual articulation, the ideology of Hindutva is made manifest through this representation. This image produces visual truth in the popular imagination; it relies on the readability of the signs and the understanding of their configurations. Political ideologies can also assert themselves

¹⁸ The unbound hair of a Hindu woman can symbolize bodily impurity. Goddesses, such as Kali, are shown with their hair unbound and disheveled as a means to convey wildness and violence and a state of dissolution. C.J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992): 188.

¹⁹ Chetan Bhatt, *Liberation and Purity: Race, New Religious Movements and the Ethics of Postmodernity* (London: UCL Press, 1997): 70.

²⁰ Ibid., 227.

through the destruction of visual forms, as in the case of Husain. However, in both articulations, the female body sits at the nexus and functions as a cartographic sign of the ideological and political breaches of India's territory. The purity of the goddess's body represents the geopolitical integrity of the land. Husain's depiction of Saraswati can be read as an act of sexual impropriety; the actions of the Bajrang Dal as an act of retribution. Perhaps most significantly, by locating *Saraswati* as the catalyst for the destruction of Husain's work in Ahmedabad, the Hindu right cleverly produced visual evidence for an ideological and historical trespass

In contrast to Juneja's theoretical analysis, historian Tapati Guha-Thakurta weaves through elements of the Husain affair to address questions of the nude within the discourse of Indian art history.²¹ She does so to illustrate the problematic inclusion of the female nude within the canons of this relatively new discipline. Once Guha-Thakurta has cast the feminine as a vexed site within the annals of art history, she further complicates her analysis by illustrating that visual and sacred articulations of the divine cannot share the same terrain as those included in the realm of "high art." Once the divine image is placed within the space of the museum, for example, it ceases to be an object of veneration; the distinction between the sacred and the secular must be preserved. As these two categories are divergent, in the course of her argument she contradicts the Hindu right's claim that Husain's "high art" representation of *Saraswati* could or did offend religious sentiment. She is also quick to point out that those who rallied behind Husain and sought to counter the charges of obscenity by cloaking *Saraswati* in the mantle of the tradition enabled "the Hindu right to dictate the terms of the debate."²²

²¹ Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "Clothing the Goddess: The Modern Contest over Representations of Devi," in *Devi : The Great Goddess Female Divinity in South Asian Art*, eds., Vidya Dehejia and Thomas B. Coburn (London: Prestel, 1999):157-179.

²² Ibid., 160.

The question of modern art practice is also addressed by Guha-Thakurta. She notes that the space of modern art in India has been created through the negotiations “between the high and the low” and “between the aesthetic and the vulgar.”²³ The high and the aesthetic define the realm of high art; whereas, the low and the vulgar are the mainstay of the popular images which can be purchased for a few rupees anywhere in India. In making her point, Guha-Thakurta refers to Ravi Varma (1848-1906) who was upheld as the standard bearer of Indian art in the mid nineteenth century. Varma’s oil painting eventually fell from grace in the realm of high art owing to its derivative European style. However, the introduction of the oleographic printing press ensured that Varma’s images would enjoy unprecedented circulation within the popular realm. Guha-Thakurta contends that such a shift from high to popular could never occur within the bastions of contemporary modern art in India as the history of its production is predicated on the preservation of the two forms of visual representation.

However, I disagree with Guha-Thakurta’s location of Husain’s work solely within the realm of high modern art. In fact, everything that I witnessed in India suggested that Husain’s work circulated comfortably within various publics. His work appeared in office buildings, in newspapers and his dalliances in the popular realm are further evidenced by his participation in religious festivals such as Ram Lila and Dussehra in which he placed his images on bullock carts for all to see.²⁴ Moreover, Husain’s very public pictorial love affair with Bollywood actress Madhuri Dixit is further evidence that this artist constantly navigates across the divide of high and low.²⁵ Husain has

²³ Guha-Thakurta, “Clothing the Goddess,” 165.

²⁴ Praveen Swami notes that *Sita Rescued* is similar to the images Husain created for the Ram Lilas sponsored by the socialist Ram Manohar Lohia during the 1970s. Geeta Kapur also alludes to Husain’s participation in rural festivals in her 1989 article, “Current Cultural Nationalism,”

²⁵ See the catalogue, *Maqbool Fida Husain’s Rare Paintings Signed Fida* (Delhi, Art Today, 1995). Husain has also recently completed a major film called *Gajagamini*, starring Madhuri Dixit.

deliberately sought to position himself across the divide of class, caste, and religion as it suggests a certain allegiance to democratic principles.

I believe that the political efficacy of the Bajrang Dal's attacks on Husain's work were reliant upon his preeminence in the popular imagination. Both Guha-Thakurta and Juneja do not really address how the work of Husain and the Bajrang Dal's subsequent attacks resonate within the public sphere; the issues surrounding the targeting of Husain's work are not purely academic. I will return to this point at a later juncture; however, I flag it here as a means of introducing an article by sociologist Patricia Uberoi's which I believe creates a median point between the engagements previously examined.

In contrast to the work of Guha-Thakurta and Juneja, Uberoi addresses the realm of popular visual culture by attending to the discursive field that has allowed the conflation of goddess, woman, tradition, and nation.²⁶ The semiotic slippage between these signifiers permits indignation over the representation of one to slide into the other. These fluid constructions leave Husain's images of goddesses in an ideologically vulnerable position; Saraswati or Sita may be positioned to function as empty signs ready to be filled with a litany of charges. Interestingly, Uberoi points out that the calendar prints, which seduce the Indian population with representations of voluptuous women/goddesses, are not subject to the same criticism. It is ironic that these images should circulate unimpeded as they are often more suggestive than *Saraswati*.

Uberoi's article raises some interesting questions about how the feminine has served in the visual production of the nation during the 1960s. A calendar print from this era illustrates the ideology of modern development and industrial advancement within an image of Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity (figure 5). The divine

²⁶ Patricia Uberoi, "From Goddess to Pinup: Feminine Icons In Indian Calendar Art," *Art AsiaPacific* 14 (1997): 62-7.

figure is shown seated in a field of wheat with a delicate pink lotus forming a dais for her supreme body. Cranes offset her bright, lush garments; smoke stacks and other markers of heavy industry rise out of a horizon rendered in a misty atmospheric perspective. This that the image is one example of how the national project of modernizing India, although claiming to be rooted in secularism, represents itself visually in the sacred.

I began this section by recalling Nagpal's question, "Why does he paint a Hindu goddess in such a disrespectful manner?" so that I might use it to frame the arguments put forth in response to the attacks on Husain's work. The articles written by Monica Juneja, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, and Patricia Uberoi have engaged with the question of the female form as the central issue underscoring the Husain incident and have generally sought to counter the charge of obscenity by complicating the ideological and representational configurations of the feminine in South Asia.²⁷

Juneja and Uberoi's articles point to a landscape occupied metaphorically and/or visually by the feminine. These two writers have facilitated the delineation of this national space and suggested the possibility for its political mobilization within the popular imagination. My reasons for positioning Juneja's argument against Ghosh's image of *Bharat Mata* were two-fold. First, I wanted to bring her argument out of the realm of the theoretical, and by extension, illustrate that the Muslim male is not the sole aggressor against the Indian nation. Secondly, in anticipation of the remainder of my narrative, I wanted to demonstrate how political representation can be claimed through visual representation, and that this strategy may involve both creation and destruction. And while I will address this strategy in more detail in my next section I have introduced it here to suggest that the palimpsest of the nation figured prominently in the Bajrang

²⁷ Uberoi, 66.

Dal's attack on Husain.

Uberoi's article, on the other hand, addressed how images carry a certain ideological thrust; her analysis pointed to how ideas percolate within the popular imagination and take on visual form. Most importantly, her article obliquely pointed to a visual and perhaps politically paradoxical relationship between the secular policies of India and how they were played out through popular images. Here I refer to the image of Lakshmi (see figure 5) in which the national enterprise of industrial development was framed alongside the sacred to drive the production of a visual and political meta-narrative. Although India claimed a mask of secularism, it was represented at a popular level in the visual vocabulary of the sacred. Guha-Thakurta's construction of modern art practice in India enabled me to see how Husain has positioned himself as a liminal figure, and how his constant negotiation with the high and the low that reveals a certain ideological stance.

The articles examined here have raised important issues and without these interventions, I would have never been able to chart a different course for my analysis. These engagements evidence the problematic position of the feminine as an ideological vehicle, or as an art historical construct. However, I would like to broaden the terrain covered by these engagements and shift the discussion about the Husain controversy incidents away from the female form. Instead, I would like to depart from Nagpal's other question, "Why doesn't he paint his mother and his sister in this modern art style?" I would like to examine how the nation has been configured in the popular imagination in order to complicate the previous discussions about the Husain incidents and to bring the event out of the academy. In the remaining pages of my text, I will address how the Bajrang Dal's attacks may have functioned both within the popular imagination and participated within a larger discourse concerning India modernity.

Re-dressing the Nation

A young, healthy woman is kneeling on the stocks of freshly cut corn. Her robust figure is flanked on either side by a variety of vegetables that confirm the fertility of the land (figure 6). An upraised arm holds the fruits of her labour, while the other brandishes the implement of her toil. Her foregrounded figure is pressed against the picture plane by the devices of modernity similar to the *Lakshmi* image discussed earlier. The drapery of her red sari draws our eyes through the image: from the red well pump set in the middle ground to the red tractor at work in the field stretching across the distant background. The image demonstrates India's development through the unification of old and new technologies. The overhead wires suggest a communications and power infrastructure; the pump and the fertilizer hint at water resource management and the development of agricultural technology.

When India gained independence in 1947, its huge population was riddled with poverty. Nehru's vision of India was one that stressed unity in diversity and sought a cultural cohesion that was based upon a common political drive toward secular modernity and economic development.²⁸ Nehru's economic policies sought to introduce rapid industrialization and increase public ownership in industry and agriculture. He also limited the growth of the private sector and introduced policies of land ownership that would facilitate the growth of agricultural collectives.²⁹ Although colonialism had left

²⁸ Ashutosh Varshney, "Contested Meanings: India's National Identity, Hindu Nationalism, and the Politics of Anxiety," *Daedalus* 122 (Summer 1993): 228-239.

²⁹ Baldev Raj Nayar, "The Economic Policy of Jawaharlal Nehru," in *Nehru and the Twentieth Century*, ed., Milton Israel (Toronto: University of Toronto Centre for South Asian Studies, 1991): 142-72. Interestingly, Nayar notes on page 144, Nehru's economic strategy was fundamentally opposed to India's political claim to be a democracy and his implementation of Five Year Plans was more in keeping with that of a bureaucratic totalitarian régime.

India to face agrarian backwardness and lack of resources, the image introduced above seems to suggest that by the 1960s the problem was well in hand.³⁰ At least that was the way it was represented.

The struggle to overcome economic obstacles in the process of nation building has its historical precedent in early twentieth century Bengal. In 1905, Lord Curzon partitioned Bengal spawning the rise of the *Swadeshi* (own-country) movement that advocated the boycott of cloth and other British made commodities. The *Swadeshi* movement transformed hand woven cloth into a potent symbol of political independence.³¹ In reference to this pivotal moment in India's history Satish Deshpande argues the development of India as a modern nation has always been securely moored to economics in the popular imagination.³² Deshpande observes,

In the Indian context, three main variants of the 'imagined economy' have contributed to the making of the nation. During the colonial period the major impetus behind the nationalist struggle - giving it an all-India character - is the notion of an enslaved economy. The goals of attaining a fully sovereign state and of liberating the economy are seamlessly interwoven with the yearning for nationhood. With the advent of socialist planning, the newly liberated economy comes to be enshrined as the very essence of the emergent nation.³³

The notion of an enslaved economy found a constituent expression in the creative and intellectual milieu in Bengal as well. Twenty years prior to emergence of the *Swadeshi* movement an awareness of the cultural, economic, and intellectual perils of

³⁰ On page 360 Stanley Wolpert notes, "Poverty, rural conservatism, illiteracy, and superstition, as well as the combination of increasing population pressure (ten million a year by 1959), limited water resources, and lack of chemical fertilizers, electricity and power all conspired to make Indian rural uplift on the world's most difficult problems." *A New History of India*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³¹ C.A. Bayly, "The Origins of Swadeshi (home industry): cloth and Indian society, 1700-1930," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in a Cultural Perspective*, ed., Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986):311.

³² Satish Deshpande, "Imagined Economies: Styles of Nation-Building in Twentieth Century India," *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 25-26 (December 1993).

³³ *Ibid.*, 13.

colonialism had begun to surface in Calcutta, the seat of British power in India.³⁴ The English educated intelligentsia, led by key figures such as Rabindranath Tagore and Bankim Chandra Chatterji, challenged the colonial system that openly disparaged all things Indian.³⁵ These men saw the Bengali as enslaved not only culturally but also intellectually because of English education. At the outset, writers such as Bankim fueled the reclamation of indigenous creative efforts as a means to cast off the shackles of colonialism restraining the mind and the imagination of the Bengali population. Bankim saw the English educated Bengali as being in the unique position to share his knowledge with those less fortunate through the indigenous press.³⁶ Bankim actively sought to challenge the colonial perception that Indian culture possessed no sense of history.³⁷ Through his writing, he strove to develop a synthesis of the indigenous and the European as a means to locate India within the temporal frame of Enlightenment discourse.³⁸

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the synthesis of European and Indian culture advocated by Bankim was cast off in favour of an assertive move toward the reclamation of the autochthonic. This emergent autonomous identity predicated itself upon the cultivation of a spiritual self in opposition to a material world dominated by

³⁴ Lou Ratté, *The Uncolonised Heart* (Calcutta: Orient Longman, 1995).

³⁵ Tagore, in particular, advocated education predicated on indigenous cultural knowledge as opposed to imported methods of pedagogy. In 1901, Tagore opened the doors of his school Santiniketan through which he developed an approach to pedagogy that would not isolate or alienate the student from nature. His curriculum stressed the importance of creative and artistic expression. For more, see R. Siva Kumar, *Santiniketan: The Making of A Contextual Modernism* (New Delhi: National Gallery of Modern Art, 1997).

³⁶ The shift in the Bengali political consciousness may have been predicated on the expression of solidarity through the creation of a community of readers, such as that proposed by Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

³⁷ Indira Chowdhury has argued that one of the leading proponents of this notion was James Mill who suggested in his *History of British India* (1858) that Indians possessed no sense of historical development. This ability was impaired by what Mill saw as a tendency to conceive of history as part of a mythological Puranic past as opposed to a temporal progression in keeping with Enlightenment principles. *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and politics in Colonial Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998): 42.

³⁸ Chowdhury, 40.

colonial power. In the expression of resistance to colonial hegemony, the metaphysical realm was positioned against the materialism of colonial rule to create a sovereign territory that eluded the reach of British power.³⁹ This project also had resonance within the plastic arts and the aesthetic expression of the nationalist ideology had to carefully negotiate between the temporal and the ethereal. It was vital to illustrate that India was not merely mimicking the British, but had developed of her own volition and by the turn of the century, art and aesthetics in Bengal carried a significant ideological and nationalistic thrust.

Art, like the economy, had been subjected to the tyranny of British taste. As part of the policy of assimilation, beginning in 1850 various art schools in India taught European style oil painting. Art education was couched in the same paternalistic rhetoric that buttressed the establishment of other educational institutions in Bengal during the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ At this time the self-taught artist, Ravi Varma was held up as an exemplary model of an indigenous naturalization of the dominant European model. Varma's representations of the Hindu pantheon visually quoted the heroic style of the European history paintings and bestowed a measure of tangible realism upon the divine. For example, Varma's *Saraswati* (circa 1890) casually sits upon the stump of a felled tree playing her veena (figure 7). Her body is draped in a fine, gold hemmed sari, the brilliance of the cloth is reflected in her lavish jewelry. The sumptuous folds of Saraswati's garment glimmer in the subtle light. The brilliant detail with which Varma rendered the goddess contrasts sharply with the earthen hue of the forest. The diffused

³⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 6.

⁴⁰ For an in-depth analysis of this moment in India's history, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

atmospheric perspective and the marshland that disappears in the distance suggests that Saraswati is alone in this pristine natural environment. The sophisticated comportment of the goddess contrasts with her rather rugged surroundings. Her environment acts to assure her mythological importance and visually confirm the refinement and elevation available through culture and learning.

The popularity of Varma's mythic oil paintings began to wane in response to a call for a true national art addressing the ethereal, spiritual element figuring so prominently in nationalist discourse. Abanindranath Tagore emerged as the quintessential Indian artist. His paintings embodied the metaphysical ideal of India's emergent nationalism and the space of resistance afforded by the deployment of the metaphysical.⁴¹ The rigorous training of academic painter with its focus on the mimetic was cast off in favor of inspiration; expression was preferred over technique and the conveyance of emotion was more important than the recreation of a realistic space.⁴²

Tagore's image of *Bharat Mata* (circa 1904-5) functioned as a visual distillation of the ideology of resistance to colonial hegemony and became the image of India and the true sign of Indianness (figure 8).⁴³ Tagore's goddess occupied a sufficiently mystical place suggesting the spiritual realm that eluded the grasp of colonial power. Her placement within a field of colour rather than a landscape may be seen in direct contradiction to juxtaposition of culture and nature in the Ravi Varma image examined

⁴¹ Social organizations such as the Brahmo Samaj may have played a seminal role in the articulation of a national identity. The Brahmo Samaj also played a major role in bringing English educated Indians back in touch with their national culture as it strove to counter the colonial perception that Hindu cultural and religious practice was backward. For more see Jogananda Das, "The Brahmo Samaj," *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, ed., Atulchandra Gupta (Jadavpur: National Council of Education, 1958): 492.

⁴² Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "Recovering the Nation's Art," *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*, ed., Partha Chatterjee (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1995): 79.

⁴³ Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "The ideology of the 'aesthetic': The purging of visual tastes and the campaign for a new Indian art in late nineteenth/early twentieth century Bengal," *Studies in History* 8 (July - December 1992): 267.

earlier. Varma's images blurred the boundary between the divine and mundane world, whereas, Tagore's image of *Bharat Mata* preserved the pictorial and ideological purity of the sacred realm. *Bharat Mata* was properly clad in khadi (homespun cloth) and she carried with her the accouterments of economic and intellectual independence.

The moment, which saw *Bharat Mata* give visual form to the ideology of resistance, set a historical precedent for the unification of art and nationalism and its circulation within the public sphere. In the wake of Curzon's partition of Bengal, Tagore's image of the goddess was printed onto silk banners and carried by participants in *Swadeshi* fund raising processions.⁴⁴ Art became a workable tool for displaying India's aesthetic heritage, its modern sophistication, and its political legitimacy. Perhaps, most significantly, Tagore's *Bharat Mata* signaled how images could be called upon to enact the ideological and geopolitical space of the nation.⁴⁵

By introducing the *Swadeshi* movement as that which married the nation to economics Deshpande complicates Benedict Anderson's model of an imagined community predicated upon print culture. Deshpande points out that India's ethno-linguistic diversity is prohibitive to a community forged upon shared reading practice. He argues that it is, "not only print commodities but other commodities too which provide the means to imagine the nation."⁴⁶ I have found this small segment of Deshpande's important article particularly interesting as one can see how the tripartite construction of nation, art, and economy was securely anchored in the popular imagination through Tagore's representation of *Bharat Mata*. Moreover, the use of Tagore's image in the

⁴⁴ Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art*. 259.

⁴⁵ In 1907, Ramananda Chatterjee, editor of *The Modern Review* believed that art in modern India had a threefold function: to resuscitate the magnificent Indian past, to evoke emotions and a sense of morality and finally to politically aid in building the nation. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "Orientalism, Nationalism and the Reconstruction of the 'Indian Art' in Calcutta," in *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, eds., Catherine B. Asher and Thomas R. Metcalf (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994): 59.

public processions of the *Swadeshi* movement illustrates how images can create and unite an imagined community.

Tagore's image set a pictorial and political precedent in which the mapping of a resistant ideology onto the female form could be called upon to enact an imagined national space. *Bharat Mata* also created a space in the popular imagination in which an imagined community could coalesce and unite in an act of political, economic and social resistance. The metonymic power of images was still being deployed at a national level in India during the 1960s as the aforementioned images of Saraswati and the peasant woman suggest. The popular images suggest that the economic imperative, which underscored Tagore's image, still carried cultural and political currency (see figures 5 and 6).

This section was bookended by two images of Bharat Mata created across the span of almost one hundred years. Although the historic circumstance that gave rise to these images differ, I have endeavoured to illustrate how this construct of resistance functions residually in the popular imagination. I have used these images to mark the space occupied by the visual vernacular in the popular imagination and address how the political employment (and deployment) of images cuts across linguistic, social and religious boundaries to form a national meta-language.

This section has sought to respond to those arguments delineated in the previous section that have read the Husain incident as centering solely around issues of the female form. By expanding the field of the feminine to include the political representations of nationalism, I have sought to address how images in India function in a polyvalent fashion. In keeping with this, I contend that we must see the Bajrang Dal's attacks on Husain's work within a larger discourse of nationalism and modernity.

⁴⁶ Deshpande, 10.

TWO: Forging a New Canon

When India gained its Independence in 1947, England's Royal Academy of Arts held an exhibition in London's Burlington House to publicly mark the occasion. The exhibition included medieval sculpture as well as modern examples of India's artistic endeavors.⁴⁷ The exhibition was a testament to India's newfound independent status and announced India's cultural legitimacy and political legitimacy by highlighting its ability to produce artistic masterpieces. The Burlington House show proclaimed that India had transcended its place as a mere colonial curiosity to be flogged for her commodities at world's fairs. It attested to the fact that India was now a country in her own right and no longer the curious stuff of the South Kensington museum.⁴⁸

The Burlington House exhibition was curated according to a chronological arrangement and its rigid adherence to periods affirmed India's inclusion within an Enlightenment paradigm. The observance of periodization within the arrangement of the exhibition effectively created a temporal and art historical relationship between the East and the West. Tapati Guha-Thakurta has argued that this exhibition solidified the discourse of art and nation in India. She observes that when the show travelled to New Delhi it

... came to stand as an auxiliary of a well established art-historical vision, translating, concretizing and condensing its narrative in a world of chosen objects. The selection and sequencing of these objects reproduced much of the same structure of evolution and achievement and the same

⁴⁷ Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "Marking Independence: The Ritual of a National Art Exhibition," *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 30-31 (1997): 92.

⁴⁸ Here I refer to the role that the South Kensington Museum played in the expression of Victorian imperialism. See Tim Barringer, "The South Kensington Museum and The Colonial Project," *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, eds., Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (New York: Routledge, 1998): 11-28.

classification of great epochs and schools that the art histories provided. What was added was an orchestrated visual sense of the 'masterpiece': a notion of a choice material embodiment of an aesthetic and a style around which this history could be reduced and frozen.⁴⁹

Guha-Thakurta points out that the show established an art historical canon and in doing so it located India's masterpieces in a past which could never be paralleled. Moreover, the exhibition must also be seen to function politically, as the metaphoric transfer of power from colonializer to colony. That the show would be mounted in Delhi and form the corpus of the newly created National Museum's collection is noteworthy as once again art was located within the discourse of nation building.⁵⁰

The 1947 Government house exhibit reaffirmed the centrality of art in India's newfound status as a nation. However, the exhibit may have attested to India's former artistic achievements, but what would represent her modern future? In 1947, a group of young artists attempted to grapple with this question by banding together to form the Progressive Artists Group (PAG).⁵¹ The PAG's members, F.N. Souza, M.F. Husain, S.H. Raza, K.H. Ara, S.K. Bakre and H.A. Gade, sought out a visual vocabulary that would express India's freedom from the past and its hope for the future. The members of the PAG lived and worked in Mumbai and came from disparate class and religious

⁴⁹Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "Marking Independence: The Ritual of a National Art Exhibition," *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 30-31 (1996): 93.

⁵⁰ Here I am referring to the political role that Delhi has played in India's past as the seat of foreign dominion beginning with the Delhi Sultanate in the thirteenth century. Interestingly, when Britain moved the colonial capital from Calcutta to New Delhi it was a seemingly final plea for control over the Indian sub-continent as at least since the thirteenth century, Delhi has been both the real and metaphoric seat of colonial dominion. Consequently, when Nehru delivered his speech to the nation on the eve of Independence, his positioning in Delhi it was a gesture of eradication; he plumbed the depths of history to stake his claim on the territorial capital of Delhi and to rise above the legacy of colonial rule.

⁵¹ During the 1940's other artistic groups adopted the epithet progressive to signal the ideological underpinnings. For example, the Progressive Artists Group in Calcutta was formed in 1942 and the Madras Progressive Painters Association was founded in 1944. Geeta Kapur, "A Stake in Modernity: Brief History of Contemporary Indian Art," *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, ed., Caroline Turner (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1993): 27-44

backgrounds. In many ways, their membership represented India's own composite culture and its mandate of unity in diversity. Two principle members of the PAG F.N. Souza and M.F. Husain travelled to Delhi to see the monumental Government House exhibition. When they returned to Mumbai they openly rejected the normative styles of Indian art that they observed in Delhi and committed themselves to the pursuit of an individualistic and expressive visual vocabulary that would parallel India's newfound freedom. A new lexicon had to be established to give voice to India's burgeoning modernity.⁵²

As the artists associated with PAG sought out a visual modern they were faced with a particular conundrum. Their artistic endeavours cast off the indigenous revivalism of the Bengal school while simultaneously attempting to transcend the naturalism taught in many art schools across India originally founded by the British. Artist J. Swaminathan observes, "While these artists did not initiate any style or school in painting jointly as the former Bengal School movement, they laid emphasis on the need for self-search in evolving personalized vision and styles. They rejected the schematized formalism of the previous generation."⁵³ The Mumbai PAG collectively shrugged off India's past artistic expressions in the desire for a new modern and independent sensibility. The PAG's ideology was in keeping with other progressive artistic movements founded in India at this time. With their sights fixed on the international, they often glanced to the epicentre of modernity clearly located in the Western capitalist hemisphere. That said, as a means of complicating the above characterization of the PAG's artistic and ideological impulse toward the modern I feel that it is important to briefly delineate the space of modernity in

⁵² Yashodhara Dalmia observes that the PAG, "claimed that they were inventing modernism for India. In hindsight, what can be said of them is they were struggling to form the Indian modern." *The Moderns: The Progressive Artists Group and Associates* (Mumbai: National Gallery of Modern Art, 1996): 17.

⁵³ J. Swaminathan, "Modern Indian Art: The Visible and the Possible," *Lalit Kala Contemporary* 40 (1995):47.

India before discussing the artistic engagements which arose out of it. I would like to mark a theoretical detour in my narrative by restating a question posed by Geeta Kapur: if the discourse of modernity is inexplicably tied to the West does that make all other manifestations somehow derivative?⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Geeta Kapur, "When Was Modernism in Indian/Third World Art?" *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 92 (Summer 1993).

Modern Questions

There has been a great deal of intellectual engagement with the manifestation of modernity in non-western countries. To be sure, there is a lot at stake in how modernity is theoretically configured in the post-colonial world.⁵⁵ How do former colonies position themselves against the hegemonic legacy of colonialism? Moreover, how do the second and third worlds situate themselves in relation to the first? What are the strategies employed by artists in an effort to position themselves in a world that wholeheartedly believes in the primacy of the West? Do we provincialize the West as Dipesh Chakrabarty has suggested?⁵⁶ Alternatively, do we cast off distinctions like first, second and third which inevitably uphold an evolutionary paradigm in which countries outside the pale of the West are in a perpetual state of becoming?

These questions loom large on the theoretical horizon and consequently, the issue of how to theorize and engage with India's modernity is still a matter of contention today. Modernity in India, as Geeta Kapur has observed, is inexplicably bound to the project of modernization. She notes that, "... the characteristic feature of Indian modernism (as perhaps with much of the postcolonial modernism) is that it is manifestly social, contingent on modernization, so that modernity has an expressly historical rather than an ontological mission."⁵⁷ One strategy to displace the hegemony of an evolutionary paradigm has been to conceive of India's modernity within an atemporal framework and

⁵⁵ Prafulla C. Kar, "Modernism: An Intellectual History," in *Creative Arts in Modern India: Essays in Comparative Criticism*, ed. Ratan Parimoo and Indramohan Sharma (New Delhi: Books and Books, 1995).

⁵⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?" *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992).

⁵⁷ Kapur, "When was Modernism," 477.

to conceptualize India's engagements with modernity in a non-linear fashion.⁵⁸ Another tactic involves the widening of the field of Indian art to encompass all aspects of visual culture in India. The net effect of this approach would be the dissolution of rigid artistic and stylistic divisions originally established within the western academy.⁵⁹

Bearing this in mind, if one returns to the modern impulse of the PAG to examine the early work of Husain and Souza, we can see how their paintings sweep across a wide expanse of influence from the international to the local. Husain's early work was rooted in the local and he represented that which he encountered and witnesses around him in Mumbai. However, his work also reflects an international sensibility and is characterized by its heavy impasto, and the broad gestures of colour, which render the canvas impenetrable. The handling of the paint is loose and the colours heat the surface of the canvas. Husain's stylistic denial of the ethereal watercolour washes used so frequently by the Bengal School is epitomized in his *Marathi Women* of 1950 (figure 9).

Similarly, Souza's work is also dense and weighted down by the thick application of paint. Unlike Husain, his colours do not bleed into one another without warning; their chaos is contained in tidy graphically rendered pockets. Souza, like Husain, focuses upon his own experiences and perceptions of the world around him. For example, in keeping with Souza's familial experience with Catholicism, *Pieta* (1947) draws on the visual vocabulary of Christianity (figure 10). The painting ironically conveys revulsion, instead of the spiritual oneness suggested by its title. The muddied application of paint and the use of dissonant colour, facilitates movement through the image in a desperate search for refuge.

⁵⁸ R. Sivakumar, "Modern Indian Art: A Brief Overview," *Art Journal* 58 (Fall 1999): 14.

⁵⁹ For example see, Preminda Jacob, "Between Modernism and Modernization: Locating Modernity in South Asian Art," *Art Journal* 58 (Fall 1999): 53.

These two artist's familial and religious origins -- Souza from a Goan Catholic family and Husain from an impoverished Muslim family -- embody modernity's language of dispersal and migration in a country whose dominant cultural roots are in Hinduism. Yet, these artists, although leftist, did not endorse a formalist visual vocabulary, nor did they embody the lofty Greenbergian notion of the avant-garde; theirs was a syncretistic approach. By looking to Husain and Souza as exemplars of the PAG's artistic and political ideology, we can see that their work stands as a set of refusals. Their canvases are about the play of paint and the banalities of the everyday. There is no claim to realism; rather, they propose an adherence to the expressive and the experiential.⁶⁰ Their work was historically mired in a drive for both self and national representation.⁶¹

By 1949, the Progressive Artists Group had disbanded: Souza along with many other young Indian artists left for Europe to broaden their horizons. Husain chose to stay in Mumbai and within ten years, he came to be regarded as India's preeminent artist. His work was sent abroad to represent India in the Sao Paulo Biennial (1959), and he was often included in exhibitions held in the U.K.⁶² Husain also gained greater public exposure in India through a series of high profile public commissions.⁶³

Artistic endeavours once again became the marker of India's political legitimacy when Nehru's Second Five Year Plan (1951-56) included a cultural policy that was to be

⁶⁰ Here I am extrapolating from Habermas's characterization of aesthetic modernity. He observes, "Modernity revolts against the normalizing functions of tradition; modernity lives on the experience of rebelling against all that is normative." "Modernity-An Incomplete Project," *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed., Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983): 5.

⁶¹ Geeta Kapur, "A Stake in Modernity." 36.

⁶² For example, *Art Now in India* (London; Arts Council of Great Britain, 1965); *Contemporary India Art* (London; India Advisory Commission, 1982); *India Myth & Reality: Aspects of Modern Indian Art* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1982).

⁶³ To name a few, in 1967 Husain executed three murals for Air India to be placed in their offices in Hong Kong, Bangkok, Zurich, and Prague. In 1969, he was commissioned by the Government of India to create a ceramic mural on the Indraprastha Bhavan in New Delhi.

developed along side economic policies.⁶⁴ A national academy of arts, the Lalit Kala Akademi, and the National Gallery of Modern Art were both established in Delhi, the latter housed in the former residence of the Maharaja of Jaipur. Artists in India now had galleries to show in, and the Lalit Kala Akademi published an art journal that encouraged dialogue and interaction amongst India's burgeoning artistic community.

In the preceding pages of my narrative, I have sought to address the historical underpinnings of a union of art and nation in the popular imagination. In looking to Bengal at the turn of the nineteenth century, we have seen how art and nation first converged to delineate the political, economic, and ideological space of the nation. These ideas were distilled into a visual shorthand that manifested itself at the nexus of Tagore's *Bharat Mata*. Tagore's painting set an ideological precedent in which the Indian nation could be reduced to a single image of divinity. The 1947 exhibition held to mark independence illustrated once again how art was conscripted into a battle for India's legitimacy. The Government House show visually and politically announced India's capacity for self-rule. Through the era of Nehru, the endeavors of Indian artists continued to be signposts of India's political legitimacy and a vehicle for nationalistic sentiments.

Art, or perhaps more specifically visual culture, in India is linked to public culture. The public visibility of an artist such as Husain also attests to the role that art has played in the articulations of India's modernity. Husain's public commissions and his participation in local celebrations of Ram Lila suggest a more egalitarian approach to artistic expression in India. Moreover, the visual expressions of nation and progress manifested themselves as well in the popular realm and the calendar images examined earlier suggest that these notions found expression and carried currency within various

⁶⁴ Kapur, "A Stake in Modernity," 27.

Indian publics. However, in an article published in 1989, Geeta Kapur observes that the function of nationalist ideology within the cultural and artistic production in India “continues to be an invisible assumption in our discourse.”⁶⁵ Nationalism during the *Swadeshi* movement, for example, wedded art (visual culture), nation, and economics in a unified effort to cast off colonial hegemony; however, how valid is this tripartite construction in the post-colonial period? In the remaining pages of my narrative, my overriding concern will be to address the linkage between modernity and the national project and its consequential visual expression. What happens if the representations of the nation, with its various accruements of freedom, prosperity, and knowledge, are at variance with lived experience?

⁶⁵ Kapur, “A Brief Review of Cultural Nationalism,” 123.

Picturing a Nation

... the Emergency had a black part as well as a white, and here is the secret which has lain concealed for too long beneath the mask of those stifled days: the truest, deepest motive behind the declaration of a State of Emergency was the smashing, the pulverizing, the irreversible discombobulation of the children of midnight.

Salmon Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* ⁶⁶

When India's constitution passed into law in 1950, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru ensured that liberty, equality and fraternity would form the bedrock of the Indian Republic.⁶⁷ The only thing that could challenge these noble principles was a small conditional clause included in the constitution. The passage stipulated that in the event of an internal security problem, the President had the power to suspend the rights and freedoms of the Indian people. No one could have imagined that, in June 1975, under the office of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi this clause would be called upon and enacted indefinitely.

To detail the specific events that precipitated the declaration of Emergency would take me too far afield; however, beginning in 1972 Indira Gandhi's government was increasing under fire for its inability to obtain its political objectives. The right leaning opposition party led by Jayprakash Narayan began to openly express its non-confidence in the Congress party and levy complaints of corruption against Mrs. Gandhi.⁶⁸ The Prime Minister's 1971 campaign slogan "*Garibi Hatao*" (Remove Poverty) was appropriated

⁶⁶ Salmon Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (Toronto: Vintage, 1981): 427.

⁶⁷ Wolpert, 356.

⁶⁸ By 1971-72 India's educated middle class was beginning to grow disenchanted with the socialist leanings of the Congress Party and the economic crisis of 1973-74 consolidated their vote bank around the right wing Janata party. Mohan Anand, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989): 212.

and reconfigured by the opposition into the slogan "*Indira Hatao*" (Remove Indira).⁶⁹

Amidst this volatile political climate, the Allahabad High Court found Prime Minister Indira Gandhi guilty of fraud during the 1971 elections. On June 12, 1975 the verdict of the court banned Indira Gandhi from running or holding an elective seat in parliament for six years. Instead of observing the Allahabad court's decision, the Prime Minister claimed that the charges were part of a conspiracy to remove her from office. She refused to resign her position as Prime Minister and appealed the judgment in the Supreme Court of India. While the case was being heard in an unprecedented political move, Indira Gandhi took to the streets and held rallies across India in an effort to seek support directly from her constituents.

The Indian people may have heard Indira Gandhi's pleas of innocence and declarations that the charges against her were a part of a plot to politically eliminate her; yet, they were also privy to the rebuttals of the opposition party. The Prime Minister's populist rallies for support were met by demonstrations, organized by Jayprakash Narayan, calling for mass civil disobedience. On June 25, 1975, the Supreme Court upheld the Allahabad court's guilty verdict. By law, the Prime Minister had to resign her office. In the wake of the court's decision, a large demonstration was staged in New Delhi during which opposition leader Jayprakash Narayan called upon the police and the armed forces to disregard orders issued by Indira Gandhi as she was no longer the Prime Minister. The country was in turmoil. Despite the Supreme Court's decision to uphold the charges against the Prime Minister, again she refused to relinquish her political seat. On June 26, 1975, the President invoked the Emergency clause in the constitution, foreign journalists were extradited, strict censorship was imposed upon the Indian Press and

⁶⁹ Ram Avtar Sharma, *Indira Gandhi and Congress* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1988): 152.

Indira Gandhi began to imprison those who spoke up against her.

As Rushdie states in the opening passage of this section, the Emergency had both a black and white component; you were either for or against Indira Gandhi. The children of midnight, those who were born of India's freedom and Nehru's hope for the future, began to lose their corporeal integrity. India began to break apart. The cracks and the fissures that riddled the political surface of India would never again close; instead, they would grow wider and more treacherous in the wake of Emergency. Rushdie's metaphor of the black and the white aspect of the Emergency speaks of the polarization of the political climate in India at this time, but his allusion also lends itself to a description of the media. The black and white pages of the newspapers in India were permitted only to say favourable things about the Emergency.⁷⁰ The black ink of the words and the white pages that held them, were presented to the Indian public as truth. In reality, they formed a screen that concealed the actuality of Indira Gandhi's coup.

M.F. Husain also participated in the production of black and white versions of the Emergency by producing three images that were published in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. Husain's images appeared on July 27, 1975 and chronicled the three major events leading up to Indira Gandhi's declaration of the Emergency (figure 11). The full-page layout is offset by a byline that reads, "In the News" below which is a photograph of Husain painting a canvas. The text beneath the photograph of the artist tells us that Husain "put his imagination to work and came up with his impressions of the recent events."⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ironically, when Indira Gandhi lost the 1977 election she stated to Khushwant Singh, "*Humko* feedback *nahin tha*." (We had no feedback). To which he replied, "how could you have any feedback if you locked up the press?" Madhu Jain, "Interview: We've Had So Many Donkeys as PM," *India Today* (August 31, 1999):54-55.

⁷¹ "In the News..." *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (July 27, 1975): 24.

The inclusion of the photograph of Husain alongside the images that he authored furnished the evidence of his political stance along side Indira Gandhi.⁷² The union of the photograph and the drawings may have etched an indelible mark in the popular imagination. Indeed one wonders if his allegiance to the Prime Minister at this moment earned him the title "the official draughtsman for the state."⁷³ The triptych was also widely shown on India's government controlled television station Doordarshan and appeared in a brochure entitled "The triumph of Good over Evil."⁷⁴ Husain's position was now incontrovertible; his graphic lines delineated a vision of India and an ideological stance.⁷⁵

The first image of *The Illustrated Weekly* triptych, Twelfth [sic] June '75, represents the day that the Allahabad high court convicted Indira Gandhi of election fraud (figure 12). Husain's drawing shows a headless tri-armed figure pointing to a lone female seated upon an elevated cupped hand.⁷⁶ The word *janata* (people) rests on the shoulders of the pointing figure. It is unclear whether one is to understand *janata* as referring to the people of India, or to those members of Jayprakash Narayan's opposition party who called for Indira Gandhi's resignation. However, the identification of the female form as *Janaki* allows no room for ambiguity. Janaki is a common epithet for the daughter of King Janaka, indicating that we are to identify the woman as the epic heroine Sita. The conflation of Sita and Indira Gandhi in this image relies upon the public recollection of

⁷² Here I am drawing on ideas put forth by Susan Sontag and her observation that photographs are evidence for the ephemeral, they both incriminate and offer justification. *On Photography* (New York: Anchor books, 1977): 5.

⁷³ Kapur, "A Brief Review of Cultural Nationalism," 127.

⁷⁴ Pal, 130.

⁷⁵ Inder Molhotra observes, "it was not one of Husain's best works, but it was the most publicized because the Prime Minister's image builders seized upon it at once." *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989): 174.

⁷⁶ Although the images were reputed to be sketches for three large 8 x 4 foot canvasses, I have only found evidence that suggests that the first image of the triptych was the only one that was executed as a painting. It is reproduced in Ila Pal's biography of the artist.

Sita's trial by fire once she is returned to Ayodhya. Mythological antecedents and their resonance within the public imagination affirm Husain's visual claim. The Indian public would know that Husain was explicitly stating that Mrs. Gandhi like Sita had been falsely accused.

The second image, inscribed with the date Twentyfourth June'75, seems at first to rupture the meta-narrative introduced by the union of the Prime Minister and the goddess Sita (figure 13). As mentioned previously, on this day the charges of fraud against Indira Gandhi were upheld in the Supreme Court; justice impelled her to surrender her office. However, the image is ambiguous as the cartouche of the Supreme Court's scale of justice, located in the upper right-hand corner, is balanced yet *Bharat Mata* is stripped bare and in turmoil. Is one to read *Bharat Mata* as Indira Gandhi in keeping with the first image? Or is the agitated drawing of the personified subcontinent meant to mirror the dissolution of political order? The balanced scales visually affirm the decision of the Supreme Court; although, the goddess's naked and agitated appearance suggests that inversion of order and the ascendancy of chaos.⁷⁷ However, when one looks to the final image in the triptych the narrative role of Husain's depiction of *Bharat Mata* in turmoil becomes more evident.

The final image in the triptych dated Twentysixth June'75 represents the day that the President declared the Emergency (figure 14). Rather than yield her office, Indira Gandhi dismantled India's democracy. Husain cast the Prime Minister as the goddess Durga astride a lion, trident in hand and poised for battle. As with the first two images, the deployment of the mythological as a political metaphor would not be lost on the Indian public. In Hindu mythology, Durga is the goddess summoned at moments of extreme

⁷⁷ See fn 16.

duress to vanquish demons that threaten the order of the cosmos. The goddess draws her power from her male counterparts as she combats the forces of evil. The image would affirm the political impotence of the opposition while justifying the need to implement the Emergency.

Significantly, the goddess Durga occupies a liminal space in the cosmos; she emerges to battle and to restore order. The visual conflation of the Prime Minister and Durga suggests that the Emergency was only a temporary measure.⁷⁸ And while this may have been the initial intent, the history of the event demonstrates otherwise. The mapping of Indira Gandhi onto Durga had two specific ideological functions. The first enables the alignment of the Emergency with the great goddess's defeat of the demons that threaten the cosmos. By giving the event a mythological gloss, it not only sublimates the reality of the event into something more palatable, but it also seemingly vindicates the actions of the Prime Minister.

The second ideological function of Husain's image relies upon the recuperation of Indira Gandhi's place in the popular imagination after her victory over Pakistan in 1971. At this moment, the Prime Minister's victory was also couched in the rhetoric of Hindu mythology. A popular image shows Indira Gandhi alongside the goddess Durga; the visual union suggests that her victory over Pakistan was divinely sanctioned (figure 15). The print reveals that both the martial goddess Durga and heavy artillery facilitated Indira Gandhi's victory. The goddess's face is mirrored in that of the Prime Minister and the bloodied corpses that lay beneath the feet of the lions, ensure that the might, and the right of Indira Gandhi is visually stated. However, it is not only the military force and the political license of the Prime Minister that is stressed in Husain's image, but also, her

⁷⁸ David Kinsley, *The Goddess Mirror: Visions of the Divine form East and West* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989): 3-14.

dynastic legitimacy to rule India.

Beginning in the mid 1960s, Husain seems to have developed a visual shorthand for Congress rule in India. Again, the establishment of an exact date is prohibited by insufficient catalogue information and a lack of dates on Husain's work. Looking back at Husain's portrait of Nehru dated 1963 the Prime Minister is represented in earthy and somber three quarter view (figure 16). However, this staid vision of an elderly Nehru gives way to a more dynamic quadra-cephalic portrait of the Prime Minister painted by Husain the following year (figure 17). It is difficult to determine whether this second portrait was executed posthumously; yet, it is interesting that Husain painted an image of Indira Gandhi using the same visual tropes (figure 18). Both images show multiple heads of the Prime Ministers and seemingly allude to the three-headed lions that sit atop Ashokan pillars (figure 19). The visual allusion carries significant political resonance as the reign of Ashoka (269-232 B.C.) has gone down in the annals of Indian history as a period that was morally just and tolerant of India's diverse religions.⁷⁹ The visual alignment of Congress rule with that of Ashoka's would not be lost in the Indian population.

In returning to the images Husain published in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, one can see the allusion to Ashoka in the first image that illustrated Sita sitting aloft on a cupped hand. To place the female form in such a position suggests that we are to read the pillar to function much like those of Ashoka's: it marks the boundary of the Indian nation and to cross it is to run the risk of political chaos. The second image evidences the turmoil resulting from the trespass against the rule of Indira Gandhi and the final image suggests that Durga has restored the proper order of the cosmos. However, the depiction

⁷⁹ During the course of Ashoka's reign, he erected sandstone pillars throughout his kingdom that functioned as ideological and territorial boundary markers.

of a three-headed Durga is an iconographic misnomer and perhaps suggests that the correct rule of India is that which locates Congress at the helm.

The Emergency in India is a topic which few seem willing to talk about. As the press was suspended and foreign correspondents were extradited gathering documents proved difficult for me. The Emergency seems to circulate within the realm of popular memory; one often hears it referred to as the only time that the trains ran on time. Open discussions about it are often cloaked in the guise of fiction, such as Salmon Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* or Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*.⁸⁰ These novels register the Emergency as a time of upheaval; the urban beautification projects and mass sterilizations are revealed as draconian exertions of power over India's poor and disenfranchised.

It was not only the poor who suffered during the Emergency; the Prime Minister's secret service was careful to round up and imprison those who voiced dissent. To cast Indira Gandhi as Durga during the Emergency may have drawn on earlier images such as those produced during the 1971 war with Pakistan; however, Husain's image conflates the role of the goddess and the Prime Minister. In 1971, the Pakistani soldiers may have played the role of the demons that threatened the cosmos; yet, in 1975, Husain's image suggests that the enemy now lies within India. It is this visual suggestion that will, in retrospect, allow for the cracks and fissures in the Indian subcontinent to widen and become much more dangerous. The emergency may have cast a shadow of doubt upon the Congress Party, but it also enabled the consolidation of the right wing in India as a political answer to the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty.

Up to this juncture, I have traced how nationally minded visual representations of resistance have been couched in the mythological or religious. Husain's images of the

⁸⁰ Salmon Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (Toronto: Vintage, 1981); Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995).

Emergency resonate with Tagore's *Bharat Mata* and suggest that India, although claiming to be a secular country, is visually represented in the language of the sacred. Or, more specifically, at moments of political crisis, visual articulations of resistance draw upon the vocabulary of the mytho-religious. I will address this point in more detail in my final section; however, I would like to leave the Emergency behind and jump ahead to August 15, 1997, to analyze another triptych published by Husain.

On August 15, 1997, *The Times of India* published a special pullout section entitled *Images* to commemorate India's first half-century of independence (figure 20). An editorial written by film director Shyam Benegal occupies the upper half of the first page. Benegal's narrative wanders through the last fifty years of India's vexed political history, from Partition to Husain's depiction of Indira as Durga and to the Babri Masjid dispute. His text is anchored by a sepia toned image of Nehru delivering his famous speech, "Long ago we made a tryst with destiny..." and a black and white photograph of Godse's conviction for the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Although these two images mark the boundaries of India's birth as a modern socialist country, Benegal's text sits at the nexus of the ideologies alluded to by the images. He points out that neither the socialism of Nehru nor the self-reliance of Gandhi have been able to rectify India's poverty. Although Benegal's text recalls Nehru's project to modernize India, as well as Indira's political failure, his pointed critique is undermined by the images that fill the remaining space on the page.

The final two black and white columns of Benegal's text are mirrored in size and placement by a colour image entitled *Our Poor Record*. As a pictorial affirmation of Benegal's concluding remarks, the image shows an emaciated Gandhiji attempting to carry a hefty bar graph that indicates the increase in poverty in India since 1973. While the image claims to affirm Benegal's observations about the failure of India's socialism,

when it is seen in relation to the advertisement placed beneath a surprising contradiction emerges. The lower half of the page is consumed by an advertisement for Mahindra Ford. A photograph of a shiny blue sedan parked in front of the Rashtrapati Bhavan is visually bracketed by the dates 1947 and 1997. The former is offset by Nehru's words, "Long ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge . . . At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom." The year 1997 is also offset by text; however, the words are those of the CEO of Mahindra Ford, "A year ago, we made a tryst with destiny and the time has come for us to renew our pledge to always give India our very best."⁸¹

The economic imperative of India's imagined community that was discussed in my previous section takes on a more perverse tone in this example offered by the *Times of India*. Certainly, the first page of this pullout section betrays a careless disregard for the ravages of economic inequity in India by its juxtaposition of *Our Poor Record* with that of an advertisement for a car few could ever afford. The blatant disregard for the less fortunate is revealed by the visual union of those whose existence is reduced to a number on a graph and an advertisement for a luxury vehicle. I have introduced the first page of the commemorative issue of *The Times of India* as a means of drawing attention to the contradictory elements that weave through this entire section of the newspaper. Husain's triptych, which appears at the top of the second and third page of the paper, is not exempt from the riddles of contradiction (figure 21).

Gandhiji goes into the frame of eventful history and
Jawaharlal Nehru appears riding the white horse like a
flash of lightning on the horizon of hope and frustration.

⁸¹ For further reading, see Vinayak Purohit, *Sociology of Art and Politics* (Bombay: India Institute of Social Research, nd). Of particular interest is his "Compradorism: *The Times of India* and M.F. Husain"

The above caption accompanies the first image of Husain's triptych, which illustrates a bespeckled, Mahatma Gandhi in the foreground, and Nehru emerging from the middle ground (figure 22). Gandhi's back is turned to us as he heads towards the shadows of history. His khadi dhoti contrasting with the stitched finery worn by Nehru who emerges astride a horse out of the shadows cast by the framed form of the Mahatma. The representations of the men betray an ambiguous tension; Gandhi's hunched and laboured pedestrian stance contrasts with Nehru's erect and elevated equestrian pose. Although Husain often depicts faces without eyes, it is interesting that one man would be given vision and the other not. Gandhiji's glasses perhaps suggest his political or ideological foresight; however, it is Nehru's mobility and impassive political countenance, conveyed by his featureless face that will realize India's future. Although the men occupy the same field of vision, the frame into which Gandhi's steps suggests a difference in temporal, ideological, and political space.

Contours of our great country transform into the image of
Mother India sprinkling the Ganga water from one hand,
the other releasing the bird of freedom, Ganesha perched
on her arm like Bhujpal.

The second image shows *Bharat Mata*, the contours of her body delineating the geographical space of the South Asian sub-continent (figure 23). The accompanying text frames the Indian nation in the vocabulary of the sacred. At first glance, the image seems to include the disparate religious expressions of India and visually unite them on the sub-continent; however, a closer reading reveals ambiguities. Initially I read *Bharat Mata*, with her upraised arm spilling the water of the sacred Ganga, as suggesting Hinduism, the crescent moon rising over the mountains as either alluding to Islam, or the symbol of Ganga usually worn in the hair of the Hindu God Shiva. The waters of the Indian Ocean

and the Bay of Bengal, respectively, embrace the fishers of Christianity and Gandhi suggesting a happy co-existence. Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, sits atop the Goddess's outreached arm offering council as she releases the bird of freedom. The figures in the image radiate out from the wheel, the symbol of the Indian republic found on the national flag. Its placement at the hub of the image suggests that despite her diverse religions, India pivots around the ideology of secularism and belief in the Nation-state.

My first reading of the image suggested an effacement of the religious strife that currently challenges the Indian nation; however, the textual and visual mention of the sprinkling of the sacred water of the Ganga provoked me to take a closer look. The explicit reference to the waters of the Ganga recalls the use of pots of Ganga water during the *Ektamata Yajna* (Sacrifice for Unity) staged by the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) in 1983.⁸² The *Ektamata Yajna* was one of the first mass rallies staged by the Hindu right wing in its bid for the creation of a Hindu *rashtra*.⁸³ The word *Yajna* reaffirmed the importance of sacrifice to the creation of a Hindu nation and its usage in this context asserts the centrality of *dharma* (religious duty) to the ideology of Hindutva. *Dharma* suggests that the will of the individual is subordinated to the will of the divine; however, in this case it takes on a specific political gloss. The popular expression of this concept may have claimed to transgress rigidly entrenched religious hierarchies by allowing all regardless of caste to participate without prejudice. However, the popular transcription of *dharma* within a political context effectively reoriented notions of difference along the

⁸² For a detailed analysis see Lise McKean, *Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 115-23.

⁸³ Peter Van der Veer has observed the procession of the goddess Bharat Mata and the use of sacred water in this event marked out the geopolitical space of the nation. *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994): 124.

lines of religious identity.⁸⁴

The cover of a souvenir volume from the event reveals the *Ektamata Yajna*'s underlying political and ideological agenda (figure 24). The martial goddess Durga is shown presiding over the South Asian sub-continent. The land mass is filled with bodies oriented toward a burning structure. That the building should rest upon the general geographic location of the contested Babri Masjid in Ayodhya is no coincidence. Durga stands upon the space of Pakistan and the crown, perhaps in allusion to Lord Ram, rests upon the territory now known as Bangladesh. The placement of these three figures affirm the reclamation of the divided geopolitical space of the subcontinent. The location of the figures on the map can be read as a gesture of erasure; the trace of Islam is eradicated by the spatial placement of the signs of an assertive Hindu consciousness.

Husain's image recuperates many of the visual and ideologically charged tropes used by the Hindu right in its campaign to create a Hindu *rashtra*. A re-reading of this image allows for the presence of *Bharat Mata* and *Ganga Mata* along side Ganesha to pack a formidable ideological punch. Ganesha, the divinely esteemed mascot to the Shiv Sena, may be the remover of obstacles, but one must ask which obstruction is to be removed? Furthermore, it is interesting that the arm of *Bharat Mata* spills the water of the Ganga on the fishers of Christianity as the Hindu right has also demonized them. The wheel of *dharma* takes on a different meaning if we read the crescent moon as a symbol of Islam; its visual appearance outside of India as position of ideological and political exile from the South Asian subcontinent. However, one must ask why Gandhi is also located outside of India in the waters of the Bay of Bengal? Perhaps the Mahatma's notion of

⁸⁴ Here I draw from Phillip Lutgendorf. On page 96 he addresses the appropriation of the Vedic sacrifice into the popular realm. *The Life of a Text: Performing the Ramcaritmanas of Tulsidas* (Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1994).

Ram Rajya is not in keeping with the forces of Hindutva, as Gandhi's invocation of this divine rubric was decidedly utopian and democratic.⁸⁵

She with a gathri on her head, he with a plough on his
shoulder. Witness the three-headed lion of the Indian
Republic climbing the Ashoka Pillar of our time

Husain's final image is equally perplexing (figure 25). Again, one is confronted by the pillar motif; however, is one to read the lions as ascending or descending the pillar? If the pillar is to represent the state of contemporary India then does the position of the lions suggest that those who preside over the *Sansad Bhavan* (Indian parliament) are not tolerant of religious difference? I would like offer a possible answer to these questions by addressing Husain's inclusion of an archway behind the pillar. The juxtaposition of these two motifs may allude to the real placement of these two structures within the precincts of Lalkot, the first Islamic citadel built in India during the twelfth century. The inclusion of the archway behind the pillar could visually allude to the historical appropriation and placement of an iron pillar within the precincts of the Q'tub mosque during the period of the Delhi Sultanate (figure 26). The placement of the pillar in relation to the gate would be an easily recognizable visual reference to a very popular and well-traversed archeological site in India. Moreover, the visual allusion to this moment in India's history securely aligns the current BJP government with a historic period of religious intolerance, iconoclasm, and political chauvinism.

It is interesting that the image also recuperates Husain's visual unification of Congress with the rule of Ashoka. An image that Husain produced in the 1980s when he was appointed to the *Rajya Sabha* (Upper House of Parliament) shows Nehru, Indira

⁸⁵ Peter Van Der Veer, "Writing Violence," *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, ed. David Ludden (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996): 259.

Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi standing atop an Ashokan pillar (figure 27). By comparing this image with that published in the *Times of India* one can see how the transitional position of the lions on the pillar may be read as visual testament to the fact that Congress is not in power at this moment.

The inclusion of the rural workers suggests concern for the common people, and assures political representation for the masses and it obliquely revives the political and ideological thrust of the *Swadeshi* movement. However, the ideals of self-reliance are radically diffused when one recollects the car advertisement on the first page of the pullout section. If India was once united in a common pursuit of modernity and development then this image suggests the failure of that project. The labourers may quote the representations of Nehru's socialist policies of industrialization and development that were produced during the 1960s: however, where are the modern agricultural implements? Perhaps the rural figures in this representation betray a tension between a centralized government invoked by the pillar, at the locus of the image, and the peripheral rural masses.

To be sure my reading of these images is open to debate; however, I have attempted to demonstrate how national images, such as those produced by Husain in 1997, are polyvalent and susceptible to the ravages of political reinvention. The caption "*50 Years of Emerging India: A Triptych by M.F. Husain*" running across the top of both the second and the third page make an unmistakable claim to cut across the history of India as an independent nation. Following this, Husain's images seem to adhere to a chronological framework and the spaces between them reveal the temporal and ideological disjuncture between the utopian dreams of Nehru and Gandhi and the distopian manifestation of the communal politics in India today. I would like to pause and reiterate Geeta Kapur's warning about the invisible role that nationalist ideology has played within the discourse

of India's cultural realm and artistic production and in the final section of my paper I will question the validity of upholding nationalism as a progressive construct in India.

THE WAR OF POSITIONS

In the late 1980s, the forces of Hindutva focused their sights upon the repatriation of the Babri Masjid in the north Indian pilgrimage town of Ayodhya.⁸⁶ The mosque was believed to have been constructed on the foundation of an older temple built to consecrate the birthplace of Lord Ram, the central figure in the Hindu epic, *Ramayan*.⁸⁷ The significance of the Babri Masjid issue is revealed in the pages of the epic story, and the clues to its ability to mobilize are to be found in the cultural currency it holds in Northern India. The *Ramayan*, with its cast of characters, is archetypal and influential in the social formation of gender and identity: Ram stands as the righteous patriarch, Sita the ideally deferential woman and Laksman and Hanuman are faithful servants to the divine couple.⁸⁸ In opposition to these exemplary characters stands Ravan as the embodiment of difference and evil.

During the 1980's the Babri Masjid evolved into a potent symbol of the increasing disenchantment with the Congress led government in India.⁸⁹ Its inclusion on the

⁸⁶ The notion of *Hindutva* has its origins in the anti-colonial struggle of the early twentieth century and its ideological precepts were first disseminated in V.D. Savarkar's 1923 publication, *Hindutva - Who is A Hindu?* (Bombay: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1969). The Ayodhya incident has been extensively engaged with by many well known scholars. For example, Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth: Religious experience and Identity in Ayodhya* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); *Secular Challenge to Communal Politics, A Reader*, ed P.R. Ram (Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 1998); Ashis Nandy, Shikha Trivedy, Shail Mayaram & Achyut Yagnik, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁸⁷ The archeological and historical evidence for this is still widely disputed. For more see Panikkar, 121 - 138. Also A. G. Noorani, "The Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi Question," *Economic and Political Weekly* (November 4-11, 1989): 2461-2466.

⁸⁸ For more see, Usha Zacharias, "The Sita Myth and Hindu Fundamentalism: Masculine Signs of Feminine Beauty," *Contributions to Women's Studies* 14 (1994): 37 - 51.

⁸⁹ Amrita Basu notes, "The BJP captured public fears of political instability and national disintegration. At the same time, it channeled public attention toward one among the many biases Congress displayed, namely its tendency to "appease" conservative Muslim groups." For more see Amrita Basu, "Caste & Class: The rise of Hindu Nationalism in India," *Harvard International Review* 18 (August 1996).

Ektamata Yajna souvenir volume along side Ram's crown and the martial Durga mark a moment in which the mythological is summoned once again to articulate an act of political resistance. Sheldon Pollock has pointed out that the *Ramayan* has a two-fold function when summoned into the political arena. Firstly, the epic provides a framework by which, "...a divine political order can be conceptualized, narrated, and historically grounded..." and secondly, it offers the means by which "...a fully demonized Other can be categorized, counterpoised and condemned."⁹⁰

The growing constituency of the Hindu right was consolidated in 1991 when BJP president Lal Krishna Advani began a *rath yathra* (chariot procession) through seven states from Somnath to Ayodhya.⁹¹ Advani's *rath yathra* etched the battle lines of the Hindutva movement and successfully roused communal tensions by leaving a flood of anti-Muslim propaganda in its wake.⁹² Saffron coloured cloth, pamphlets, and posters depicting Lord Ram in fully militarized regalia were widely distributed by volunteers from the Bajrang Dal along the route of the *rath yathra* (figure 27). A solitary Lord Ram is depicted astride his (yet to be built) magnificent temple. His physical presence is now fully realized in the popular imagination as he materializes fully armed and ready for battle. His corporeal appearance over his temple is radically different from his metonymic

⁹⁰ Sheldon Pollock, "Ramayana and Political Imagination in India," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52 (May 1993): 264.

⁹¹ K.N Panikkar notes on page 157 that the linkage of Somnath and Ayodhya fueled anger at the Muslim population because Somnath had been revived as the entry point of Muslim invasions in the past while Ayodhya's Babri Masjid stood as the icon of Muslim aggression towards Hindus. See, "Religious Symbols and Political Mobilization: the Agitation for a Mandir at Ayodhya," in *Communal Threat, Secular Challenge* (Madras: Earthworm Book Pvt., 1997): 149-176. Panikkar notes further on page 159 that between 1 September and 20 November 1992, sixteen communal riots were spawned by the *Rath Yathra* in which 564 people lost their lives.

⁹² The political viability of the epic may have been rekindled in the late 1980's when India avidly watched Ramanand Sagar's television broadcast of the *Ramayan*. For more on the political and social uses of the *Ramayan* see: Sandria B. Freitag, "Enactments of Ram's Story and The Changing Nature of 'The Public' in British India," *South Asia* 14 (1991): 65-90. Paula Richman, "Epic and State: Contesting Interpretations of the *Ramayana*," *Public Culture* 7 (1995): 631-654.

representation as a crown in the *Ektamata Yajna* image and perhaps visually confirms the political confidence of the Hindutva movement.

In December 1992, the agitation over the mosque culminated in its spectacular destruction by *karsevaks* (voluntary workers), recruited from the rank and file of the Sangh Parivar. The event at Ayodhya was a watershed in the mobilization of the Hindu majority in India and signaled how mythological precepts could be enlisted to advance political action. If the Babri Masjid was once a symbol of Hindu and Muslim coexistence it now stood, in its conspicuous absence, as a fully loaded sign indicating the politics of intolerance. If the Sangh Parivar cast the Muslim population in India as the demon Ravan in this political drama then the Congress party played the role of Ravan's demonic army.

I would like to pause at this moment in my narrative to construct a frame through which to re-view the events I have just described. In doing so, I once again draw from Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci recalls Rosa Luxemburg's pamphlet, *Mass Strikes, Party and Trade Unions*, as "one of the most significant documents theorizing the war of maneuver applied to political science."⁹³ The first step in a war of maneuver is to breach the adversary's line of defense. The breach of territory fills the trenches on the front line with chaos and riddles the cadres' defensive ability with self-doubt. Once this is accomplished, the aggressor organizes his own rank and file to displace the remaining vigilant cadres and completely occupy the trenches. The advancement of troops visually affirms the capitulation of the enemy through an amazing display of manpower. The new strategic position of the aggressor is further consolidated by an ideological impulse toward the next advancement.⁹⁴ Once the new ground has been secured, the vanguard begins to engage in a war of positions. This war is primarily fought

⁹³ Gramsci, 225.

⁹⁴ Gramsci, 225-6.

on ideological terrain; its political efficacy requires a measure of consensus and an exertion of “unprecedented hegemony.”⁹⁵

The destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya can be read as the first strategic deployment of troops in a war of maneuver. The *karsevaks*, in successfully breaching the precincts of the mosque, made strategic political and ideological advances toward the creation of a Hindu *rashtra*. The physical advancement of the foot soldiers of Hindutva across the trenches of the Babri Masjid secured the boundaries of the Indian nation first laid down by Advani’s *rath yathra*. The empty space created by the destruction of the mosque visually affirmed the capitulation of the enemy. The slate of history was metaphorically wiped clean by the *karsevaks* and the new strategic position of the Hindutva was secured by an ideological impulse toward the next advancement.

In keeping with my discussion of the Babri Masjid, I would like to insert the Husain incidents within the militaristic rubric outlined by Gramsci and position the Bajrang Dal’s attacks on Husain’s work an offensive move in a war of position. The saffron shrouding of Husain’s portrait in Ahmedabad reminiscent of the saffron cloth which paved Advani’s road to Ayodhya. Moreover, its placement over the portrait of the artist subjected all that he stood for to erasure and the gesture must be seen to resonate with the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque.

The Bajrang Dal’s exertion of “pedagogically motivated violence” against Husain produced a certain visual truth, much like that of the union of his photograph alongside the drawings reproduced in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*.⁹⁶ If Husain is considered the liberal artist-knight in India’s battle for democracy then to shroud his portrait is to efface

⁹⁵ Gramsci, 230.

⁹⁶ I borrow this term from Jayant Lele, *Hindutva: The Emergence of the Right* (Madras: Earthworm Books, 1995): 81-103.

his dauntless efforts. The Bajrang Dal, with their heads bound in saffron cloth and their hands wielding *trishuls*, simultaneously acted as the metaphoric torturers and executioners of Husain. Their deeds marked the body of Husain's work with infamy. His saffron shrouded self-portrait functioned as the public exhibition of his metaphoric execution of a particular ideology and stood as a definitive sign of the first of many offensive strikes against India's ideological interlopers.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Here I am drawing from ideas put forth by Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977): 32-5.

EPILOGUE

Modern memory is above all archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image.⁹⁸

This project has sought to shift the discursive terrain around the Husain incident to one that would address the issue of the artist's implication in the project of India's modernity. At the beginning of this endeavor, I cast myself in the role of the archeologist who sifts through the detritus of memory in order to construct an inventory of traces. The images I examined here have hopefully suggested new possibilities to frame the formation of modernity in India. To date, a great deal of scholarship has focused its intent upon suggesting that the rise of so-called fundamentalism in the world is anti-modern. Richard Fox, however, characterizes religion as ideology as being the underside of modernity.⁹⁹ According to Fox, political religiosity appears at the moment that modernity shows its weakness. I find this proposal to be most productive as it suggests that we must look through India's modernity if we are to understand the political ascendancy of the Hindu right.

I have argued that Tagore's *Bharat Mata* set an illustrative precedent for how visual articulations of resistance draw upon the vocabulary of the mytho-religious at moments of political crisis. I have also attempted to illustrate that although India claimed to be rooted in the ideology of secularism it was frequently framed in the visual rhetoric of the sacred. If Tagore's *Bharat Mata* signaled how images could be called upon to enact

⁹⁸ Pierre Nora, "Between memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1999): 13.

⁹⁹ Richard G. Fox, "Communalism and Modernity," in *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community and the Politics of Democracy in India*, ed., David Ludden (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996): 239.

the ideological and geopolitical space of the nation, then Husain may have recuperated this when he visually aligned Indira Gandhi with Durga or the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty with the just rule of Ashoka. Yet, it was not the images of divinity that Husain produced to mark the occurrence of the Emergency that showed the fragility of India's secular modernity; but rather, it was the Emergency itself that caused the weakness to appear. Rushdie evokes this through his protagonist in *Midnight's Children* whose body grows more fractured and fragile through the dark days of the Emergency.

I placed the national narrative of M.F. Husain's work between Tagore's image of *Bharat Mata* and the VHP's image of Ram so that I might illustrate how the palimpsest of India's modernity has functioned within the popular imagination. However, it is the juncture point of the ephemeral and the eternal that is of most importance. By this, I mean images can function in the production of a nation either through their creation or destruction. The Bajrang Dal's attack in Ahmedabad subjected the work of Husain to erasure; the act may have resonated alongside the destruction of the Babri Masjid within the popular imagination. The political efficacy of the attacks on Husain relied upon his place as the artist-knight in the nation's battle for liberal secular democracy and the memory of its inversion during the Emergency. Yet, the engagement with the history of images is not uni-directional, as in my analysis of the *Times of India* triptych I have suggested that Husain visually reconfigured the motifs of the Hindu right to challenge the hegemony of Hindutva.

The notional formation of the Indian nation has enabled the Hindu right to mark out the boundaries of a Hindu *rashtra* using the same visual vocabulary deployed by Tagore, by the popular calendar images of the sixties and by Husain himself. I maintain that it is the ubiquity of these types of representations that has allowed the forces of

Hindutva to colonize a space in the public imagination, and utilize it to reach its own political end.

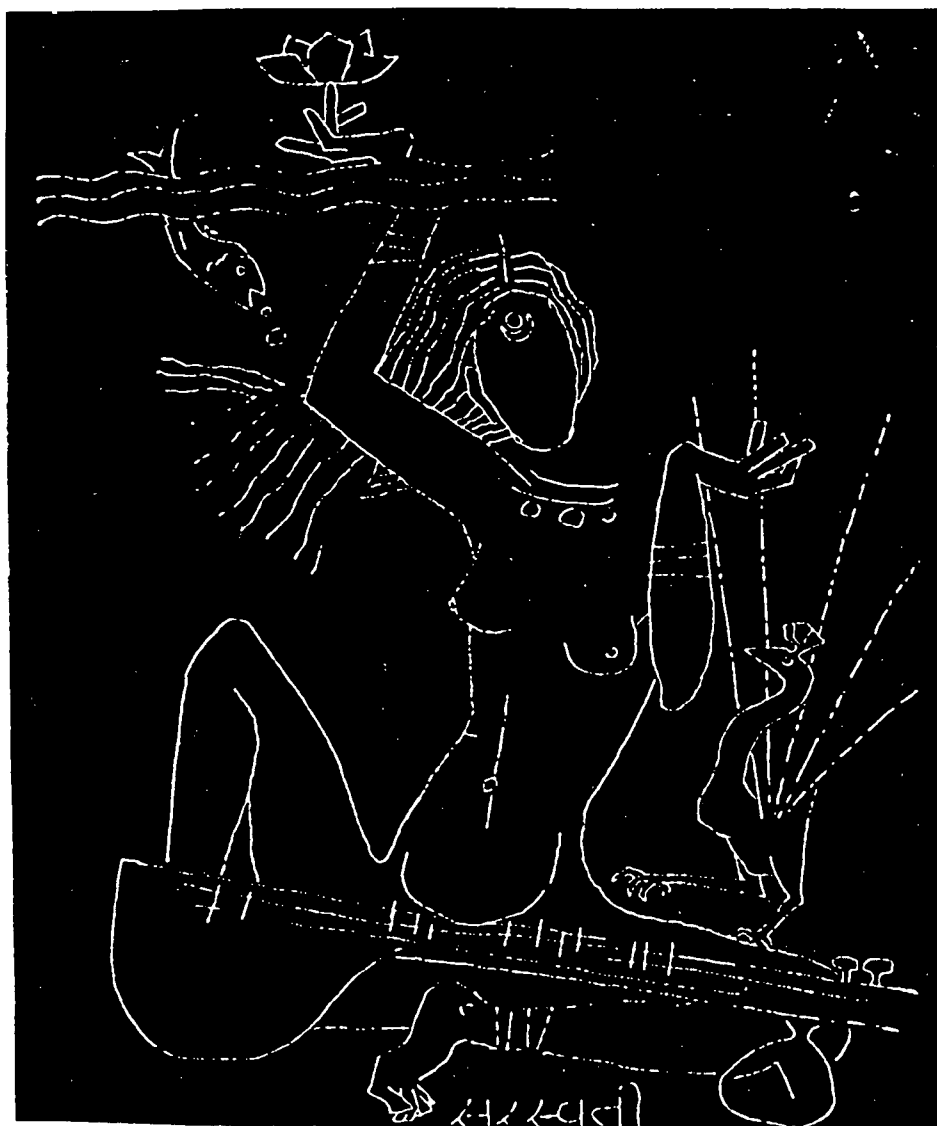


Figure 1:
M.F. Husain, *Saraswati*, circa 1976.



Figure 2:
M.F. Husain, *Sita Rescued*, 1985.

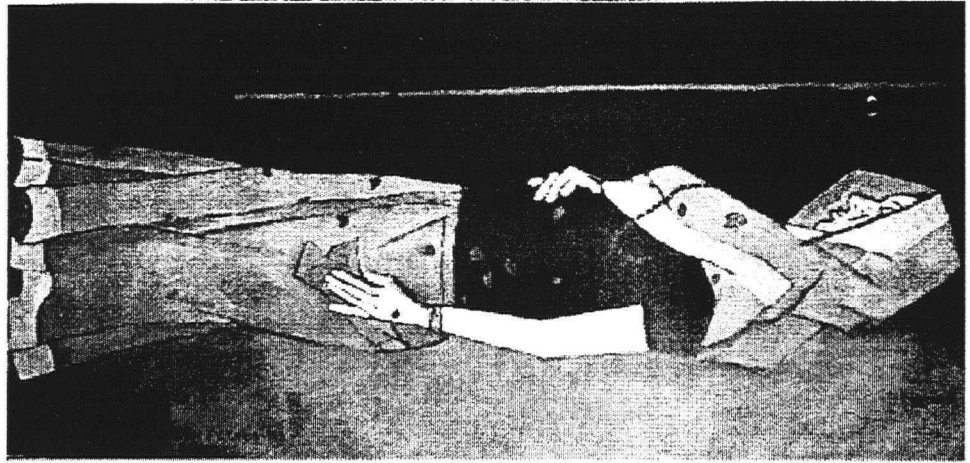
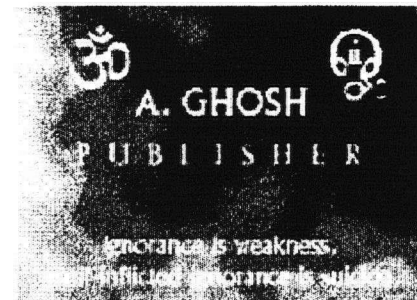


Figure 3:
M.F. Husain, *Sixteen Pedals on Her Body*, circa 1984.

A. Ghosh (Publisher),
5740 W. Little York, Suite # 215
Houston, TX 77081, USA
Ph: 713-772-0960
CLICK HERE: *The Sword of Truth*



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Figure 4:
Bharat Mata, A. Ghosh Publishing, circa 1999.



Figure 5:
Lakshmi, 1968.

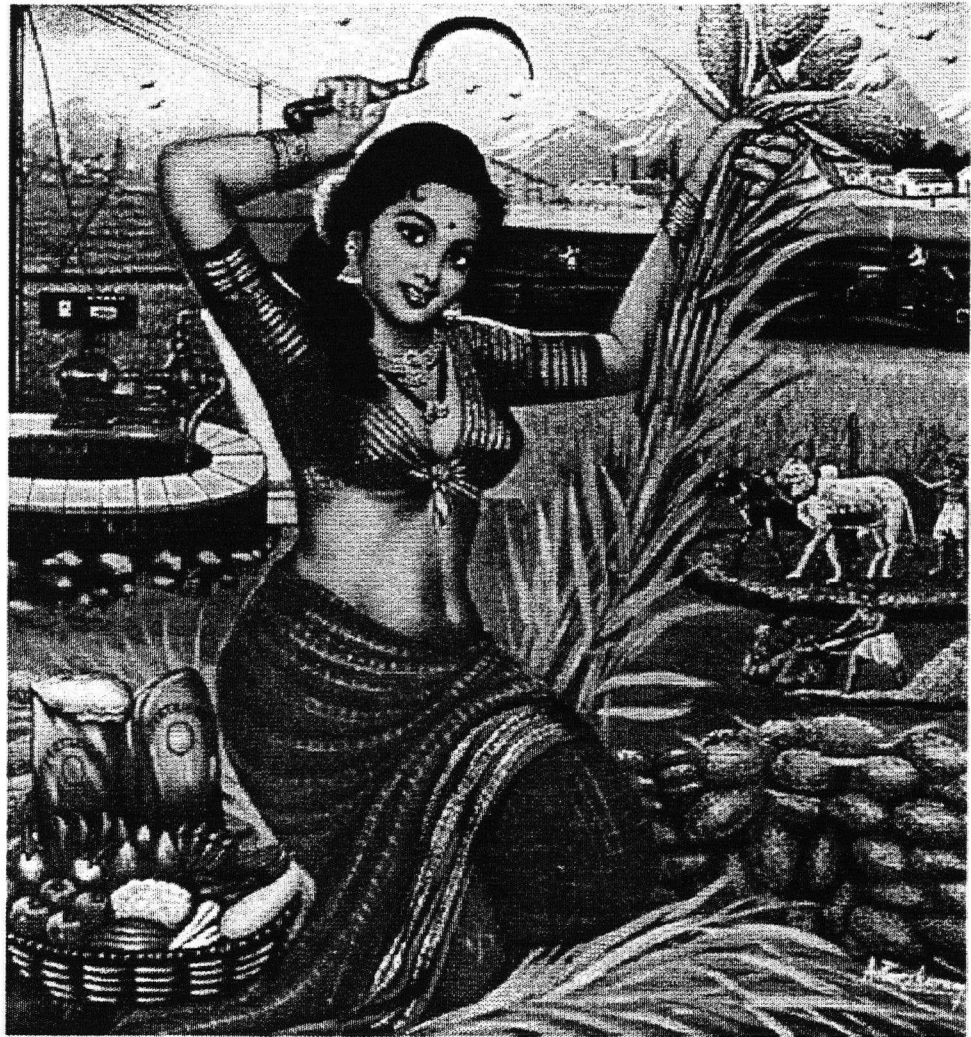


Figure 6:
Peasant Woman, 1969



Figure 7:
Ravi Varma, *Saraswati*, circa 1890.



Figure 8:
Abindranath Tagore, *Bharat Mata*, 1903.



Figure 9:
M.F. Husain, *Marathi Women*, 1950.

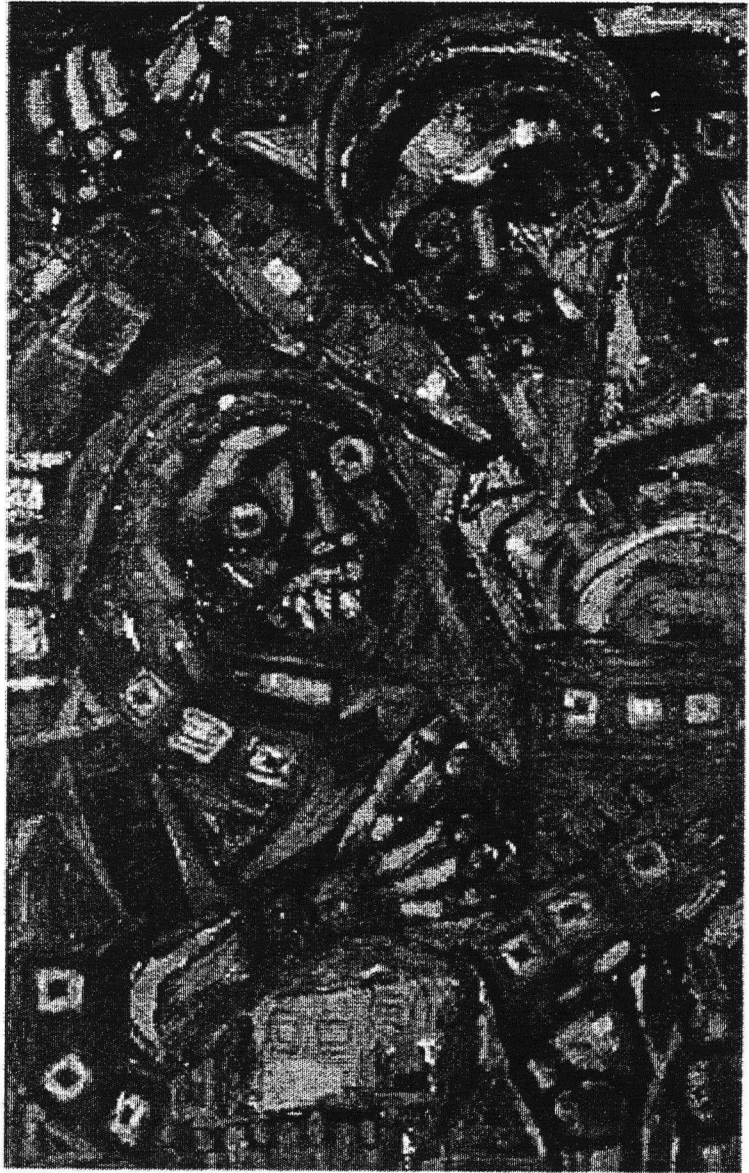
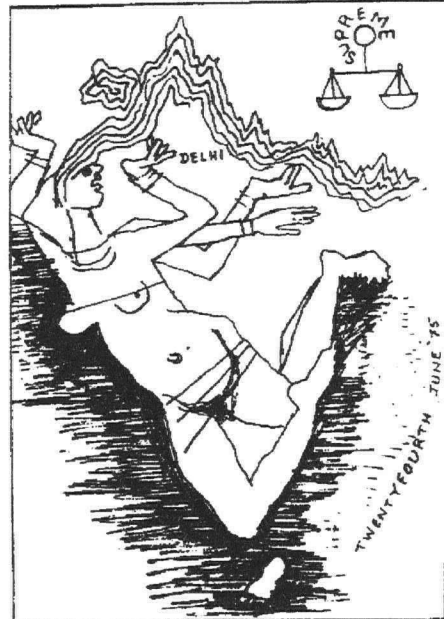
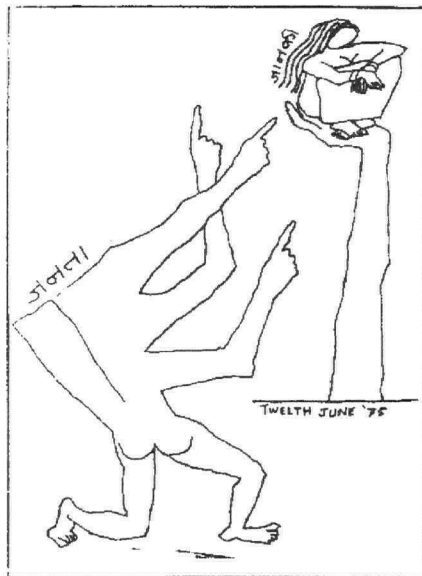


Figure 10:
F.N. Souza, *Pieta*, 1947.



In The News...



AN ARTIST'S-EYE VIEW. M. F. Husain (above), the renowned painter, put his imagination to work and came up with his impressions of recent events: June 12, June 26 (above left and right) and June 26 (right)—the date of the judgement of Mr Justice J. M. L. Sinha of the Allahabad High Court, the verdict of Mr Justice V. R. Krishna Rao of the Supreme Court and the day the President declared the Emergency, respectively.

24 THE ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY OF INDIA, JULY 27, 1975

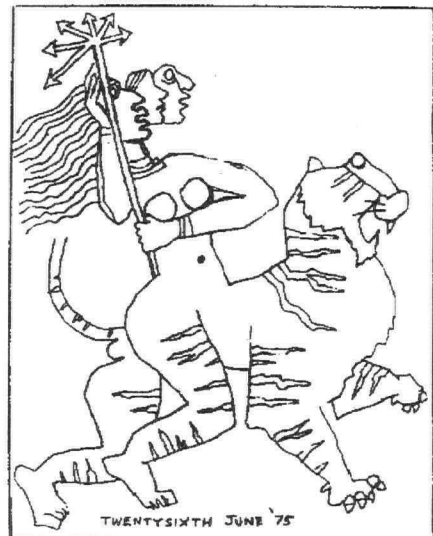


Figure 11:
Illustrated Weekly of India, July 27, 1975.

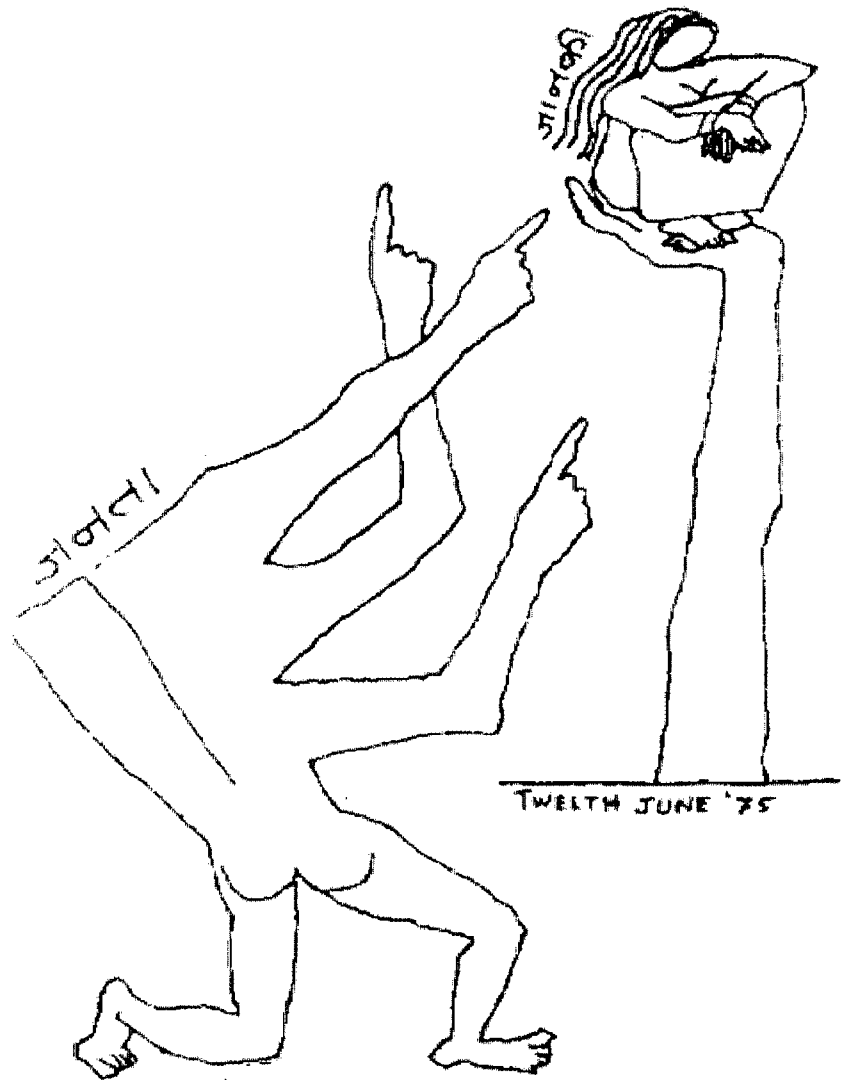


Figure 12:
M.F.Husain, *Twelfth [sic] June '75*, (Panel one, detail)
Illustrated Weekly of India, July 27, 1975.

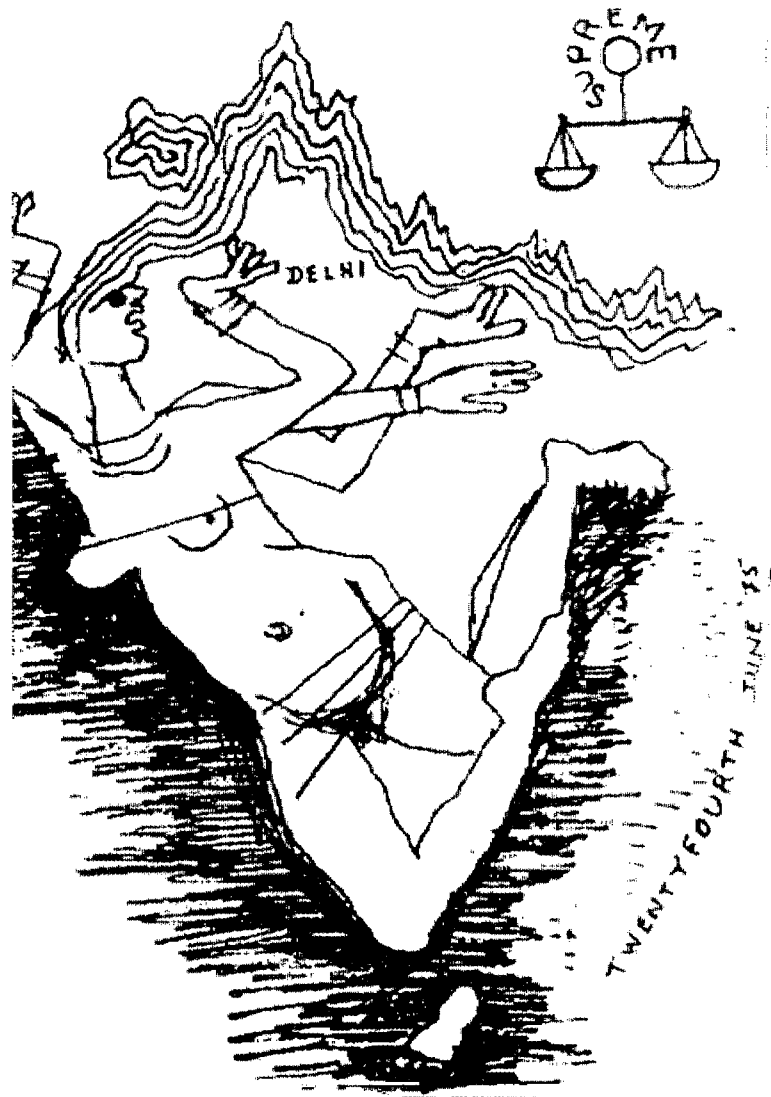


Figure 13:
M.F. Husain, "Twentyfourth June '75, (Panel two, detail)
Illustrated Weekly of India, July 27, 1975.



Figure 14:
M.F. Husain, "Twentysixth June '75, (Panel three, detail)
Illustrated Weekly of India, July 27, 1975



Figure 15:
Indira as Durga, 1974.

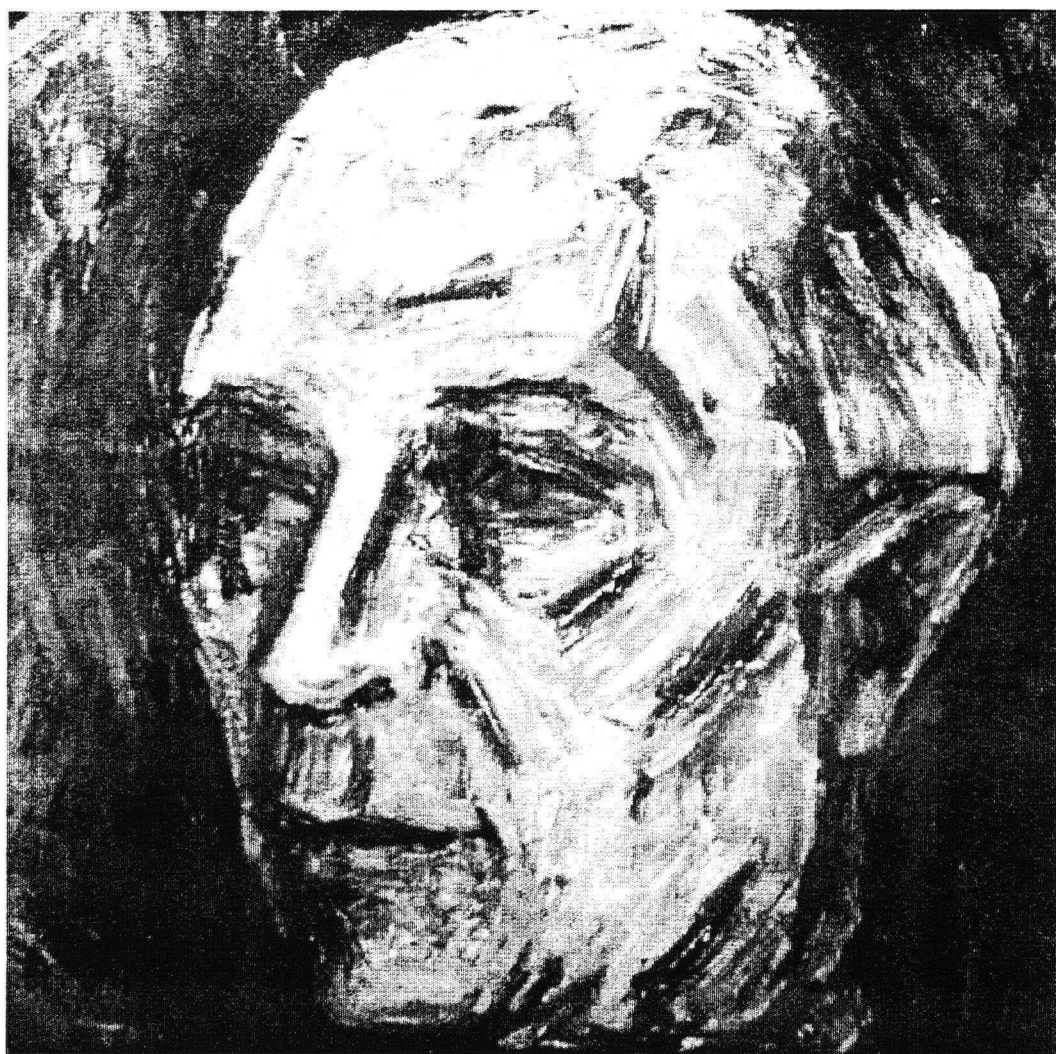


Figure 16:
M.F. Husain, *Nehru*, 1963



Figure 17:
M.F. Husain, *Four Faces of Nehru*, 1964.



Figure 18:
M.F. Husain, *Indira Gandhi*, c.1985.



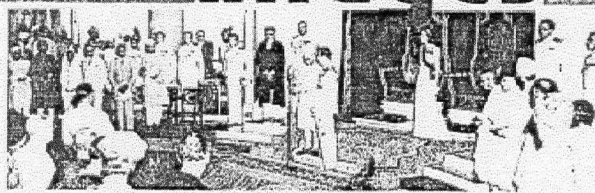
Figure 19:
Ashokan Pillar, Third century B.C.



Images



BALU, a 19-year-old student of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, is the first Indian to win the prestigious 'Young Scientist Award' for his research in the field of nanotechnology. The award, presented by the Indian Academy of Sciences, recognizes his work on the synthesis of carbon nanotubes. Balu, who is currently a postgraduate student at IIT Bombay, has been working on this project for the past two years. His research has led to the development of a new method for synthesizing carbon nanotubes, which has the potential to revolutionize the field of nanotechnology. The award is a testament to Balu's exceptional talent and dedication to his work.



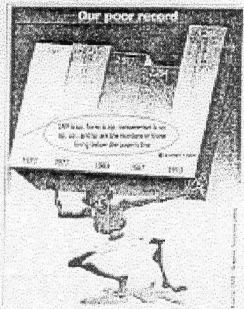
protesters in the city of Mumbai, India, are demanding the government to take action against the rising prices of essential commodities. The protesters, who are mostly women, are holding demonstrations in front of government offices and markets. They are demanding that the government should take steps to control the prices of essential commodities and ensure that they are affordable for all. The government has responded by announcing a series of measures to control prices, but the protesters are not satisfied with the government's response. They are demanding more action from the government.

FREEZE FRAME

by Shyam Bhangal



Deepa, a 25-year-old woman, is sitting on a bench in a park in Mumbai, India. She is looking down at a small object in her hands, which she has just found. She is a student at a local school and is looking for things to sell to support her studies. She has been sitting on this bench for hours, hoping to find something. She is a poor girl and needs the money. She is looking at the object with a mix of hope and disappointment. She has found a small, old, and worn-out object. She is not sure what it is, but she thinks it might be worth something. She is looking at it for a long time, trying to figure out what it is. She is a poor girl and needs the money. She is looking at the object with a mix of hope and disappointment.



"Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge... At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom."

— Jawaharlal Nehru



Today, Indians will hold their heads up high with pride as the midnight is marked to celebrate fifty glorious years of freedom.

In these fifty years, India has taken its rightful place as the fastest of the world of science, art and industry.

Celebrate. It's the dawn of a new golden era for India.

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Because we are committed to ensuring that the golden miles of independence is but the beginning of a new golden era for the country.

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"A year ago, we made a tryst with destiny and the time has come for us to redeem our pledge... it always goes better on very bad."

— Jawaharlal Nehru

Ford

DEMAND THE VERY BEST

Figure 20: "Images" The Times of India, August 15, 1997.

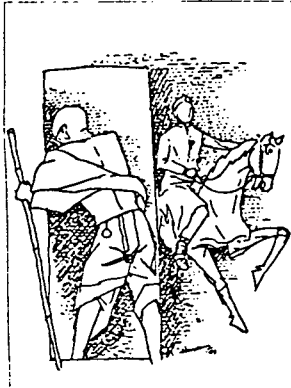
Specially created for
The Times of India's
Independence Day issue

India 50

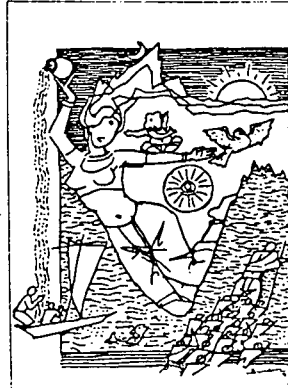
50 years of Emerging India: A

India 50

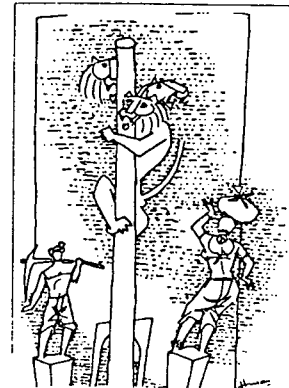
Triptych by M F Husain



Gandhi goes into
the frame of
our history
and Jawaharlal
Nehru appears
riding the white
horse like a Gosh of
lightning on the
horizon of hope
and frustration



Contours of our
great country
emerge into the
image of Mother
India sprinkling
Ganges water from
one hand, the
other releasing the
bird of freedom.
Gandhi perched
on her arm like
Bhagat



She with a gesture
on her head, he
with a plough on
his shoulder.
Witness the
three-headed lion
of the Indian
Republic climbing
the Ashoka Pillar
of our time

Figure 21:

M.F. Husain, *50 Years of Emerging India*,
The Times of India, August 15, 1997.



Figure 22:
M.F. Husain, Panel one, detail,
The Times of India, August 15, 1997.

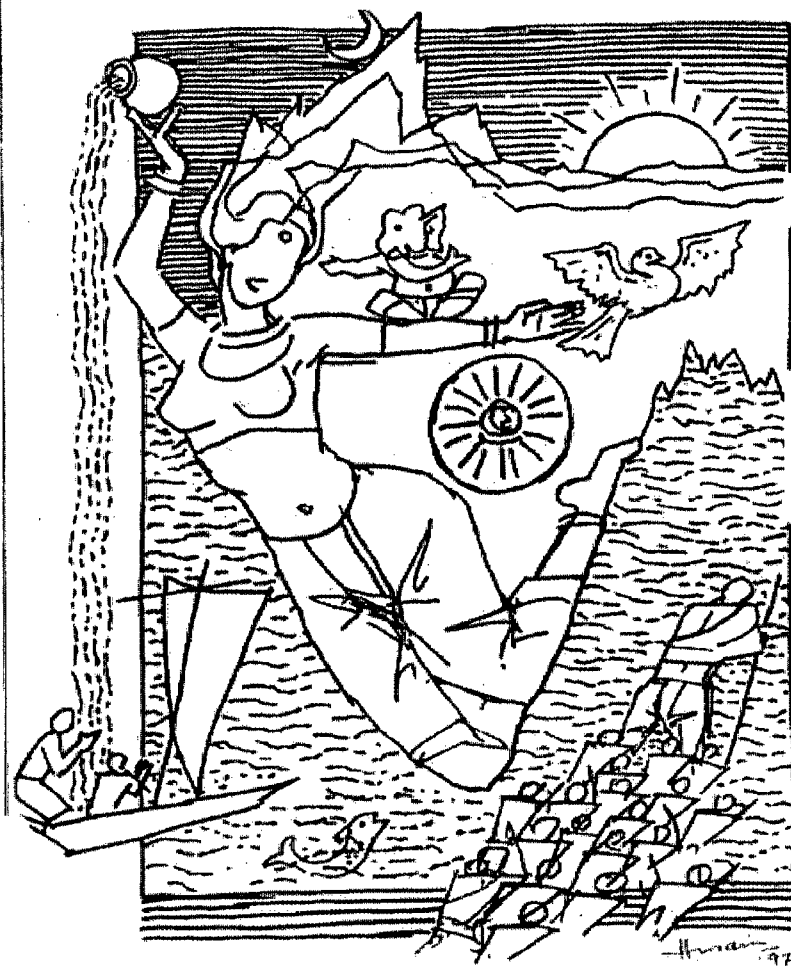


Figure 23:
M.F. Husain, Panel two, detail,
The Times of India, August 15, 1997.

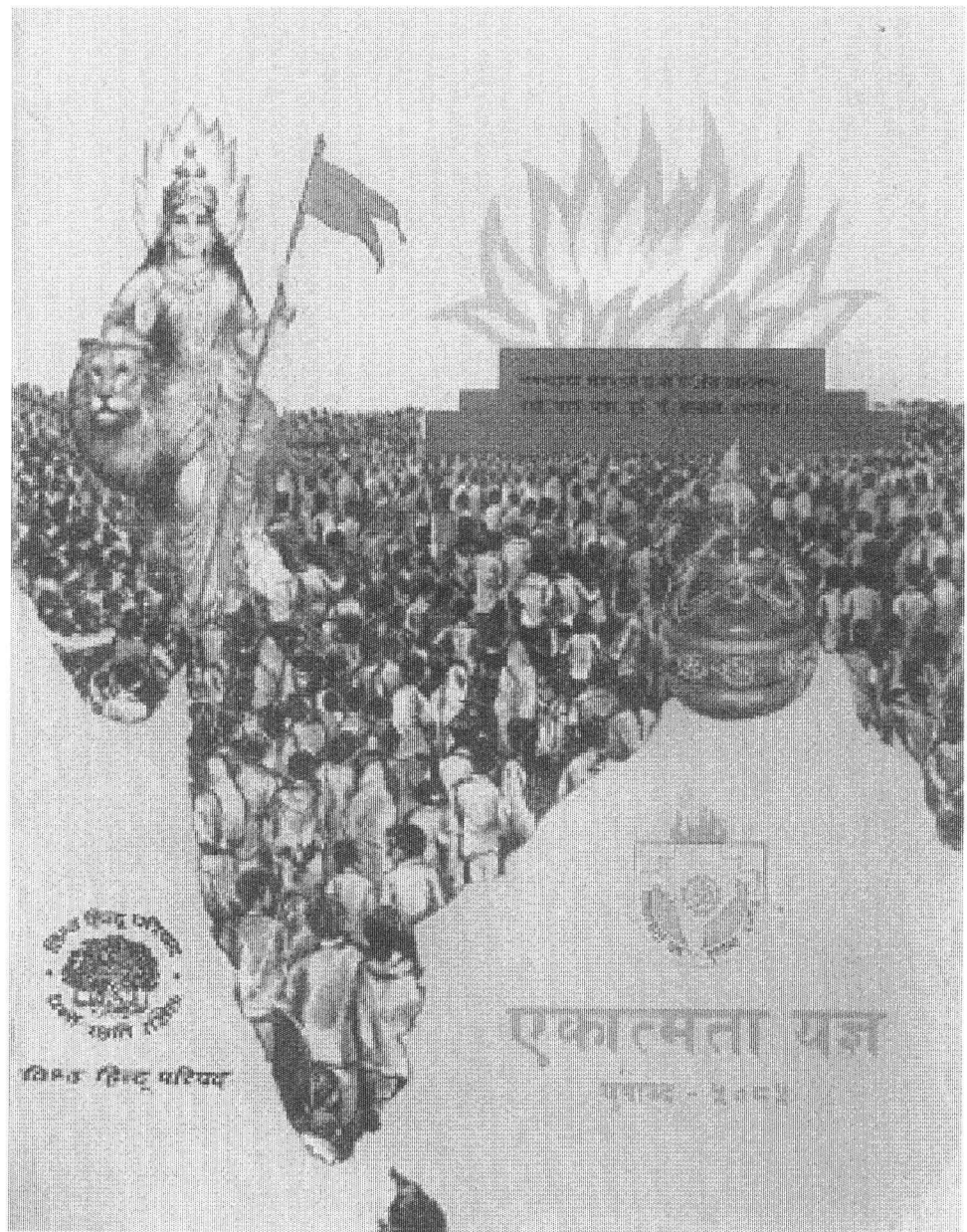


Figure 24:
Ektamata Yajna cover, souvenir volume, 1983.

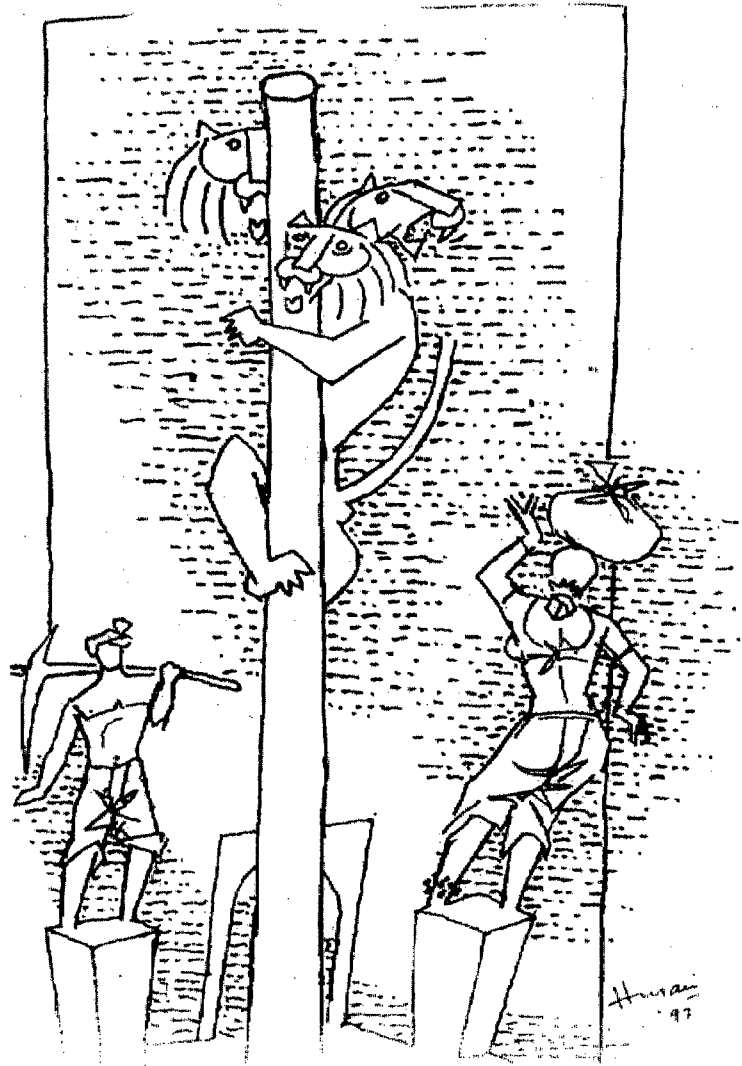


Figure 25:
M.F. Husain, Panel three, detail,
The Times of India, August 15, 1997.

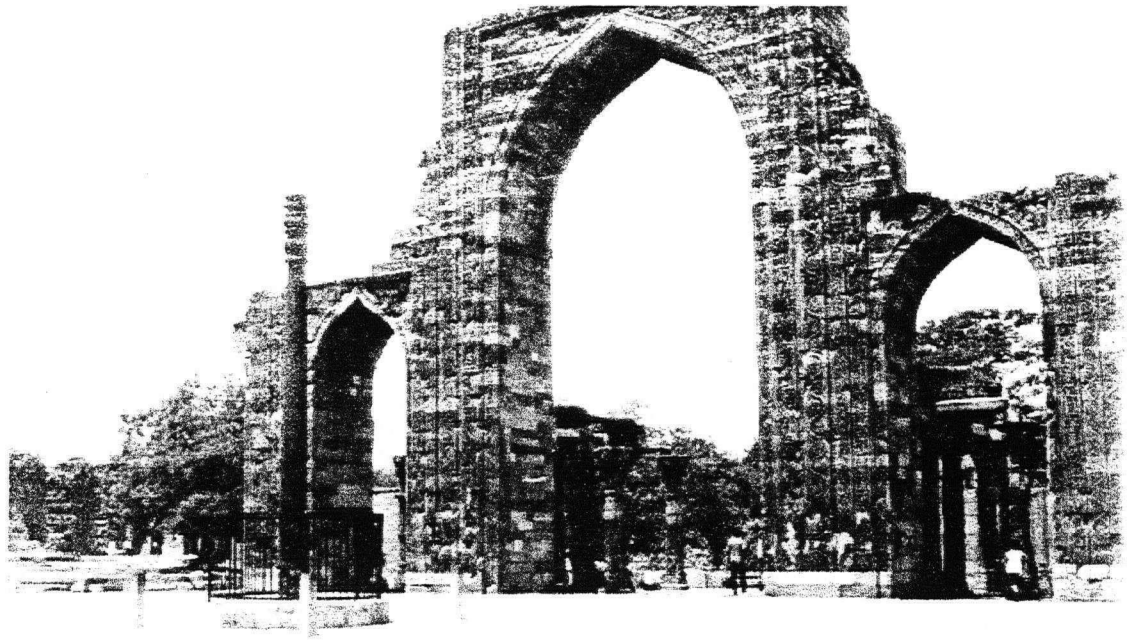


Figure 26:
Iron Pillar, Qutb Mosque Complex,



Figure 27:
M.F. Husain, *Teen Murti*, circa 1985.

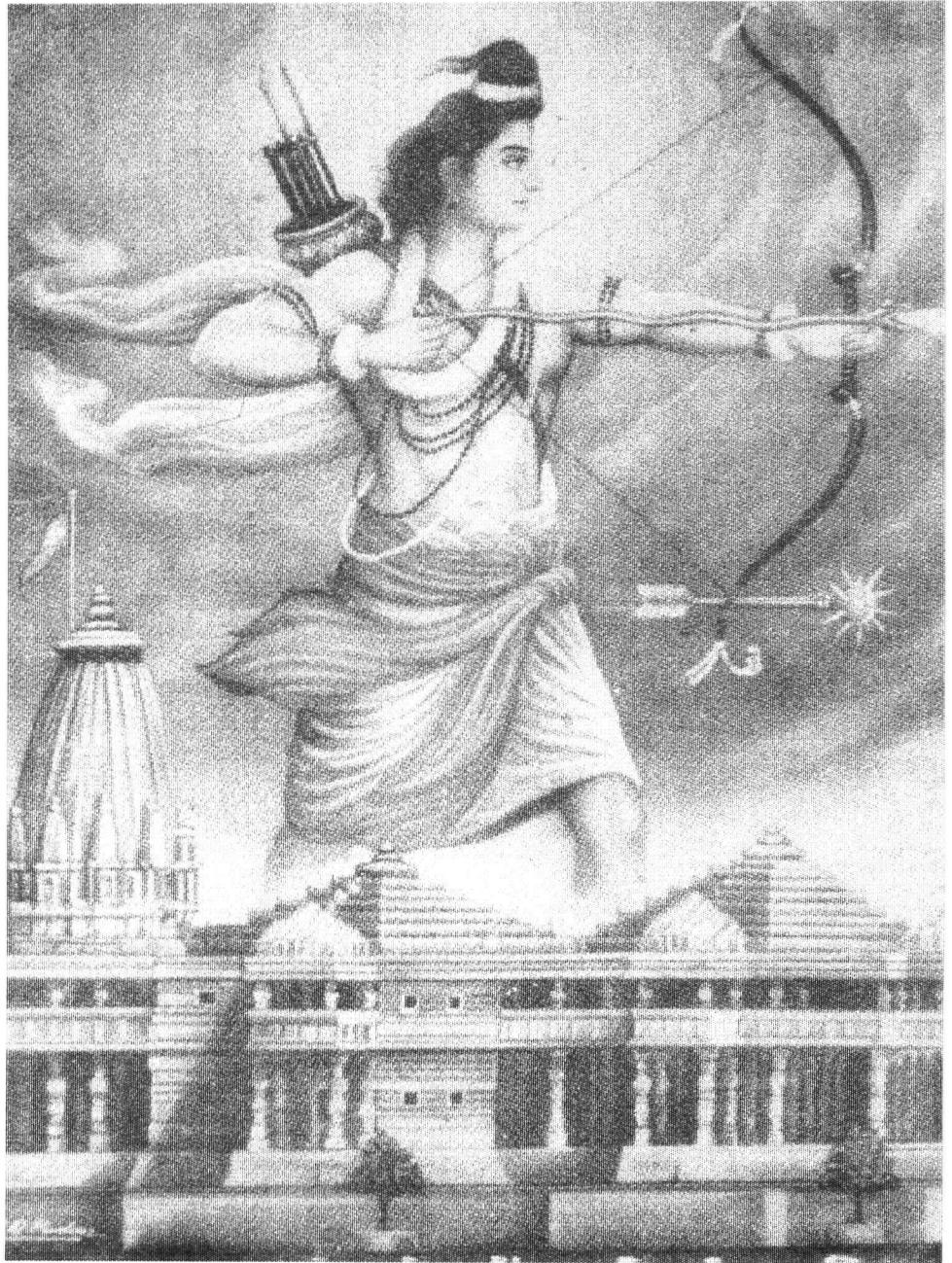


Figure 28:
Ram at Ayodhya, VHP poster, circa 1992.

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