

INDIGENOUS SPECTRES, SUBVERSIVE *LILAS*: ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN
NAWABI AUTHORITY, COLONIALISM AND POPULAR RITUAL IN
LUCKNOW

By

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ABSTRACT

The constructions of religion and ritual have been central to constituting a colonial vision of India and *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* is an important and early visual site of this dynamic and history. This small watercolor painting was completed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, an intense and conflicted period in which the rulers of Awadh and their negotiations of self and sovereignty had to contend with the forceful power/knowledge nexus of colonialism. I argue that *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* draws upon the vocabularies of the picturesque and the sublime for a construction of knowledge that would be instrumental in justifying colonization. I illustrate the ways in which such a colonial project is an anxious one, continually put into crisis by how kingship is negotiated in Awadh. Specifically, I employ caste, a key colonial trope for othering and homogenizing India, as an important and intricate site for the Nawabi brokering of power. Caste, marked by contesting Shia Nawabi and colonial constructions, is further destabilized by the proliferating, rebellious and resistant identities that it attempts to domesticate. These identities have to negotiate other dominant narratives, such as the colonial discourse on “criminality”, and I explore these negotiations in relation to subaltern histories and memories. This theoretical position works to hybridize from below the visual terrain of colonial modernity and productively allows the dense sites of resistances to be brought out; thus, in my textured reading, *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* emerges as a multifaceted site of social struggles. I position these struggles within a social arena in which divinity, asceticism, labor, gender, class, caste and *adivasi*-ness weave in and out of each other in several directions. This complex arena is mapped in my thesis through visual analysis of *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* and its relationship to other discursive practices. Significantly, I also develop how *lila*, *bhakti* and Sufism, as social practices inhabiting the discursive spaces of the image, allow

rethinking of agency and subjecthood in a manner that critiques the modern-historical imagining of time/space as only singular and secular.

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For Fabiola, my humsafar and farishta

Introduction

I. Project Overview

The focus of my thesis is *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* (c.1800), a small watercolour painting (14 x 17.5 in) that is presently located at the British Library in London. *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* is highly animated with a crowd of men gathered in front of a large walled gateway, mimicking and parodying North Indian symbols of royalty, as part of the rituals of Holi. Holi recalls “tribal” and *adivasi* traditions through its celebration of spring, and though undoubtedly associated with Hinduism by the eighteenth century, was also a festival much patronized and celebrated by the Mughals.¹ Marking fertility and regeneration by invoking renewal through a symbolic re-ordering of society, Holi in a courtly context becomes tied to the performance of authority and the construction of ideal subjects. In *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, divinity, kingship and regeneration are negotiated by “common” bodies dabbed in colour, joyously moving to the rhythm of music and performing social reversals of class and caste. The rituals of reversal are about play or *lila* with social boundaries, which through popular Hindu or Muslim perspectives demonstrate the *transformative* power of a relationship with the divine.² In other words, *lila* during Holi is capable of producing reversal, change and renewal in the physical world by linking the belief in the power of the divine to the possibilities of socio-political transformation.

¹ The patronage of the festival of Holi by Mughal and regional courts is evident in court paintings. See Steven Kossak, *Indian Court Painting 16th-19th Century* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997). Also, for the “Hindu” reading of Holi in colonial descriptions and visual renderings of the festival see Indira Ghose, ed., *Memsahibs Abroad: Writings by Women Travellers in Nineteenth Century India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) and W. G. Archer, *Company Paintings: Indian Paintings of the British Period* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1992). The *adivasi* and “tribal” origins become clearer once one relates Holi to the celebration of spring. The celebration of different seasons by *adivasi* peoples is referred to in Geeti Sen, ed., *Indigenous Vision: Peoples of India Attitudes to the Environment* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992).

² Leona M. Anderson, *Vasantotsava: The Spring Festivals of India* (New Delhi: DK Print-World Ltd, 1993): 165 - 66.

These powerful dimensions of Holi, when contextualized within the history of Lucknow, provide a rich avenue for excavating multivocal histories and their encounters with British colonialism. By 1800, Lucknow was fully caught up in transactions of power between elite Shia Nawabs and the British East India Company. Negotiating the central orbits of the Mughal Empire as well as the emerging British Empire, Lucknow's newly arrived minority rulers from Persia had to delicately broker their claims of authority over the city.³ The Shia Nawabs promoted the ideology of a tolerant, eclectic and synthetic engagement, which later came into a vexed dialogue with British colonial discourses around the "public", the "rational" and the "secular".⁴ I explore how these competing narratives of authority frame representational strategies in *The Holi Festival of Lucknow* as well as how "common bodies" negotiate them.

In other words, my project investigates how dominant narratives rely on a discursive construction of subaltern subjects and how these subjects disturb both Nawabi and British colonial ideologies. More specifically, I explore the visual rhetoric of *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* and its discursive construction of *adivasi*-ness in a complex and multifaceted manner, in which labor, divinity, asceticism, gender, class, caste and "tribe" inform how I read both dominant and resistant meanings in the image. I locate sites of anxiety, resistance and violence in the image through performative concepts such as *lila* (play) and *bhakti* (participation), as well as through Sufi discourses on power and parody, thereby capturing the explosive nature of ritual in its encounters with British colonialism as well as Nawabi authority. These social discourses are deployed not because they are "aspects" of "religious" systems but because they are an important way in which subalterns inhabit divinity and the social world.

³ Richard B. Barnett, *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals and the British: 1720-1801* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

⁴ Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow 1856-77* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

II. Theoretical Framework

The deployment of the term *adivasi* (first peoples) instead of “tribal”, and the histories and identities that are marked by it, are part of a highly contested academic discourse and I wish to start by laying out why and how I seek to explore *adivasi*-ness in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*. Sumit Guha has pointed to the colonial origins of the category “tribe”, of its homogenizing and arbitrary nature and its racist evolutionary underpinnings.⁵ He has also shown how “tribe” operates as a site for constructing an unchanged, “primitive” group identity for the “other” that is uncontaminated by modernity.⁶ However, he is resistant to instead use the term *adivasi* as he sees it having originated, pace Crispin Bates, in the early part of the twentieth century and to imply “substantial genetic continuity” which he argues cannot be proven.⁷ However, as I see it, in dismissing *adivasi* identity for its “unproven” claim for ancient presence or indigeneity, Guha ignores the strong socio-political import of deploying the term as a strategy for struggle and representation locally, nationally and internationally.⁸

Crispin Bates does note how the term *adivasi* was first employed in the 1930s as an effort to unite different “tribes” in their struggles against injustice and oppression.⁹ Bates further delineates the importance of *adivasi* as an identity to lay claim to non-hegemonic understandings

⁵ Sumit Guha, “Lower Strata: Older Races, and Aboriginal Peoples: Racial Anthropology and Mythical History Past and Present,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, 2 (May 1998): 423 - 441.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 424 - 428.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 433.

⁸ For a critique of dismissing *adivasi* as a term on the basis of chronology see B. K. Roy Burman, *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples: Gathering Mist and New Horizon* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1994). Burman also comments on how the UN has shaped the international discourse on indigenous peoples and how this discourse does and does not relate to India. At the same time he is able to argue how that discourse is highly important for indigenous and tribal peoples in India. He wishes to read indigeneity and “tribal” as woven discourses in the international rights arena and to also grapple with the North/South divide, elite national discourses as well as specific histories of different peoples within South Asia. His interventions are an important corrective to that of Guha and Bates.

⁹ Crispin Bates, “‘Lost Innocents and the Loss of Innocence’: Interpreting *Adivasi* Movements in South Asia,” *Indigenous Peoples of Asia*, eds., R. H. Barnes, Andrew Gray, and Benedict Kingsbury, (Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies, 1995): 104.

of the past and to redress dispossession and inequalities.¹⁰ Nonetheless, like Guha, he sees *adivasi* identity and its imagining of politics as “fatally flawed” due to its imbrication in colonial conceptions of contract and property, and the invocation of golden, mythic pasts.¹¹ However, what both Bates and Guha cannot hold together is the very hybridity of *adivasi*-ness, historical and contemporary, the colonial legacy out of which the discourse is articulated, and the turbulent ground of international political representation. The contradictions and negotiations among the borders of these entangled arenas point not to the uselessness but rather the productive, powerful and hybrid potentialities and contestations of *adivasi* discourses.¹²

Thus, in my paper, I position *adivasi*-ness as a significant narrative: not one that exists in isolation but rather forcefully intersects with issues of caste, class and gender. These dynamics provide important ways of thinking through the rhetorics at play in the encounter between Awadh and the East India Company. Rhetoric is concerned with constructing meaning that extends much further than mere insertion of cultural information or history into the vibrant operations of a visual or literary text, brilliantly demonstrated by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*.¹³ Rhetoric involves composing and creating meaning and legibility, and I seek to argue that how British colonialism and Nawabi narratives negotiate authority is reliant on discourses of sovereignty and kingship in which caste, class, gender and *adivasi*-ness inhabit hybrid discursive arenas. In reading *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* through these complex parameters, I also hope to counter readings in which social meanings and identities, especially in

¹⁰ Bates, “‘Lost Innocents’,” 118 - 119.

¹¹ Ibid. In contrast, Ajay Skaria in *Hybrid Frontiers: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999): 268 - 281 underscores the need and the importance of claiming *adivasi* identities. I take up Skaria and his arguments in more detail in a later section.

¹² See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) for a general vision of such a practice and politics.

¹³ Edward Said, *Cultural and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994). This thesis is haunted by Said’s great and soulful presence. For an excellent take on rhetoric and its relationship to cultural ‘race’ politics and colonialism see Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham, eds., *Race, Rhetoric and the Postcolonial* (Albany: State University of New York, 1999).

relation to indigeneity, are constituted as static and monolithic, rather than intertextual and intersubjective. This critical gesture owes a great debt to the work of Homi Bhabha and his insistence that “hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to represent the unpredictability of its presence.”¹⁴

Thus, my thesis is concerned with the manifold ways in which subalterns are always already inscribed into elite transactions and form a disturbing presence. In relation to India, and also more generally, the work of the Subaltern Studies collective has been seminal in opening up the field to such theoretical reworkings.¹⁵ Taking my cue from Subaltern Studies that the dominant writings of histories are predicated on construction of other-ed subalterns, I analysis the visual rhetoric of *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* from below. Thus, I explore how divinity, asceticism, labor, gender, class, caste and *adivasi*-ness weave into each other in several directions, and map out the complicities and resistances to various dominant narratives in these intersections. Furthermore, the concept of the subaltern is linked to the social terrain that is cut off from mobility and thus, as Gayatri Spivak captures it, there is “something of a not-speakingness in the very notion of subalternity.”¹⁶ Therefore, if despite foregrounding sites of assertion in the face of erasure and violence, the subaltern communities that I shore up remain ghostly, that should act as a powerful reminder of the ways in which the subaltern does not catch.

¹⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, “Sign Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817,” *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994): 114. For a deeply nuanced discussion of the poetics and politics of hybridity in relation to the work of Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Gloria Anzaldua, turn to detailed interviews with these scholars in Olson and Worsham, eds., *Race, Rhetoric and the Postcolonial*. Avtar Brah and Annie E. Coombs, eds., *Hybridity and its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000) provides a more wide-ranging discussion on the topic.

¹⁵ For a good overview of the work of the collective see Ranajit Guha, ed., *A Subaltern Studies Reader 1986-1995* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000). For the exploration of subaltern methodologies in relation to Latin America see Ileana Rodriguez, ed., *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Subaltern Talk: An Interview with the Editors,” *The Spivak Reader*, eds., Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (New York: Routledge, 1996): 289.

This “failure” to catch narrates a form of epistemic violence and haunts my thesis because colonialism, in terms of how it has shaped me as well as the writing of history has meant that the texts I engage with are from the other side. However, as Spivak argues, despite such difficulties the subaltern past must still be attended to and hence my constant excavation of traces of other/ed memories and histories. In conceptualizing how to think through such traces within the context of a representation of a religious festival, I have turned to Dipesh Chakrabarty. Chakrabarty argues that we should think of the historical as always already marked by the presence of gods and spirits rather than deny agency to the “supernatural” and to view “religion” as a form of displacement and alienation.¹⁷ My employment of *lila* and *bhakti* as conceptual springboards for my image, rather than as mere sociological aspects of “Hinduism”, shares Chakrabarty’s deep critique of how agency and time figure in historical paradigms. As he eloquently argues, one needs to critique the “assumption running through European modern political thought and the social sciences...that the human is ontologically singular, that gods and spirits are in the end ‘social facts’, that the social somehow exists prior to them.”¹⁸

The critique is especially pertinent to my image as it relates to the celebration of a popular spring festival that is about social reversals and parodies and is normally understood through the paradigm of ritual.¹⁹ Although the ritual has been powerfully reconstituted by scholars like Nicholas Dirks as a site of the everyday and of resistance, rather than “tradition” or “order”, the modes of imagining subject-hood in ritual are not generally taken as significant points of departure – the historian remains “outside” rather than there being a relationship

¹⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Minority Histories: Subaltern Pasts,” *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000): 97 - 113.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁹ A seminal reading of the festival within the paradigm of ritual is that of McKim Marriott, “The Feast of Love,” *Krishna: Myths, Rites and Attitudes*, ed., Milton Singer (Honolulu: East-West Centre Press, 1966): 200 - 212. Christopher Allan Bayly provides a brief reading based on such understandings of ritual in relation to *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* in *The Raj: India and the British 1600-1947*, ed., Christopher Allan Bayly (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 1991): 288.

whereby the modes of inhabiting divinity disrupt historical explanation.²⁰ Instead of constructing “ritual” as a site of the alterity of the “East” or of “Hinduism”, I take it as a significant, everyday way of constructing meaning that destabilizes the historian’s or anthropologist’s own domain, challenging objectification and disciplinary notions of time and space. Thus, *lila* and *bhakti* that inhabit the social worlds of Holi are also present in my thesis as sites of critique of Eurocentricity and to challenge the idea of a single and secular historical time.

In addition, I think through the paradigms of *lila* and *bhakti*, as well as the dynamics of British colonialism and Nawabi authority, as they are embodied in the social relations and histories of Awadh. However, my focus on “specificity” and historical context should not be read as constructing a very narrow sense of local/regional histories around the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. “Specificity” as Gayatri Spivak has powerfully articulated also concerns the location and site of the enunciation of knowledge and its political valence today, and I hope my own formation as an Indian elite, colonially educated, now diasporic and a resident-citizen in the settler-colony of Canada, haunts this thesis and does not allow one to forget that this project is as much about the past as it is about the vanishing present.²¹ This construction of history writing as a vested process of subject-hood and power, as it reads through the North/South divide, and the politics of Empire in the present, should serve to remind us that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in India were also a time of a different kind of globalization and imperialism, and to fix too literally on the “local” is to ignore the transnational and transregional traffics in Lucknow and Awadh that were reconstituting the local. Thus, my project is very significantly informed by Gayatri Spivak’s concepts of “transnational literacy” as

²⁰ Nicholas B. Dirks, “Ritual as Resistance: Subversion as a Social Fact,” *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, eds., Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994): 482 - 503.

²¹ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

well as the more recent one of “planetarity”, in which the specific or the local is not construed narrowly but in an open-ended manner that remains attuned to different agendas, histories and idioms at play, and where the past and the vanishing present are made to work together.²²

²² See Spivak, *Death of the Discipline*. It is to be noted that such a theoretical framework allows me to go beyond earlier literature which relied on a predominantly style based classification of colonial representations. For example, note Mildred Archer and R. Lightbown, *India Observed* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982) and more recently Barbara Schimtz, ed., *After the Great Mughals: Painting in Delhi and the Regional Courts in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2002). Recent critical scholarship, especially that of Christopher Pinney, “Colonial Anthropology,” *The Raj: India and the British 1600-1947*, ed., Christopher Allan Bayly (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 1991) and Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) locate colonial strategies of knowledge as intimately tied to the exercise of power in a complex manner. In terms of how the visual can be rethought in relation to these and other significant interventions that I have mentioned in my introduction, Christopher Pinney and Rachel Dwyer, eds., *Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001) provides a good starting point.

Chapter One

Re-ordering Space

The Holi Festival at Lucknow (fig.1) is a watercolor on paper, a medium in common use during the Mughal period with which Lucknow had an ongoing relationship. The city was made the capital of the Awadh province in 1580 AD and remained a decentralized extension of Mughal power until 1722.²³ However, the use of watercolour without the application of ink, and gold and silver, marks a move away from earlier courtly painting traditions.²⁴ Considering that since 1722 Awadh had become a largely independent yet allied state to the Mughal Empire, and that regional patronage to the arts was strong, such innovations came to announce a distinct cultural identity. Further, in no longer making integral the geometrically devised framework or a view from on high, the regional visual vocabularies were to become more differentiated – the contrast between *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* and *A Holi Celebration* (fig.2) done in Awadh thirty-five years earlier, highlights these shifts in cultural production. It is true that the move away from such a framework to the development of the gaze at the level of on-looker, and from foreground to background, along with the transitioning from light to dark, had occurred at the Mughal court since the 1560s through encounters with European art, much before Company rule.²⁵ However, Awadh's fraught relationship with emergent British colonialism is crucial to illuminating the *extent* of the engagement with European art vocabularies, and also marks the beginning of a more persistent emphasis on the European/colonial techniques of realism.

²³ Amaresh Misra, *Lucknow: Fire of Grace, The Story of its Revolution, Renaissance and the Aftermath* (New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd., 1998): 9.

²⁴ See Barbara Schimtz, ed., *After the Great Mughals*, for discussion of late Mughal and regional painting styles.

²⁵ See B. N. Goswamy and Eberhard Fischer, *Wonders of a Golden Age* (Zurich: Museum Rietberg, 1987) and Milo Cleveland Beach, *Mughal and Rajput Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). This process had begun in Akbar's court in the 1560s, for examples see Beach, 52 - 55.

In other words, *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, with its view at the level of the onlooker and three-dimensional recession of space, cannot just be seen, as has been argued for an earlier moment, as “internally induced Europeanisms.”²⁶ As Ayesha Jamal argues, the introduction of three-dimensional perspective with a single vanishing point acts to subalternize “all other forms and objects in the composition” and is distinct from “the miniature of the old [in this case regional appropriations of it] with its own unique sense of space, time, movement, colour and form.”²⁷ The British were in extensive control of Awadh’s resources and interfered considerably in its politics, even deciding the successor to the throne in 1798;²⁸ the emergence of a street scene of a popular festival in European visual rhetoric must then be viewed within the context of this charged encounter with British colonialism. The Nawabs had to negotiate the loss of the glory of the Mughal Empire that though holding little power over them, added to their legitimacy and prestige; at the same time, the East India Company emerged as a major political force and only in such a moment, does one see a visual vocabulary where the Mughal elements (especially the way the movement of the bent figure is realized) haunt *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* but do not remain integral to it. In fact, as Michael Fischer has asserted, though Mughal power was waning, the rulers of Awadh as well as the East India Company continued to give *de jure* recognition to the Emperor due to considerable symbolic legitimacy and allegiance the Mughal Empire could accrue, thanks to its long standing relationships with landholding and administrative elites.²⁹ These traces, however, are marginalized in the colonial reworking of the aesthetics and the emerging hegemony of three-dimensional perspective and its displacement of

²⁶ J. P. Losty, “Towards a New Naturalism: Portraiture in Murshidabad and Avadh, 1750-80,” in *After the Great Mughals*, 51.

²⁷ Ayesha Jamal, “The Muslim Self and the Loss of Sovereignty: Individual and Community Before 1858,” *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge, 2000): 14.

²⁸ C.A. Bayly, “Rebellion and Reconstruction,” *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 171 and Aniruddha Ray “Accession and the Deposition of Vizir Ali Khan,” *The Rebel Nawab of Oudh: Revolt of Vizir Ali Khan, 1799*, (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi and Company, 1999): 51 - 78.

²⁹ Michael Fischer, *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British, and the Mughals* (Madras: Manohar, 1987).

other ways of ordering space are an allegory of the political reordering of self and sovereignty under colonialism in eighteenth and nineteenth-century India.

How the subject matter of Holi is framed further supports the argument that status and identity are being reconstituted in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*. Most paintings of Holi from courtly contexts as well as later Nawabi traditions revolve around a ruler celebrating with his subjects, harem women celebrating among themselves or with the rulers, or are related to the play between Radha and Krishna.³⁰ For example, in the earlier painting *A Holi Celebration* (see fig.2), the Nawab of Awadh is shown sitting on his marble terrace that looks onto the walled garden, celebrating the festival in the presence of a large number of women and some male attendants, courtiers and musicians. Not only is the Nawab's authority articulated through his central spatial location and the presence of those attending upon him, and celebrating with him, but also through the territorial expanse of the garden. What are also claimed are the different spatialities, of the terrace scene, the garden, and the landscape beyond, discontinuous but to be contemplated together, and creating flatness and depth, intimacy and distance. In contrast, *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* centres on a "public" procession of "common" bodies, outside a city *darwazah* (gateway), with no outright reference to kingship. This "secular" angle on Holi, completed around 1800, marks a colonial/modern re-conception of the "public" and an imagining of "religion" as a domain separate from the "truly" political.³¹ Sandria Freitag has revealed how the distinction between "private" and "public" was deployed under colonialism to argue that only the colonial state could be the rightful and benevolent authority to guard "public" interests and how India's communities were based on "religious" or "particular" interests, and

³⁰ See Kossak, 1997 and Linda York Leach, *Indian Miniature Paintings and Drawings* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1986).

³¹ For a discussion of the Enlightenment rhetoric informing the construction of the "religious" and how it was deployed under colonialism in India see Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and the Mystic East* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

hence unable to cater to “public” needs.³² The intimacy as well as the perspectival depth of *The Holi Festival of Lucknow* is then meant to constitute a deep colonial knowledge of India, and this knowledge is closely tied to the exercise of colonial power.

The Aesthetics of Colonialism

In *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, the confident attention to detail – every fold and shadow of the clothes, every brick and every leaf of the tree is carefully painted – is an allegory of an attempt at intimate knowledge. This knowledge is constructed through two key colonial constructions of space and place, the picturesque and the sublime. Thomas Daniell and his nephew William Daniell, who Partha Mitter credits with being two of the most influential British artists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, were key to bringing these colonial aesthetics into play in the representations of India.³³ The Daniells had also been to Lucknow and created works such as *Gates of the Palace at Lucknow* (c.1801) (fig.3) and *Palace of Nawab Shuja-ud-daula at Lucknow* (n.d.) (fig.4). In these images, the picturesque operates in a very particular manner; it is not so much how the landscape is portrayed, but rather the site represented (Lucknow) and the “exotic” elements (Nawabi buildings) that are included, which allow the picturesque to cohere. The picturesque as an aesthetic category had been re-worked in late eighteenth century Britain by Uvedale Price, who associated it with irregularity, variation, and intricacy.³⁴ Lucknow, in being constructed by the British as far away and “exotic” and as the

³² Sandria B. Freitag, “Contesting in Public: Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Communalism” in *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, ed., David Ludden (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996): 212.

³³ Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 126.

³⁴ Uvedale Price, “On the Picturesque.” (1810) University of Pennsylvania English Department. 2003. July 25, 2003 < <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/price.html> >

city ruled by an Oriental despot,³⁵ becomes a loaded site for a specific kind of picturesque “irregularity”.

This “irregularity” is shored up by the focus on Nawabi architecture, and its asymmetrical placement in the picture plane in both *Gates of the Palace* and the *Palace of Nawab Shuja-ud-daulah*. There is certain specificity to the gateway and the palace as Daniells’ probably observed the architectural details during their visit to Lucknow.³⁶ However, the buildings, amidst the more familiar and dramatically romantic scenery of rolling clouds and beautiful water, become more of a loose “Oriental” feature. To develop a sense of how the architecture of Lucknow and Lucknow itself is rendered picturesque, one needs to turn to the colonial rhetoric on the city. In the political letters written on Awadh by different British officials in the 1790s, there is constant mention of “rapacity and oppression” of subjects under the Nawab, of the Nawab’s “habits of indolence and pleasure”, which are seen to define the “disposition” and “character” of other courtiers as well, and explain the “nature of his [the Nawab’s government]” and the consequent “wretched state” of the kingdom.³⁷ This has direct links to architecture in the city, which can be drawn out through reference to a 1791 account by Abu Talib, a pro-British court official in the Nawab’s service.

Talib outlines how the Nawab takes over poor peoples lands, throws them out of their houses, utilizes building material by taking down his subjects’ residences, hoards the labour of

³⁵ Alexander Dow writing in 1770 had argued how India is ruled by Oriental Despots who have no sense of laws or of property and, hence, people under them have no rights. According to him, as Indians had been so accustomed to being “slaves”, the British had the onus to turn them into “moral” and “enlightened” subjects. Warren Hastings disagreed with this rhetoric in part and argued that India had ancient laws that had been preserved and they needed to be upheld and the study of Sanskrit encouraged. In other words, India was once magnificent but now fallen into despotism and needed colonial intervention. These observations are documented in Thomas Metcalf, “Britain and India in the Eighteenth Century,” *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 6 - 15.

³⁶ For comparing the images to photographic documentation of architectural buildings from the Nawabi period, see Saiyed Anwer Abbas, *The Perishing Art of Nawabi Lucknow* (Lucknow: Pnar Offset, 2002).

³⁷ *Letters, Political, Military and Commercial on the Present State of the Government of the Province of Oude and its Dependencies* (London: University of London Press, 1903): 4 - 8.

the city, and in the end the hasty yet extravagant projects are abandoned or begin to fall apart.³⁸ Thus, the landscapes of the Daniells, prominently displaying Nawabi architecture, bathed in sunlight in images like *The Palace of Shuja-ud-daula*, inhabit the picturesque through colonial difference – the quite splendid imagery of the Nawabi buildings, contrasting strongly with the other structures which are smaller, crowded and cast in shadows, then emerges as more of a representation of “despotic” grandeur. The “irregularity” of the picturesque, which Uvedale Price delineates, comes to bear meaning in colonial images of Lucknow through the tropes of the incapable and indulgent Nawab and his oppressive rulership, of which the buildings are an important representational symbol.³⁹

This picturesque history comes to bear on *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, with the towering gateway standing in as an emblematic index. The use of *lakhori* (special, small) bricks and of *chunam* (stucco), materials generally more common to Lucknow and distinguishing it from other cities such as Delhi and Agra, are clearly marked in the image by the wall and gateway.⁴⁰ The disorder of Holi and different characters participating in the festival, all present in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, adding romantic “variability”, exaggerate the picturesque quality, as does the attempt to claim colonial knowledge through the image. For it is in giving shape and meaning to social space that picturesqueness can cohere, an elaboration highlighted by Price himself.⁴¹ The representation of diverse social actors within a clearly marked “oriental” space to shore up the picturesque is also evident in *The Gateway of the Palace at Lucknow* as one can notice a set of crowds, whose alterity is evoked through clothing and the presence of details like the bedecked elephants.

³⁸ Abu Talib, *History of Asaf-ud-Daulah, Nawab Wazir of Oudh*, trans., W. Hoey (1791; reprint, Lucknow: Prem Printing Press, 1974): 72 - 73.

³⁹ Price, “On the Picturesque.” < <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/price.html> >

⁴⁰ Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *A Fatal Friendship: The Nawabs, the British and the City of Lucknow* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985): 214 - 225.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

In addition to the picturesque, *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* is tied to the aesthetics of the Sublime. The Sublime as a category was re-conceptualized in 1757 by Edmund Burke, who related an aspect of the Sublime to the ideas of danger and terror that “hurries us on by an irresistible force.”⁴² Terror is linked to obscurity and revealingly the illustrative example given by Burke is of how despots rule by fear and generally keep themselves hidden from the public eye to rule by terror.⁴³ Terror is also evoked through Burke’s example of the “heathen” temples that are kept dark.⁴⁴ Burke further relates the workings of the Sublime to the quality of humanity, which is made to lie with Christianity, and the development of sympathy in the aftermath of a tragedy. The latter aspect is illuminated through an imaginary scenario of the destruction of London, the metropolitan centre of British imperial power. Burke states that that were London to be destroyed and one had not even witnessed its days of glory, how immensely tragic and Sublime the event would be.⁴⁵ These conceptualizations and examples betray the political parameters of Burke’s sublime; the “irresistible” workings of terror, danger and power eerily evoke the tales of adventure, bravery and glory, which mark the rhetoric of British colonialism, and the tragic and the humane are aesthetically energized for this colonial terrain. At the same time, the discourse dehumanizes the “Orient” and constructs it as the site of “heathen” beliefs where non-“public” and non-transparent power resides.

Specifically, *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* shores up these tropes through its “heathen”/ “religious” thematic and the monumentality of the gateway, as scale is an important part of Burke’s formulation of what may aesthetically constitute the Sublime.⁴⁶ Thus, though the different figures in the image, from a colonial viewpoint, would represent different “castes”

⁴²Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed., James T. Boulton (1757; reprint, London: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987): 57.

⁴³ Ibid. , 58.

⁴⁴ Ibid. , 59.

⁴⁵ Ibid. , 70 and 48.

⁴⁶ Ibid. , 137-138.

participating in the rituals of “Hinduism”, this picturesque confidence in depicting Indians would be haunted by the discourse of the “obscurity” and “irrationality” of India as embodied in its aberrant “religiosity”.⁴⁷ The grand gateway that largely blocks the viewer’s vision by working to halt the depth in the image unsettles the attempt to make transparent the picturesque social realities of India through depiction of its “religious” festivals, peoples, “castes” and “tribes”. However, within colonial rhetoric, this opacity of India works to create an other-ed place at the same time as it provides a range of strategies for sustaining the nexus of colonial power and knowledge and its cultural ignorance and profound un-looking. For example, the Daniells’ paintings, such as *The Gates of the Palace* and *The Palace of Shuja-ud-daulah* are claims to truth based on “accuracy” and particularity derived through careful observation by travel to the sites depicted. However, the insertion of the social through processions with elephants and so on, along with the deployment of generalized conventions of the romantic aesthetic allow the representations to be consumable as images of the “Orient” from almost any location, were it not for the title that made them specific to places like Lucknow. Thus, the notion of a picturesque access to India is haunted by the inability to grapple with the specificities and histories of the subcontinent, and this “haziness”, instead of being acknowledged as a limited aesthetic and ideological strategy, becomes a general “oriental” ethnography. Furthermore, within the rhetoric of the Sublime, this unawareness is not acknowledged but rather cast as “difficulty” of knowing such a large country as India.

In fact, as Sara Suleri has argued, the discourse of the “difficulty” of understanding the vast and grand canvas of Indian life is in collusion with the ideologies of truth and transparency

⁴⁷ King, *Orientalism and Religion*.

in picturesque knowledge.⁴⁸ In other words, though colonial commentaries and visual studies of India's lands, peoples and social life were put forward as accurate and sound knowledge, they were highly arbitrary and partial, and it was not only what was "obscure" about India but also what had been confidently catalogued and described that was "terrorized" by its own lack of awareness. Therefore, to sustain this fiction required building another rhetoric that this knowledge was not yet final, that India was grand and obscure and required more penetration to understand what were, as William Crooke said, "things Indian."⁴⁹ The conceited and in many ways capricious nature of colonial knowledge had to be repressed to constitute the confident and knowing picturesque, and it is the terror of realizing this and the terror of acknowledging the immensely exploitative nature of colonial power/knowledge that constitutes another dimension of the Sublime in the colony.⁵⁰ Therefore, Suleri reworks the terror of the Sublime as imagined by colonialism – that is, as a sign of "heathenism" and "non-transparent" power in the "Orient" – and it instead comes to mark the colonial fear and guilt that work to actually deny the coercive and violent project of colonial power/knowledge.

Enlightenment and Romanticism in the Colony

The Sublime was one clever way of denying colonial theft and looting and worked to act as a supplement to the institutional discourses of the Enlightenment, such as the rule of law and the idea of "improvement", put into place also to locate oppression and injustice elsewhere, away from British colonial identity. It is true that Burke, the theorizer of the Sublime, was opposed to figures like James Mills who were not sympathetic in any way to India or its social structures

⁴⁸ Sara Suleri, "Edmund Burke and the Indian Sublime," *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 24 - 48.

⁴⁹ William Crooke, *Things Indian: Being Discursive Notes on Various Subjects Connected with India* (1906; reprint, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1972).

⁵⁰ This aspect is explored wonderfully in Suleri's "Edmund Burke and the Indian Sublime".

and peoples; Burke and Warren Hastings had an “imaginative respect” for Indian communities.⁵¹ Nonetheless, when it came to the impeachment trial in 1788, Hastings resorted to the concept of Oriental Despotism and Burke in fierce opposition argued that sub-continental social institutions and the state were equally just and moral as the European ones. This discourse, as Suleri argues, allowed for the abuses of power to remain in the shadows, and gave colonialism a much-needed legal and ethical alibi while solidifying all the violence and theft under colonialism into the figure of one man, Warren Hastings.⁵² What is important to note is that one of the key charges against Hastings was to do with his excessive demands on the Nawab of Awadh who, according to Burke, was forced into violently dispossessing his own mother and grandmother, the Begums of Awadh. Burke put to work the colonial rhetoric wherein the women in question were seen to be violated, and the British parliament needed to intervene, and as Suleri notes, setting a perilous precedent in which the figure of the brown woman is there to be “saved” by the “liberated” colonial authority.⁵³

I turn now from the Sublime to another way of thinking about how aesthetics and the Enlightenment intertwine in the visual politics of India. In a later moment of British colonialism, an aesthetic representation such as *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* would not come to constitute “proper” knowledge and this shows how in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, there was a more overtly visible link between aesthetics, history and anthropology, and their complicities in attempting to name, possess and master the colony. The visual representations of

⁵¹ Suleri, “Edmund Burke and the Indian Sublime,” in *The Rhetoric of English India*, 33.

⁵² Ibid., 46 - 47

⁵³ Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, 60. Scholarship that has carefully examined the role of gender under colonialism in India includes Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Colonial Debate on Sati* (Berkeley: University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998) and Sangeeta Ray, *Engendering India: Woman and Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). A seminal essay that explores the legacy of gender politics under imperialism in relation to the dynamics of the vanishing present is Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *Feminist Review* 30 (Autumn 1988): 65 - 88. I will be developing the gendered nature of *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* in more detail in the last chapter.

India that solidified into “facts” regarding Indian societies by the end of the nineteenth century were first developed in the amateur sketches by soldiers, other East India Company employees, and colonial travellers, men as well as women.⁵⁴ Also, most likely, in the case of *The Holi Festival of Lucknow*, many anonymous “native” artists were employed who engaged with British visual vocabularies to render “natural” and “transparent” the realities of “religious” India. Nicholas Dirks has articulated well how these dynamics played out in India and that in being “exotic”, India was always already picturesque, and that the ideology of picturesque actually acted in collusion with Enlightenment’s thunderous focus on reason.⁵⁵ In other words, looking back we may not see *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* as really anthropological but as much more “romantic”, but Dirks is highlighting that in the earlier colonial moment there was a collusion between the two which has been ideologically obscured. Further, Dirks compellingly links the picturesque to the process of how the “other” comes to signify under colonialism:

We should no longer be surprised to discover that romantic ideology conspired with the scientific goals of the Enlightenment to facilitate colonial conquest, that the filling in of the unknown spaces provided new representational possibilities for the justification and aestheticization of colonialism itself.⁵⁶

The collusion between the scientific and the aesthetic in colonizing India has a very early history in relation to Awadh, and is startlingly worn on the “outside” in Colonel Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gentil’s *Maps of Mughal India* (1770).⁵⁷ Gentil lived in Awadh for a substantial period of time and he produced this atlas at Faizabad, based on the *Ain-I-Akbari*.⁵⁸ However, the *Ain-I-Akbari* was seen as being too heavily reliant on literary narratives for its sense of place and

⁵⁴ Nicholas Dirks, “Guiltless Spoliations: Picturesque Beauty, Colonial Knowledge, and Colin Mackenzie’s Survey of India,” *Perceptions of South Asia’s Visual Past*, eds., Catherine Asher and Thomas Metcalf (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994): 211 - 232.

⁵⁵ Ibid. , 216 - 218.

⁵⁶ Ibid. , 218.

⁵⁷ Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gentil, *Maps of Mughal India* (1770; reprint, London: Kegan Paul International, 1989).

⁵⁸ Authored by Abu Fazl, the *Ain-I-Akbari* was an encyclopaedic work detailing Mughal administration produced in conjunction with the *Akbar-Nama*, the voluminous account of Akbar’s reign (1556-1605).

Gentil's was meant to be a more "accurate" cartographical intervention.⁵⁹ This secondary status given to the "literary", as compared to the more scientific discourses, lays bare that to separate the social from the aesthetic (in this case embodied in the literary) under the rhetoric of accuracy, is the operation by which Eurocentricity came to assert its superiority and also repress its own reliance on the aesthetic in materializing colonial discourses.⁶⁰

Gentil's *Map of Awadh*⁶¹ (fig. 5) reorders space through deployment of modern colonial cartographic conventions that rely on marking individual places according to distance and location within a highly abstracted space. However, the presence of few scattered people along with several kinds of animals within more of a spatially "factual" or cartographic narrative illustrates that the agenda of claiming dominion over India through colonial transformation of space relies on multiple rhetorical strategies. This is further clarified through the "scenes" of Indian "otherness" that surround the cartographic laying out of individual places as abstracted dots within a bird's eye-view of the kingdom of Awadh. Cartography had explicitly to do with conquest, colonization and trade, and it was the battles between the English and French in India, earlier in the eighteenth century, that had spurred the interest of people like Gentil in mapping territories more "accurately".⁶² If mapping Awadh within colonial cartographic norms is meant to facilitate military and economic interventions through a clearer sense of its geography, the

⁵⁹ Susan Gole, "Introduction," *Maps of Mughal India* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1989): 3.

⁶⁰ Interestingly, Gole, in introducing this recent publication of Gentil's maps repeats the gesture by claiming that "the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain cosmologies have little to do with the earth on which we live" as a sign of difference from the Western interest in cartography. *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶¹ The French were an important presence and their role is documented in Jean-Marie Lafont, "The French in Eighteenth Century Lucknow," *Lucknow: Memories of a City*, ed., Violette Graff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 67-82. Lafont points to how French albums participated in the discourse of Orientalism and that the extensive albums and commissions of Gentil, Polier and Martin, all Frenchmen of standing in Awadh, transformed the aesthetics of Indian paintings. She sees these early works as constituting an earlier form of Company painting, developed under a wider European patronage. Also, see Antoine-Louis-Henri Polier, *A European Experience of the Mughal Orient: The I'jaz-i Arsalani (Persian Letters, 1773-1779) of Antoine-Louis-Henri Polier*, trans., Seemi Alavi and Muzaffar Alam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) for a different inflection.

⁶² Gole, 6.

ideological justification for such interventions relies on the visual rendering of the “bizarreness” of India, a phrase Gentil himself used in describing the subcontinent.⁶³

The scenes of “bizarreness” found in the *Map of Avad* depict Ravana being killed by Rama, various Hindu gods, ascetics, hookswinging, a tiger hunt, and a chariot procession. I will be teasing out the politics of such subject matter in a later section and will emphasize here that these are not just random images, but as W. G. Archer has noted, “subjects that were to become the ‘stock-in-trade’ of ‘Company’ painters.”⁶⁴ There is a strong correlation here – mapping of India through a set of cartographical tropes is a way by which the colonial powers claim territoriality and the picturesque “otherness” that is also represented acts as both the excess and the necessary supplement to cartography. The different representational strategies deployed by the *Map of Awadh* then destabilize the myth of the scientific neutrality of cartography, and foreground the traffic between the “romantic” and the “rational” that came to justify and materialize colonial rule in India.

To briefly summarize, I began this chapter by discussing how visual space is recast in the Nawabi encounter with British colonialism, and then engaged with how the picturesque and the sublime work to consolidate the nexus of colonial power/knowledge in this encounter. I deepened my argument by showing how such romantic aesthetics are not in opposition to but in collusion with the Enlightenment’s focus on the “rational” as a site of knowledge.

⁶³ Gole, “Introduction,” 5. I find instructive the dedication that Gentil wrote to present his book at the court in France, “today, when your glorious reign has given to the name of France the greatest renown in all parts of the globe, this is the time to make use of your victory to enlarge the commerce of the nation. This volume can help fill this design.” For more on colonialism and cartography see Ian J. Burrow, “Moving Frontiers: Changing Notions of the Indian Frontiers.” (1994) *South Asian Graduate Research Journal*, September 22, 2003 <<http://inic.utexas.edu/asnic/pages/sagar/fall.1994/sagar.intro.toc.dec1994.html>>. Also, see Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

⁶⁴ Gole, 7.

Chapter Two

Caste, Kingship and Colonialism

In this section, I broaden the terrain of my thesis by exploring how Nawabi ideologies attempted to counter colonial visions and how these dynamics reconfigured subaltern social bodies, especially in terms of “caste,” with the history of the Chamars and the Satnami sect acting as a historically specific example.⁶⁵ The complex relationships among “caste” and kingship, in conjunction with the colonial discourse on “difference”, provide rich entry points for grasping how labor, *adivasi*-ness, asceticism, and gender weave through *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, and for locating sites of violence as well as resistance in the image.

The Holi Festival at Lucknow, although not marking Nawabi authority directly, can serve, within the context of the socio-political brokerings by the Nawabs, to legitimate their self-promotion as tolerant and benevolent rulers. In fact, under Asaf-ud-Daulah (1774-1798), the celebration of Holi was an expensive and grand affair and is documented in Abu Talib’s history of the Nawab as well as the Urdu poet Mir Taqi Mir’s autobiography *Zikr-I-Mir*.⁶⁶ Mir mentions that he was commissioned to write a *masnavi*⁶⁷ on the annual Holi celebrations.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the Nawabs patronized European as well as North African, Central Asian, and West Asian artists and scholars.⁶⁹ Thus, though *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* is a “non-courtly” image, it can be made to evoke that under Shia rulership, different traditions were accommodated and that in terms of painting, not only Mughal aesthetics were given support but also other ones, including the European/colonial aesthetic that mark *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*. Thus, as I have argued,

⁶⁵ The Chamars are an “untouchable” community and ritually associated with hides, leather and carrion. The Satnami movement was a form of social protest that emerged from within the community.

⁶⁶ Abu Talib, *History of Asaf-ud-Daulah*, 29 - 30, 86.

⁶⁷ A *masnavi* is a poem consisting of rhymed couplets in a particular metre, and was the ideal genre for narrative poetry.

⁶⁸ Mir Muhammad Taqi Mir, *Zikr-I-Mir: The Autobiography of the Eighteenth Century Mughal Poet Mir Muhammad Taqi ‘Mir’*, trans., C.M. Naim (1783; reprint, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002): 173.

⁶⁹ Misra, *Lucknow: Fire of Grace*, 9.

the image can well suit the British rhetoric of Indian “religiosity” and “particularity”, as well as serve the Nawabi elite’s need to underscore their ability to engage with diverse traditions and, in the case of Holi, even sanctioned rituals of “reversals”.

In order to probe more deeply how Nawabi authority as well as British colonialism had different parameters of understanding and negotiating socio-political relations, let us turn more closely to the figure of the man on the upturned bed or *charpai* in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*. This man is at the centre of the parodic mimicking of the public *darshan* of royalty. *Darshan* is public witnessing and seeing that constitutes an active exchange and the ruler, as an embodiment of the divine, bestows blessings on all those who witness his presence.⁷⁰ Ornamenting of the deity and its procession through the street is similar to the procession of a lavishly dressed up king – both bring the viewer material blessing and spiritual insight, with the king acting as the material embodiment of the sovereign deity.⁷¹ In the *Holi Festival at Lucknow*, the “royal” figure wears a garland made of shoes, with vegetables stuck to his turban, and is being fanned with a broom⁷² – the ornamentation, along with the music, the celebration and the gathering remind one of a *darbar* (holding of court) and of royal *darshan*, but here fun is being poked at such theatrical displays of power. For the British these parodies are a fascination with the “exotic”, and the “degraded” religion of the “Hindoos” that has been rendered comic and familiar, also confirmed by the clumsy rendering of Hindu gods, of tree-swinging ascetics and the “juggernaut” procession within the more familiar cartographical visual conventions of Gentil’s *Map of Avad*. However, such a rendering familiar of “Hinduism” or its festivals like Holi, through use of many

⁷⁰ C.J. Fuller, “Worship,” *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 57 - 83. See especially 59 - 62.

⁷¹ For the procession of the deity and the operations of *darshan* see Joanne Punzo Waghorne, “Dressing the Body of God: South Indian Bronze Sculpture in its Temple Setting,” *Asian Art* 5 (Summer 1992): 9 - 33.

⁷² To get a sense of the complex coding of turbans and shoes see Bernard Cohn, “Cloth, Clothes and Colonialism,” in *Colonialism and its Form of Knowledge*, 106 - 62.

European representational techniques, and its “secularization” by taking it out of the court onto the street, cannot escape the haunting effects of the reworking of *darshan*.

If the picturesque and the sublime act to create a powerful colonial gaze by making one witness the alterity of “India”, the parodying of *darshan* and the reversals of Holi destabilize authority as claimed through vision and witnessing. In other words, the social space being visually rendered is part of a transformative and parodic process and cannot be consumed as a picture of a stable “reality”. Thus, there is a challenging of authority, both kingly and colonial, and I wish to develop this in a more polyvalent manner through bringing in the issue of “caste”.⁷³ The figure that is seated on the upturned bed is wearing a garland of shoes, which are associated with the Chamars, one of the “lowest” on the caste hierarchy and traditionally defined as leather workers. The image, however, cannot just be read through the colonial/modern lens for which caste is an ancient and unchanging cornerstone of Indian society, visually borne out in the rendering of a Chamar in the Skinner album.⁷⁴ In *Camar* (1825) (fig.6), the male figure is surrounded by the tools and materials of his occupational specialization i.e. leather work; thus, it is the labouring body, “fixed” by occupation within a “natural” landscape with trees, that comes to embody the essence of caste. *Camar* reworks caste, a multifaceted site of negotiation, into a

⁷³ Bernard Cohn is one of the key historians to delineate how social forms such as caste, with which one has come to grasp India, owe a great deal to colonial reworkings. See Cohn, *Colonialism and its Form of Knowledge* as well as Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990). Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) are more sustained studies on the politics of caste. For the linking of caste to gender, see Mani, *Contentious Traditions*, Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly” Englishman and the “Effeminate” Bengali in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) and Janaki Nair, *Women and Law in Colonial India: A Social History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996). For discussions of caste in relation to dalit politics see Dirks, “Caste Politics and the Politics of Caste,” in *Castes of Mind* as well as Aditya Nigam, “Secularism, Modernity, Nation: Epistemology of the Dalit Critique,” (2000). *Sephis Website*. May 25, 2003 <<http://www.issg.nl/~sephis.papers.htm>>.

⁷⁴ The Skinner album, executed in Persian and titled *Tasrih-al-aquam*, contains a large collection of paintings of “castes” and “tribes”, as defined by profession. James Skinner (1778-1841), the man who commissioned it, was an Anglo-Indian military adventurer and became part of one of the most famous British cavalries of his time.

naturalized and contained category of occupational status as other traces of the social are marginalized.

However, the colonial conceptualization of caste is challenged in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, as the figure wearing the garland of leather shoes is also parodying royalty/kingship. This dual embodiment provides a powerful entry point for hybridizing the discourse of caste.⁷⁵ This is illustrated through the Nawabi patronage in Awadh of Baba Jagjivan Das, a militant *bhakti* figure and leader of the *Satnami* sect.⁷⁶ The *Satnami* sect arose in the early eighteenth century and included armed groups of householder-mendicants who engaged in business and agriculture and came to seriously challenge Mughal power.⁷⁷ Their rebellion is described by a contemporary source: “it is cause for wonder that a gang of bloody, miserable rebels...carpenters, sweepers, tanners, and other ignoble beings, braggarts and fools of all descriptions should become so puffed up with vain-glory as to cast themselves into the pit of self-destruction.”⁷⁸ Thus, though associated with militancy and rebellion against Mughal power, still the source of much rhetorical legitimacy to the Nawabs of Awadh, they patronized the *Satnami* sect.⁷⁹ The patronage highlights that for the Nawabs, Shia Muslims themselves, “caste” was a process linked to the delicate brokering of power in a cosmopolitan city, in which asserting power and authority involved complex interactions with different social actors.

In addition, the *Satnami* sect created mobility for itself, and the history of rebellion and of mercenary occupations does not allow containment of *Chamars* as a “caste” tied to one profession or separate from and over and above dynamic and dense social and political

⁷⁵ Caste was intricately linked to kingship before colonialism made it a far more pervasive and uniform social form. See Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 3 - 18 and Gloria Goodwin Raheja, “India, Caste, Kingship and Dominance Reconsidered,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 17 (1988): 497 - 522.

⁷⁶ Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Pasts: Religion, Identity, and Power among a Central Indian Community, 1780-1950* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 2001): 37 - 38.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 36. Also documented in Misra, *Lucknow: Fire of Grace*, 48.

⁷⁸ Mamuri cited in Dube, 344.

⁷⁹ Dube, 37.

processes. It was not only that the sect discouraged caste distinctions; it was also that “carpenters, sweepers, and tanners”, all “low” caste figures part of the Satnami sect, reworked their status and profession through reconstituted asceticism and militancy. These histories clarify the ideological framework in which some of the ascetics figure in the *Map of Avad*, *The Holi Festival of Lucknow* and the Skinner Album (fig.7 and 8). The representation of the ascetic upholding fire in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, *Bhajan Das Bairagi* (see fig.7) as well as the lone ascetic walking with a cane in one hand and a bowl in the other in the *Map of Avad* is marked by the construction of a frail body. This frailty along with the religiosity evoked through Holi celebrations in *The Holi Festival*, the purposeful compartmentalization of figures in a boxed space in the *Map of Avad* and delineation as an exotic social “type” in *Bhajan Das Bairagi*, may be seen as anxious colonial attempts to “other” and contain the threat of social actors who are different, militant and rebellious. Even when the body is robust and armed (see fig.8), the figure is neutralized as a “naked ascetic”. These colonial strategies of disempowerment may further be seen as a response to the ascetics claiming command in a manner that disrupted colonial conceptions of who should be engaged in the negotiations of power and sovereignty. Further, if a *Camar* (see fig. 6) in the colonial album is also visually rendered as bent, oppressed and as tied to a particular profession, by pointing to the hybridity of caste-identity of Chamars and its intersections with the ascetic self, I wish to disrupt the colonial fixing of either identity. These identities had to be visually constructed within certain colonial tropes of “caste” and “Hinduism” over and over again, as they had power and agency that the colonial gaze wished to domesticate. Also, such “common” bodies, once homogenized and evacuated of their hybridity, can more straightforwardly be labelled as “oppressed” under Nawabi rule and as needing colonial benevolence and government. The histories I will unearth will continue to disrupt such imperial rhetoric - within such an effort, visual traces of asceticism that hauntingly embody resistance

through recalling of *tapas* (bodily discipline) as well potent divinity are explored later in Chapter 3.⁸⁰

In this chapter, I wish to explore more of how Satnamis as a social group embodied important challenges to colonial conceptions of “Hinduism”. For example, the verses of Nanak and Kabir have been attributed as being popular among the sect; Sufi and *bhakti* influences on their reconstruction of “Hinduism” are also present in that Jagjivan Das was a disciple of Bulla Sahib, a Sufi mystic.⁸¹ In addition, the sect redefined “householder, the man-in-the-world, as an ascetic marked by a disdain for wealth and authority” who did not go begging for alms but rather dressed simply, ate a restricted diet, and lived a married life.⁸² Other reconstitutions included belief in *satnam* (the true one) who was articulated through the idea of *nirgun* (god without form) though deities of the Hindu Pantheon were also incorporated, with Ram, Krishna and Hanuman being central.⁸³ The presence of different Hindu deities, including Ram and Hanuman, along with more “marginal” ascetics and the tombs of saints/*pirs* in Gentil’s *Map of Avad* can be contrapuntally read as traces of such perpetual reinvention of traditions by subaltern social actors and the hybrid nature of “Hinduism”.

These reworkings also attest to David Lorenzen’s assertion that *saguni* (with attributes) and *nirguni* (without attributes) *bhakti* traditions need not be thought of separately, though the low caste and artisan critique embodied in *nirguni* traditions is important to highlight.⁸⁴ Further, some of the discriminatory distinctions were maintained within Jagjivan Das’s sect, in terms of

⁸¹ Dube, *Untouchable Past*, 38. Sufism is the mystical branch of orthodox Islam and played an important role in social reform within religious communities.

⁸² Ibid. , 37 and 38. Guru Nanak was the founder of Sikhism and his philosophies owe a great deal to both Sufi and *bhakti* legacies. Kabir is a famous saint who was a Muslim weaver and powerfully challenged orthodoxy in both Hindu and Muslim communities.

⁸³ Ibid. , 38.

⁸⁴ David Lorenzen, “Introduction: Historical Vicissitudes of *Bhakti* Religion,” *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994): 1 - 32. See esp. 13 - 28 for discussion of *nirguni/saguni* forms of *bhakti*.

who could drink water from the Guru's feet, and this is one example of how movements among the low castes were marked both by internalization of dominant norms as well as resistance to "high" Hinduism.⁸⁵ Also, followers of Jagjivan Das included *Chamars* as well as Rajputs Brahmans and Muslims.⁸⁶ Such reinvention of traditions by the Satnami sect undoes not only the colonial stereotype of caste but its basis as well, which, as Partha Chatterjee states, has been taken to be a universal *dharma*, as defined by the dominant.⁸⁷ In other words, "the construct of *dharma* assigns to each *jati* its place within the system and defines the relations between *jatis* as the simultaneous unity of mutual separateness and mutual dependence" and is employed to "claim that the conflicting relations between the differentiated parts of the systems (namely, *jatis*) are effectively united by the force of *dharma* so that the caste system as a whole can reproduce itself."⁸⁸

These notions are countered by the numerous subaltern reworkings of "Hinduism" and what is normally termed "eclecticism" in practice – the different sites of "Hinduism" depicted in Gentil's *Map of Avad* and the social practices of the "common" bodies in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* bear witness to this. For example, among the Chamars, a community evoked in *The Holi Festival* through the figure garlanded with leather shoes, the Satnami movement points to the need to subvert scriptural doctrines, or to create a popular, more inclusive doctrine and also to comply with dominant norms, which may be due to coercion, internalization, the need for legitimation or a specific strategy of resistance.

⁸⁵ Dube, *Untouchable Pasts*, 38.

⁸⁶ Dube, 39.

⁸⁷ Partha Chatterjee, "Nations and Its Outcastes," *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): 180.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

These dynamics are also registered in colonial documents that mention the presence of *Kabirpanthis* and the worship of Sufi *pirs* (saints) among the Chamars.⁸⁹ Chamars are in addition observed as having a “tribal” organisation and their origins are linked to “primitive tribes”. The documents further speak to the refuge offered to widows and abandoned women, as well as the simple marriage rites of “low-caste” and “tribal” peoples.⁹⁰ Chamars bring to bear these histories of negotiating and resisting dominant narratives and of “eclectic” practices into *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* as they were participants in the drama of Holi at Lucknow, which they make not only “Hindu” but also “Sufi” and “tribal” by virtue of their larger set of social histories and engagements.⁹¹ All these efforts point to the creation of a different sense of communities in the face of dominance and here, as Partha Chatterjee points out, subaltern presence is not only there as negativity but also marked in the “immanent process of criticism and learning, of selective appropriation, of making sense of and using on one’s own terms the elements of a more powerful cultural order.”⁹²

In many ways, the reversals and parodies of Holi gain potency through the participation of subaltern social actors that inhabit these critical histories and presences. The social practices of communities such as the Chamars counter the notion that there is a homogenous and *universal* dharma and, thus, contributes to the deconstruction of conceptions of caste based on essentialist ideals. Besides, they put under scrutiny the notion that “Hinduism” is an overarching and coherent system of “religious” thought, and thus fracture the colonial gaze that would have one engage with *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* and its “common” bodies, of which the Chamars are a part, as a picturesquely exotic “Hindu” scene rather than as a site of social struggles.

⁸⁹ William Crooke, *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh Vol.1* (1896; reprint, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1999): 184 - 185. Crooke’s four-volume study was compiled from a large number of colonial documents, both historical and contemporary.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 168 - 169.

⁹¹ Ibid., 185.

⁹² Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 197.

The homogenizing colonial conception of caste, which was seen to fundamentally constitute social bodies in India, helped congeal this idea of a unifying system of “religion” called “Hinduism”, with the caste system being one of its fundamental and distinguishing elements. In terms of visual history, the constant renderings of peoples as “castes” and “tribes”, the Skinner Album (1825) being a symptomatic example, bears testimony to this colonial process. Before the eighteenth century, it was the designation “Heathens” that was more widely used by Europeans and only through the eighteenth and nineteenth century did “Hindu” become a pan-Indian religious identity and “Hinduism” a term to designate a cohesive, all embracing system of religious thought.⁹³ Richard King has emphatically pointed to the colonial origins of the notion that Hinduism is a consistent, overarching religious identity but other scholars such as David Lorenzen and Sheldon Pollock have argued that although colonialism may have reshaped and homogenized religious identities, such as Muslim versus Hindu, there is also a pre-colonial legacy for constructing oppositional identities in relation to socio-religious beliefs.⁹⁴

There may very well be pre-British histories at play here, but it is important to realize that the colonial narratives played a far more dominant and violent role in reshaping modern India as a “religious” and “Hindu” land as Gyanendra Pandey reminds us in *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*.⁹⁵ Through reference to the Satnami sect, I have pointed to the multiple and hybrid nature of what “Hinduism” was, and if these histories do not shape dominant frameworks as readily today, it is because colonialism has subalternized these memories as well as succeeded in reconstituting India in the texture of “high” Hinduism. Scholars like Lata Mani have documented how the texture of “religiosity” was deeply

⁹³ King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 99 - 101.

⁹⁴ Lorenzen, “Introduction: The Historical Vicissitudes of Bhakti Religion,” and Sheldon Pollock, “Ramayana and Political Imagination in India,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 5 (1993): 261 - 97.

⁹⁵ Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press: 1992).

brahamanized, textualized and sanskritized under colonialism.⁹⁶ This colonial legacy continues to be deployed in the service of imperialism today and haunts postcolonial India at the local, national and global contexts.

Mapping Social Bodies and Identities in Awadh

Colonial constructions were contested and “Hinduism” was continuously reconstructed within its various contexts. In turning to how the “common body” impinges on *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, I wish to provide a sense not only of the “interrogated, reworked and contested meanings of Hinduism and Hindu identities” but generally of social and political identities from which “religious” identities cannot be separated.⁹⁷ To reframe the image as such allows the resistances to colonial conceptualizations to be brought out in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*. I now turn in particular to Bhars, Pasis, Ahirs, Kurmi, Koris, Sanorias, Bauriahs, Aherias and Harburahs – all “castes” and “tribes” that had a presence in Awadh and were engaged in relationships with Nawabi as well as colonial authority. I will delineate the complex set of social relations of which these communities were a part to develop a multifaceted sense of “Hinduism”, its constant appropriation of and re-appropriation by *adivasi* discourses, and importance of the notions of labor, “wildness” and “criminality” to the constitution of “tribal” and “low-caste” identities. This bears on *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* in that these would be the kind of social bodies that would find themselves present at the celebration of Holi. Furthermore, it is only within the context of power relations among the “common” or “low-caste” and “tribal” bodies and those dominant that one gets a rich and contested sense of the charge of the depiction of a festival marked by parody, reversals and critique.

⁹⁶ Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions*.

⁹⁷ Dube, *Untouchable Past*, 6.

One of the key parodies, as discussed before, is of kingship through the figure on the upturned bed, garlanded with leather shoes, and fanned with a broom. Importantly, this figure is wearing a turban decked with vegetables. Vegetables recall produce of the land, and the push and pull between the countryside and the city, which is also shored up through the gateway, a liminal space between the “inside” and the “outside” of the city. In addition, the gateway is a marker of wealth, and within the context of the “low” and “common” bodies that inhabit the space of the image, the question arises as to what relationship these bodies have to wealth and authority, both in the city and the countryside. This relationship pertains not only to Nawabi rulership but also colonial authority as the British had vast control over issues of land and revenue in Awadh, and played a huge role in shaping the Awadhian countryside.

Another crucial component I wish to interrogate is the relationship of Nawabi and colonial narratives to the defining of social bodies as “criminal,” and the underlying political and economic agendas. In colonial rhetoric, the discourse of criminality has a long history, although the designation of entire peoples as “criminal” under the law did not take effect till 1871. For example, letters written by British officials on Awadh in the 1790s state:

Property is insecure. Murders and robberies are daily committed, and pass unpunished, and even unnoticed. Ultimately, there is neither police nor efficient government in his [Nawab of Awadh’s] country. These facts are undeniable and prove the necessity of the Company extending, without delay, their paternal care to the subjects....⁹⁸

“Robberies” appear as a subject over and over again and they are seen as interfering with cultivation and thereby impacting the land revenue collected by the Company.⁹⁹ In other words, the “security of property” is at stake in that the Company desires to stabilize who owns the land and works on it so that its bureaucracy can efficiently exploit and discipline labouring bodies. Also, the oppression and “anarchy” in Awadh is located by the British in there being no “fixed”

⁹⁸ *Letters, Political, Military and Commercial*, 4.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

system in place and “no police, no courts”.¹⁰⁰ This is despite the fact that William Crooke’s study and survey, relying on more than a century of colonial scholarship, notes “caste” and “tribes” as having a wide-range of organisational processes to deal with social conflicts. However, these processes were seen as “tribal” or “non-modern” and their usefulness was seen to be only in terms of what impact they had on “caste” interrelationships, marriage and so on, rather than being considered as systems of political and social thought and practice. As well, in mentioning the “corruption” of the Nawab’s court and his employees, and their “failure to notice” and “punish”, a complicity is being established between the “robbers and murderers” and Indian elite.¹⁰¹

It is important to note that the tropes of murders and robberies coalesces with the older stereotype of the Oriental Despot to conjure a general sense of “corruption” and “cruelty” energizing the idea that a more “just” and paternal colonial power needs to intervene. Even if the colonial descriptions are more sympathetic and do not prescribe to the rhetoric of despotism, as Sanjay Nigam has documented, there still persists the colonial concern that Indians need to be reformed into good moral subjects of the Raj.¹⁰² Further, any threat to colonial power is rendered aberrant. For example, in Awadh, Badhaks were peasant mercenaries who worked for taluqdars¹⁰³ and helped them negotiate and contest Mughal and Awadhi demands over land and revenue. Their activities, though within the acceptable parameters of a shared sovereignty and the well-established tradition of a mobile peasant and military labour, were highly threatening to the colonial authorities. They were thus one of the first ones to be seen as “thugs” that raided and

¹⁰⁰ *Letters, Political, Military and Commercial*, 8.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰² Sanjay Nigam, “Disciplining and Policing the Criminals by Birth, Part 1: The Making of a Colonial Stereotype – The Criminal Tribes and Castes of North India,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 27 2 (1990): 172.

¹⁰³ The taluqdars refers to a rent-receiving intermediary with power over at least several villages. Zamindar, in contrast, is a more general term and may refer to any landholder.

looted, and measures were taken to settle and reform them.¹⁰⁴ This process began in the early nineteenth century, and it is to be noted that Bhadaks were strongly linked to Pasis, a major “cultivating caste” residing in Lucknow and other parts of Awadh since the sixteenth century.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the discourse on “criminality”, raiding and mobility has an important role to play early on in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* was produced.

Furthermore, the notion of kingship and authority that works by negotiating, sharing and in many ways conceding economic, political or social sovereignty to different communities – as evident in the case of Chamars and Bhadaks – is unacceptable to the British. These negotiations are rather seen as a sign of lack of law and order and colonial power criminalizes threatening social bodies at the same time as it ideologically belittles the competence of the Indian ruling elite. The dynamics operate to support colonialism’s attempt to create fixed boundaries through the idea of exclusive sovereignties and singular allegiances, a process also well documented by Ajay Skaria.¹⁰⁶ At one level, in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, the aesthetics of the picturesque and sublime “fix” the social bodies in that they can be consumed as “romantic” and “exotic” and their specificity and relations to political sovereignty are obscured. The question of how to “people” *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* differently and in a more multifaceted manner, against the colonial grain, is what leads me to William Crooke’s *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Awadh*, a narrative of “castes” and “tribes”, in which profession rather than “race” is a more pervasive way of distinguishing communities. Crooke’s study, though from 1896, relies heavily on much earlier reports and writings on Awadh, and as the discourses of “criminality” in relation to which I will discuss it were already at play in the late eighteenth

¹⁰⁴ Nigam, “Disciplining and Policing the Criminals,” 134.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 161 and Misra, *Lucknow: Fire of Grace*, 9.

¹⁰⁶ Ajay Skaria, “Towards Exclusive Sovereignties,” in *Hybrid Histories*, 165 - 175.

century, it can be put to use for the moment when *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* was produced. Though fully implicated in the colonial power/knowledge nexus, the study contains traces that suggest other-ed social histories and memories. Instead of reading Crooke's work within its attempt to construct "caste" and "tribes" as fundamentally tied to occupational status, I will take up traces that inhabit multiplicities and resistances for unpacking and challenging the homogenizing colonial fictions.

This excavation, in relation to the visual arena, accomplishes several goals. For example, the central portion of Gentil's *Map of Avad* is almost entirely depopulated of people as a part of a rhetorical claim to scientific cartographical knowledge.¹⁰⁷ The space of the map reduces the symbols of Nawabi authority to minute inscriptions of forts/buildings thereby making them more or less inconsequential. Further, the different animals represented in the map conjure up some sense of a "wild" space, a notion that carries suggestions of an uninhabited land. These visual gestures perform an almost but not quite complete emptying of space that seeks to repress Nawabi claims to land and sovereignty, visually marked in elaborate *darbar* scenes such as *A Holi Celebration*. Instead of kingship being performed in the splendour of the king's marble terrace, the beautiful garden and the lands beyond, as in *A Holi Celebration*, Nawabi power, embodied by the hunt and the soldiers on elephants, horses and foot, finds itself compartmentalized in the lower left corner of Gentil's *Map of Avad* and subordinated to a larger visual program. Unmistakably, Awadh is not a *tabula rasa* site for colonial intervention and people appear but largely at the margins of the map and mostly within a "religious" context. This

¹⁰⁷ With regard to the late eighteenth century colonial cartographic practices, Ian J. Burrows in "Moving Frontiers: Changing Colonial Notions of the Indian Frontiers" states: "The new maps were authoritative not simply because they contained greater information, but also because they incorporated the principles of scientific cartography with personal experience. Maps which relied solely on travelers' descriptions, or which contained information which was uncorroborated, were *passé*." < <http://inic.utexas.edu/asnic/pages/sagar/fall.1994/ian.barrow.art.html> >. Gentil's mapping of Awadh is part of a moment when the conceptualization of maps as being purely about spatial organization and rationality still overlapped with the medieval European tradition of cartography that incorporated elements of fantasy and personal visual interpretation.

marginality is further enacted through erasure of Nawabi authority - ascetics enjoyed respect of nobility and in the case of the Satnamis politically negotiated with the Nawabs, a context removed in the map and in which the figures are recast as part of colonial knowledge of Awadh.

By filling in the map of Awadh with social bodies whose identities are culled from colonial space but deployed to critique it, I hope to deconstruct the marginality of these bodies and to emphasize the intersecting political and social histories that inhabit their “religiosity”. The “castes” and “tribes” that I will discuss will be with reference to William Crooke’s four-volume compilation on the North Western Provinces and Awadh. I will be devoting a reasonable amount of space to the network of social practices embedded in his accounts; I ask the reader to keep in mind claims of sovereignty and *adivasi*-ness and to pay attention to labouring identities and “eclectic” traditions as they will be important for my readings of the colonial archive from a subaltern perspective.

Though first published in 1896, Crooke’s *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh* relies heavily on previous colonial efforts ranging from travel writing to government reports and gazetteers as well as anthropological and archaeological literature. In the first few chapters, Crooke stakes out his own position within debates around the origin and nature of caste. On the basis of anthropometric data, Crooke, in opposition to H. H. Risley, locates caste as being much more tied to profession than to “race”.¹⁰⁸ In the rest of his enormous body of work, Crooke attempts to supply more detailed information than any previous account regarding “manners, customs, marriages, institutions and religion” of various “castes” and “tribes”.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed analysis of Risley’s project see Dirks, “The Enumeration of Caste: Anthropology as Colonial Rule,” *Castes of Mind*, 198 - 227.

¹⁰⁹ Crooke, “Preface,” Vol. I, iv.

I begin by documenting Crooke's narratives concerning the "criminal tribes" of Awadh. What is Uttar Pradesh today, and was the United Provinces of Agra and Awadh in the 1800s, came to constitute forty percent of all the "criminal tribes" in India.¹¹⁰ Sanorias, Bauriahs, Aherias and Harburahs were the main groups targeted by the colonial authorities.¹¹¹ Crooke observes that Sanorias are not a caste but a confraternity that includes Kurmis and Ahirs as well high castes such as Thakurs and Brahmins, and that they conduct extensive "criminal" activities across India. Chamars are seen as being excluded from the group.¹¹²

Another group of "criminal tribes", the Aherias, their second largest concentration being in the city of Lucknow, are described as a "tribe of hunters, fowlers and thieves", who are historically said to have settled in the Tarai region of the United Provinces (UP).¹¹³ They are described as "vagrants" moving from place to place as migrant labourers on farms and roads. Aherias are also linked to Bhokas, another "tribe" of UP, as well as the Bhils. It is pointed out they claim important historical presence over Ayodha and continue to go for annual pilgrimages there. Sharing of political power through a council, widow remarriage and bride-price are mentioned as social "customs". Aherias are also seen to engage with Ahirs and Chamars in worship of the goddess and the importance given to the shrine of a Muslim saint, visited by fakirs, is also cited. Significantly, Valmiki the author of *Ramayana* is listed as a patron saint of the Aherias and is recorded as being celebrated as a great hunter and "robber". However, the final and closing description is of Aheria's inherent criminality. Though the role of the landlord and the bania in financing and controlling Aheria raids is mentioned through reference to previous colonial reports, it is their aberrant nature that is more strongly brought out.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Nigam, "Disciplining and Policing the Criminals," 131.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 131.

¹¹² Crooke IV, 271 - 272.

¹¹³ Crooke I, 39.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 39 - 49.

The other two main “criminal tribes” as defined by the British were the Buariyas and Harburahs. Buariyas are described as a hunting and “criminal” tribe. They are listed as present in North-western and Northern India and associated with dacoity, theft and burglary. Importantly, another index of the Bauriya “tribe” is seen to be that they roam about and commit “crime” in the disguise of fakirs. They are alleged to be an ancient and brave people who helped defeat Ravana. Besides, their history of interaction with Rajput clans and the claiming of Rajput lineage are mentioned.¹¹⁵

Like the Bauriyas, Harburah’s too are described as a “vagrant, thieving tribe.”¹¹⁶ Present in several areas of Awadh, they are associated with “gypsies” and described as “savages”, who were cursed by Sita to live a life of wandering as they intruded into her forest retreat. “Customs” include the ease of divorce, widow remarriage and bride price, and “religious” practices involve the worshipping of Devi as well as of *pirs*, and the celebration of Holi. Though labelled as non-Hindu, the Harburah’s are evidently documented as asserting Rajput status and not accepting food from a Chamar. As well, though previous colonial reports link them with the Tharu living in the Tarai, Crooke disputes this claim.¹¹⁷

The identity of Harburahs, Sanorias, Bauriahs and Aherias populates Gentil’s *Map of Avad* in a disturbing manner. The colonial ordering of space, of which Gentil’s map is a component, can no longer remain innocent and emerges as a violent procedure through which entire communities were criminalized and stigmatized. Further, colonial classificatory projects such as that of William Crooke relied on the rhetoric of scientific truth; however, colonial survey’s and censuses were marked by an exasperating inexactitude of responses and the codification of information was heavily reliant on colonial interpretation rather than self-

¹¹⁵ Crooke I, 228 - 237.

¹¹⁶ Crooke II, 473.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. , 473 - 481.

definition of the subjects in question.¹¹⁸ Further, the discourse of “criminality” pervasive in such “scientific” colonial accounts is intimately tied to the constitution of India as a “barbaric” land, evoked in the *Map of Avad* through the representation of bodies being crushed under the chariot, a hookswinging event¹¹⁹ and the three bloody corpses on the other end of the upper left register. The issues of pain and blood emerge, not in the pulsating contexts of the events, but rather in a colonial fiction, whereby the inherent and widespread “irrationality” and “savagery” of the subcontinent is confirmed. It is as if the violent nature of colonialism has been suppressed and bloodiness is represented, not as part of colonial identity, but as constitutive of the strangely gory nature of Hinduism.

In fact, the linking of blood and gore of “Hinduism” to “criminality” and to “criminal tribes” is enacted by colonialism’s visualization of “thuggee” as a highly cruel act performed in service to “hindu” goddesses like Kali.¹²⁰ Also, as Dirks has documented, hookswinging was often linked to “blood sacrifice”, another trope central to colonial imaginings of thuggee.¹²¹ These constructions of savagery are discursively inflected in many ways - *adivasi* encounters with Hinduism are loaded with the trope of the “hunter” and the “savage” (a history borne out by Harburahs) and the colonial encounter with bodies that disrupt the disciplinary mechanisms of labour is responsible for layering this “savagery” with “criminality”. At first, these encounters may not seem to mark *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* that can be read as innocently capturing the scene of a “Hindu” spring festival. However, by documenting that the “common bodies” present

¹¹⁸ See Dirks, “The Enumeration of Caste: Anthropology as Colonial Rule,” *Castes of Mind*, 198 - 227 and Gauri Viswanathan, “Ethnographic Plots,” *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998): 153 - 176.

¹¹⁹ As Nicholas Dirks, “The Policing of Tradition: Colonial Anthropology and the Invention of Custom” in *Castes of Mind* has demonstrated, the campaign against hookswinging, like the one against sati, “became a symbol of British commitment to civilizational reform as well as the crisis of enlightened colonial rule [and] the alleged concern about the victimization of colonial subjects, worked to obscure far more salient concerns around the representation of rule and the reorganization of colonial subjectivities ” (152).

¹²⁰ Martine Van Woerkens, *The Strangled Traveler: Colonial Imaginings and the Thugs of India*, trans., Catherine Tihanyi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹²¹ Dirks, “The Policing of Tradition,” 156.

in the image may inhabit the intersecting terrains of *adivasi*-ness, “criminality”, caste and labour, it becomes possible to deconstruct the colonial gaze. Instead of objectifying the bodies depicted, the questions can be asked – what is the link between “criminality” and political and economic interests of the British? Why and how is *adivasi*-ness and labor inflected in relation to “religious” and “criminal” identities?

I now return to Crooke to gather additional traces of interwoven histories, which in the next chapter will allow me to locate strategic sites of subaltern agency through contrapuntal readings of colonial sources.¹²² For example, Harburahs are associated with Tharus who are further linked to Kurmis. The Kurmis are listed as an “important cultivating caste,” “tribal” in origin, with some communities claiming a brahmanical origin. The role of fakirs in formation of some of the Kurmi communities and the mixing of Muslim and Hindu rituals is noted. Also, it is brought to attention that they enjoy a better status in Awadh and have been landholders prior to Rajputs in the area.¹²³ Amaresh Misra provides useful documentation in this regard and points to how some of the Kurmis, Pasis and Ahirs were present as rajas and traders in their own right in the kingdom of Awadh.¹²⁴ The case of Darshan Singh Kurmi illustrates some possibility of mobility for those who were poor and “low” caste. For example, in the late 1790s, Darshan Singh was hired by the Nawab while working as a labourer on one of his buildings and became a very powerful military figure and also executed several engineering projects.¹²⁵

Let us turn from the Kurmis to the Ahirs, a community pertinent in relation to Awadh and to Holi. In Crooke’s account, Ahirs figure as “herdsmen” and “agriculturists” who claim

¹²² Yes, here I am evoking contrapuntal analysis as developed by Said in *Culture and Imperialism*, in which one thinks through and interprets cultural production that may seem discrepant through the intersections that emerge. Obviously, colonialism is one significant entry point and analysing it from the subaltern perspective offers an important counterpoint.

¹²³ Crooke II, 346 - 354.

¹²⁴ Misra, *Lucknow: Fire of Grace*, 66 - 67

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

inheritance either from Kshatriyas or from Krishna. In the case of Awadh specifically, the lineage is claimed as being from “aboriginal inhabitants.”¹²⁶ These aboriginal peoples are the Bhars, who once ruled over Ayodha and Lucknow.¹²⁷ Crooke’s own conclusions come from observing that Ahirs in Awadh worship and hold dear some of the same key heroes and deities as the Bhars. The celebration of Holi and the role of Panchon Pir, too, are commented upon but the description ends with the criminalizing statement that “he [the Ahir] is not free from the suspicion of cattle stealing”.¹²⁸

Though the Bhars in Awadh are cited by colonial officials as having ruled over Awadh and having had fortresses in the area, it is argued that their rule was probably over a “uninhabited forest country” and that they did not really build a “civilization” as they had and continue to have “nomadic and predatory habits”.¹²⁹ Bhars are also linked to the Kols, Cheros and Seoris, all *adivasi* communities. Pasis are said to consider them their “sub-caste”, though this is contested by the Bhars themselves. Several times the link between Bhars and Ahirs is affirmed, and the role of Panchon Pir, “tribal” deities and festivals of spring is recognized as being important to these communities. As well, Bhars along with the Tharus are described as “nothing short of a pest to their respectable neighbours at harvest time” and called “thieves”, “burglars” and “dacoits”.¹³⁰ Further, Bhars are seen to resemble “low caste Hindus, Koris and Chamars” and as having similar marriage customs.¹³¹

The Pasis, who claim Bhars as a subcaste, and were cultivators as well as rajas and traders in some parts of Awadh, are described similarly. However, a significant emphasis emerges on the observation that Pasis, along with low “castes” and “tribes”, are “very catholic”

¹²⁶ Crooke I, 52.

¹²⁷ Misra, *Lucknow: Fire of Grace*, 9 and 44-45, and Crooke I, 52.

¹²⁸ Crooke I, 52 - 66.

¹²⁹ Crooke II, 2

¹³⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹³¹ Ibid.

in worship and “will visit the tomb of any saint (*pir*) or martyr (*shahid*) which is convenient”.¹³² The celebration of Holi and interactions with Chamars is expressed, and Sleeman is quoted as saying “there were one hundred thousand families of Pasis in Oudh, who were skilful thieves and robbers by profession and were formerly Thags and poisoners as well.”¹³³ Thus, “criminality” and “thuggee” are also important colonial stereotypes for constituting Pasi communities; the interactions of Pasis with Chamars bring to the fore another “caste”, the Koris. The Koris were believed to be present in large numbers in Lucknow and Faizabad and to have “manners and customs” like the Chamars. They were designated as poor and exploited artisans and labourers, working largely as “hindu” weavers.¹³⁴

These histories of different communities gathered from Crooke’s substantial enumerations of caste are clearly part and parcel of colonial knowledge. Daniells’ orientaling imagery, the visualization of “caste” and of difference in the Skinner Album, the “exotic” scenarios on the margins of the *Map of Avad* and “Hindu” festivities and social bodies represented in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, all form part of this imperial will to knowledge as well as underscore some of its ideological turns. Thinking of this visual archive together with Crooke’s imperial archive helps establish a critical intertextuality – what one is able to read in the images as “knowledge” is sustained by the citationary nature of colonial rhetoric in which aesthetics as well as history and anthropology participate together. The effect of this move is that the epistemic violence, prejudice and fiction of William Crooke’s project comes to haunt the visual renderings; the visual as a vested, partial and fractured construction of space and of

¹³² Crooke IV, 147.

¹³³ Quoted in Crooke IV, 149. William Sleeman published extensively on the issue of thuggee and in the 1830s went on to become the Commissioner of the Department for the Suppression of Thuggee and Dacoity. He worked in Jabalpur, Gwalior as well as Lucknow.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

bodies, rather than as a depiction of “truth”, destabilizes the “scientific” and the “rational” as embodied in colonial texts.

Such a critique of the imperial archive does not rule out looking for subaltern histories within it, and hence my excavation of Crooke’s work to locate sites of hybridity which may challenge colonial conceptualizations. The traces foregrounding multidirectional interactions and intersections between social actors allow one to be haunted by the sheer heterogeneity of decolonised space that must remain the ever-receding horizon of history-making.¹³⁵ However, if I am able to suggest diverse histories through reference to the colonial archive itself, it must not be seen as colonialism’s ability to engage with the heterogeneity of the subcontinent. The visual interpretations of “castes” and “tribes” in Colonel Skinner’s *Tasrih-al-aquam* clarify the profound inadequacies of the project of classification – the figures are depicted in isolation, peppered with signs of “religious” or occupational status and are meant to stand in for entire communities. The bodies are in a sense emptied of textured social meaning and then colonialism violently inscribes its anthropological valuations of “caste” based on profession or religion – the Chamar is shown working with hides and the Bairagi with prayer beads (see fig.6 and 7). These representations are devoid of a sense of larger social relations and are powerfully homogenising; diverse and locally and regional distinct yet fluid communities are congealed into a contained and frozen “caste”. *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* offers up so much for performing oppositional readings of this colonial vision as it inscribes multivocal aesthetic, political and “religious” encounters within the richly contested public arenas of Lucknow, and I explore this potential more emphatically in the last chapter.

¹³⁵ Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 314 - 316. These pages highlight some of Spivak’s thoughts on heterogeneity.

Chapter Three

Re-thinking Asceticism and *Adivasi*-ness

In the previous chapters, I have delved into the colonial construction of caste and criminality and in this section, I want to continue this exploration of mapping social identities in relation to the figure of the ascetic and how, at the same time, *adivasi*-ness finds itself woven into the discourse. *Adivasi* traces mark the very celebrations of spring, the occasion that Holi rejoices in. Also, the figure of the Chamar through being linked to Kol lineage shores up *adivasi*-ness and through the Satnami sect makes this history intersect with ascetic-hood. The city of Lucknow is historically an *adivasi* territory and through the re-workings and reconstructions of dominant Hinduism, the assertion of power and presence in Awadh continues to be haunted by *adivasi*-ness. It is not only from colonial accounts that one gathers the interactions, assimilations and exchanges between “tribal” practices and those part of “Hinduism” – contemporary ethnographies and oral histories from Uttar Pradesh, the area formerly encompassing Awadh, also point to this history.¹³⁶

I will be foregrounding these histories in relation to the tropes of “nature”, “wildness” and “criminality”, all of which are deployed for shoring up *adivasi*-ness as well as ascetic-ness. Moreover, I will link the tropes to the politics of territoriality and how, in many key arenas, the discourse relies upon the figure of the woman to constitute its rhetoric. I will also build upon the contention that both the ascetic and the *adivasi* inhabit multiple identities and cannot be ideologically contained in the “forest” or as “marginal” to cities or to sites of labour. I seek to push further Ranajit Guha’s account of the modernity of peasant assertions that powerfully

¹³⁶ See Amir Hasan, *Meet the UP Tribes* (Gurgaon: Academic Press, 1982). The popularity of Krishna in the oral traditions and the celebration of Holi by the *adivasis* and how they make it their own is suggested. As well, see C.J. Bijoy, “A History of Discrimination” who documents this more generally and as part of a long and sedimented encounter between *Adivasis* and non-*adivasi* social actors, exemplified in Hindu scriptures such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.

counters their construction as “backward” and “pre-political”; I open up identities of the peasant, associated with agricultural labor, to that of the *ascetic* and the *adivasi* which embody complex and manifold ways of being in the world.¹³⁷ Being a peasant is part and parcel of the hybrid terrain of *adivasi* and ascetic inhabitations, whose role in social struggles has been seen as less significant due to its “religious” nature¹³⁸ or largely discussed within the parameters of the history of a community or a movement. While some of the latter scholarship, such as that of Ajay Skaria, has brilliantly explored the socio-political and cultural histories of *adivasi* peoples and their reflections on and negotiations of colonialism, modernity and history,¹³⁹ *adivasi*-ness (or asceticism) has generally not been imagined as an important discursive field that is fundamental to a very wide-ranging set of social discourses.

To develop this, I return to *The Holi Festival of Lucknow*, in which the frail ascetic is carrying fire and the other two ascetics are upholding swords. The sword is parallel to the broom fanning the “king” on the *charpai* (bed), and even the ascetic wearing a loincloth adorns the royal colours, red and gold. This contributes to the parody of authority and is accentuated by the aspect of the ascetic that stands against the *maya* (fiction and illusion) of material power and wealth. However, as the history of the *Satnami* sect near Lucknow indicates, both militancy and household duties were made to bear on the figure of the ascetic, hinted in the image through the sword yielding figures. Thus, the ascetic does not merely displace authority but reconstructs it as well whereby a soldier or a labouring body can inhabit the power and agency generally domesticated by being placed only in the “outside” to the worldly. Spiritual agency through liminality is then not alienated from the worldly but put to work within it.

¹³⁷ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

¹³⁸ David Hardiman, “The Coming of the Devi” in *A Subaltern Studies Reader*, 100-106 points to the dismissal of *adivasi* assertions in nationalist and socialist histories of the subcontinent which see them as too embroiled in “backward looking” religiosity.

¹³⁹ Skaria, *Hybrid Histories*.

The fire that the ascetic holds brings into play other discursive tropes – William Crooke in *Things Indian* links the role of fire in festivals to “primitive” and “tribal” origins when the earth’s elements were celebrated during different seasons.¹⁴⁰ When made to relate to “Hinduism” as *agni* the fire god, and the cycles of “agriculture”, this very fire at Holi is read as more civilized.¹⁴¹ There are several layers that need unpacking here in order to critique this colonial construction – sites of agricultural labour, the relationship between Hinduism in text and practice, the relationship between “Hinduism” and *adivasi*-ness and ascetics within this matrix. Here I am inspired by the scholarship of Alf Hiltebeitel who has explored the socio-political import of “religious” narratives, not only through Sanskrit texts, but regional oral ones within a hybrid cultural milieu, with a focus on how devotional idioms of the marginalized become strategies of “displacement, mimicry, resistance and localization.”¹⁴² My project is indebted to Hiltebeitel’s sense of how popular “religion” operates and relates to the larger arena of social contestations, but I have attempted to move away from employing popular “Hinduism” as the only entry point for my image and read it within other competing, colliding and intersecting social theories and discourses.

Chamars, bearing on *The Holi Festival of Lucknow* through the figure garlanded with shoes, were shoemakers, weavers and agricultural workers in Lucknow, and their social rituals, including Holi, came out of a arena of practices that included “tribal” deities, fakirs and other ascetics, *pirs* and *birs*.¹⁴³ Also, Chamars are mentioned as having more “tribal” ways of constructing and regulating community and a link is drawn in the colonial documents between them and Kols. Thus, the presence of “fire” in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* recalls many hybrid

¹⁴⁰ Crooke, *Things Indian*, 210 - 211.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 218.

¹⁴² Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking India’s Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadi among Rajputs, Muslims and Dalits* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999): 9.

¹⁴³ Please see footnote 144.

histories – if it is there as an *adivasi* trace, it is not to be boxed into the “forest” or to be considered as part of a homogenous connection with “nature” as we know that *adivasis* inhabited and ruled over the plains and were cultivators as well. Further, traditions and lineages of “low” castes like Chamars¹⁴⁴ as well as Kurmis, Ahirs and Pasis, were haunted by connections to *adivasi* communities of Bhars, Tharu, Bhoksa and Bhils, all of which practiced different kinds of labour and lived in the cities as well. Thus, although “fire” may recall another way of imagining nature and celebrating spring, one that differs from that of canonical or Brahmanical Hinduism (as in the significance of the fire altar and vows of marriage around *agni*), it cannot be seen as non-agricultural or residing in the past. In other words, fire can indicate a relationship to nature and to the seasons within the very context of agricultural and artisanal labour, rather than negotiate this relationship only fully “outside” Hinduism as a sign of the “primitive” and of the “past”.

However, there are hierarchies and oppressions marking the presence of *adivasi* traces at hybrid sites;¹⁴⁵ an image like *Krishna and the Gopis Take Shelter from the Rain* (fig.9) illustrates this well. The image, though not from Awadh, would be one that would form part of its discursive visual arena, as Mughal and Awadhi paintings were in dialogue with Rajasthani and

¹⁴⁴ Please read footnote in relation to the place marked by fn.143. The traditions are culled from colonial accounts but I was able to find suggestions to them in Diane M. Coccarri, “The Bir Babas of Banaras and the Deified Dead,” *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees*, ed., Alf Hiltebeitel (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989): 251 - 256. In an important footnote (n.13), Coccarri observes how ascetics, local goddesses, “Muslim deities”, *birs*, *pirs* and *shahids* are part and parcel of “low” caste and “tribal” worship in Banares, a city that historically has been in close contact with Lucknow. Ahir, Kurmi, Pasi, Bhar, Kol, Gond, Dom, Chamar and Rai Das were some of the communities that Coccarri found as still inhabiting this diverse terrain of hybrid religious practices. Being a key site of pilgrimage, Banares can provide suggestions of regional parameters of religious practice.

¹⁴⁵ Daniel J. Rycroft, “Revisioning Birsa Munda: An Afterword on Vir Vanavasi Constructs versus Identity-Hybridity in Jharkand”. 2002. *Sussex History of Art Research Publications*. June 5, 2003. <www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/arthist/sharp>. Rycroft thinks through hybridity in relation to *adivasi*-ness in Jharkhand, a now independent province with a large *adivasi* population, that has “created a forum of contest whereby tribal and low-caste subjectivities have strategically reconstituted radical regionalist identities.” Rycroft shows how different “tribal” communities allied with non-tribals against a whole range of oppressors, colonial and Indian, and employed Christian, Hindu, Muslim and *adivasi* socio-religio-cosmic discourses, with their convergences, ambivalences and contradictions to create subaltern resistances that had to do with land, labor, indigeneity, self-rule and spiritual reclamation.

Deccani paintings and the circulation of the narratives and images of Radha and Krishna certainly exceeded one specific region.¹⁴⁶ Significantly, the lush imagery of the forest in *Krishna and the Gopis Take Shelter* recalls Holi, as it is a festival that celebrates nature and its fertility.¹⁴⁷ Further, nature and the forest is an emblematic trope for shoring up *adivasi* presence in Sanskrit epics as well as Mughal accounts.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, by seducing Radha in rich, lush, evocative landscapes in *Krishna and the Gopis take Shelter* – streams, forests, trees, animals and birds being prominently part of this visual rendering of their encounter – Krishna is claiming his seduction of that “untamed” nature and of that “untamed” woman, thereby establishing his control and right over *adivasi* lands.

This assertion as being one over *adivasi* lands becomes clearer once it is noted that Radha, Krishna’s lover, was not a part of the *Mahabharata* but born much later as an Ahir heroine, and Ahirs, within the context of Awadh, claim aboriginal origins and continue to share in many “tribal” social and religious practices. Her “nomadic” origins are evoked through the presence of the cows in the foreground and Krishna, assimilated into Vaisnavite Hinduism, is present here as a Hindu kingly figure. Krishna’s crown is beautifully and prominently rendered and his kingly sovereignty is being declared over the hills, ponds, and forests, which in terms of representational space form a large part of the image. However, Krishna is located in the centre and largest in scale, dominating and ordering the space of the image. Furthermore, it cannot be forgotten that this sovereignty and its relationship to territoriality is fundamentally reliant on the figure of the woman. With Radha’s body acting as the conduit of exchange, Krishna is literally

¹⁴⁶ Beach, *Mughal and Rajasthani Painting*.

¹⁴⁷ The dark clouds in the image may very well point to the monsoon season; however, the lushness so spectacularly imaged can be strategically read within the context of Holi as it more the thematic of fertility and love that is important. Also, Krishna and Radha bring the charge of these two seasons intimately together.

¹⁴⁸ C. J. Bijoy documents this trope within Sanskrit epics and Sumit Guha points to its use as a wider strategy of othering. Guha mentions an episode where a Mughal general in his contempt for Shivaji got a pandit to compile a verse in Sanskrit comparing him to a monkey dwelling in the forests of the mountains. See Bijoy, “A History of Discrimination,” and Guha, “Lower Strata,” 429.

bringing into the protective embrace of Hinduism the “low” caste and “tribal” community of cowherders, ideologically not only bringing “civilization” but also affirming his right over “tribal” territory. In addition, within the rhetoric of kingship, the image enacts the availability of other “low” caste and “tribal” women to the ruling elite. Holding the cloak over Radha and Krishna by stretching their arms, the gopis replicate the contours of Mount Govardhan, at the same time displaying their bodies, which though not engaged by Krishna’s body language, are present at his service and command, highlighting the narrative of availability.

However, the political subordination of *adivasi* and “low” caste bodies is not an absolute narrative and the effort to obliterate or domesticate their practices and discourses is disturbed by signs of survival and resistance that are present in traces of reconstituted Hinduism. For example, some histories point to Ahirs, along with the Bhils, Nishads, Nagas and other “tribes” battling with the gods of classical Hindu epics, and in the context of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and into the present, Ahirs claim Krishna as their ancestor in the form of a Hindu god rather than as a “tribal” figure.¹⁴⁹ In the same manner, Aherias, Buariahs and Harburahs negotiate social positions within the dominant narratives of Hinduism by claiming Valmiki as a patron saint or by invoking either an oppositional or a supportive place within the history of *Ramayana* or by claiming Rajput status. It may be easy to read the rituals of Holi performed by these “common” bodies as another sign of being caught in the ideological parameters of dominant “religious” narratives in the same way as Ahirs and other “castes” and “tribes” have to position themselves carefully within the *Ramayana* or in relation to Krishna. However, considering the histories of resistance and rebellion of these communities, and that such reworkings allow for status and socio-political claims to be made, they are always contestatory in

¹⁴⁹Jaspal Singh, “Krishna and his Role in Social Change”. 2001. *Tribune Publications*. 06 May, 2003.
<<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2001/20011125/spectrum/book7.htm>>

nature. Therefore, "Hinduism" emerges as a history of the traces of *adivasi*-ness and "low" caste reworkings though in a dynamic of constant negotiations.¹⁵⁰

This hybridity of subaltern histories underscores the multidimensional nature of subaltern resistances *and* clarifies the colonial agenda. For example, the Kols, to which the lineage of one community of Chamars is attributed, are an *adivasi* community with ties to Hos, Oraons and Mundas.¹⁵¹ All of these communities are marked by a history of rebellions against colonial authorities as well as exploitative Indian elites that created devastating social conditions.¹⁵² In some of these revolts, the colonial officials commented that mendicants and fakirs not only participated but also spread rumours of insurgency;¹⁵³ in the case of Awadh, "wandering" and "shifty" fakirs were sites of colonial suspicion and ascetics had been revolting against the Company for decades. No wonder, they were also blamed for fuelling anti-British sentiments in Lucknow during the revolts of 1857.¹⁵⁴ What is to be noted is that ascetic and peasant rebellions are in part *adivasi* resistances – "tribal" communities intersected with ascetic groups as in the case of Kurmis and the abstract figure of the peasant included dispossessed and displaced "tribes" as well as "tribal" agricultural labourers and cultivators.

The sites of resistances that materialize through excavating the multivalent nature of *adivasi* and ascetic identities allows one to inhabit the "common" bodies in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* with socio-political and spiritual agency rather than letting the colonial gaze congeal

¹⁵⁰ Gauri Viswanathan in *Outside the Fold* has persuasively argued that even in the case of conversion, one of the most highly charged and destabilizing activities for any community, though assimilation may certainly be a significant narrative, it cannot be ignored that conversion may also serve as the site for dismantling marginality and seeking civil and political rights. Further, she notes that in some instances conversion emerges "not as a renunciation of an aspect of oneself (as it is in the personal or confessional narrative form), but as an intersubjective, transitional, and transactional mode of negotiation between two otherwise irreconcilable world-views" (176).

¹⁵¹ Crooke II, 295 - 296.

¹⁵² Shachi Arya, *Tribal Activism: Voices of Protest* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1998) and L. P. Mathur, *Movement of Tribals during the Colonial Rule: Role of Ideologies* (New Delhi: Inter India Publications, 1995).

¹⁵³ Arya, 85 and K. S. Singh, *Birsa Munda and His Movement (1871-1901): A Study of a Millenarian Movement in Chotanagpur* (Calcutta, Seagull Press, 1992): 20.

¹⁵⁴ Misra, *Lucknow: Fire of Grace*, 104.

them as ascetics or low “castes” and “tribes” within a “religious” framework, where they are either “exotic”, “degraded” or “oppressed”. Furthermore, this agenda is intimately tied to the exercising of colonial power – the mobility of fakirs and sadhus and their multiple labouring identities, which prominently included military action, were homogenized and criminalized through the trope of “wild nomadism” and “raiding”. As we know, these are also the tropes for shoring up *adivasi*-ness in colonial narratives. The “criminality” of communities like the Aherias, Bauriyas and Harburahs is uttered in the same breath as their hunting capabilities, which are tied to their *adivasi* lineage. “Hunting” and “criminality” is collapsed into *adivasi* identity in order to make operative the colonial rhetoric that they have the “inability” to be “good” “settled” labor. For *adivasi* and “low” caste bodies to have some degree of mobility, even if it was one arising from displacement through war, famine and oppression, was disturbing to colonial authority interested in controlling agricultural production and labor as well as extracting high revenues. Also, *adivasi*, peasant and ascetic communities that still held onto political sovereignties of their own were seen as a great threat, especially because “raiding” was a crucial part of some of these communities (Badhaks, Nagas), and the ensuing disruption of cultivation and loss of revenue was viewed by the Company as undermining productivity and profits.¹⁵⁵ This “raiding” got cast under colonialism as “dacoity” and “robbery”, and the trope also extended to “tribes” like the Tharu and Bhar as they continued to move about in the forests and plains more freely. Their resistance to colonial conception of private property led them to being referred by the British as thieving “pests” and “dacoits”.

Earlier “raiding” was tied to the discourse of “wildness”, but this did not imply that communities labelled as “wild” necessarily lived in the forest; it was rather an inscription of

¹⁵⁵ Also see Ajay Skaria, “Celebrating Raids and Desolation” in *Hybrid Histories*, 124 - 152. Skaria’s arguments are made in relation to *adivasi* communities in Western India but he does document how raiding as a way of negotiating political authority was also common in North India and its major urban centres.

otherness. Within Nawabi authority and their incorporation of Mughal imagery, the claim of territoriality through the energizing of the city/forest and wild/civilized hierarchy is marked in the hunt. The performance of the hunt and its relationship to the incredible display of power, masculinity and rulership is captured in Mir Kalan Khan's *A Lion Hunt at Allahabad* (1760-65) (fig.10). The forest and the wilderness is constructed as full of danger and excitement, and as men fight sea-monsters and are mauled by lions, the Nawab makes one observe the mastering of the "untamed" beasts within this perilous environment. In *A Lion Hunt* this mastery is witnessed by a mass of accompanying hunters, soldiers and hangers-on, and in the upper left the carrying of the royal flags and insignia makes clear that this is tied to the performing of one's sovereignty. In being dominated and subjugated, the landscape and the animals that inhabit it are "tamed" and the agency and power is located in the skilled male hunter who is the Nawab of Awadh. Though this is a depiction of Shuja-ud-daulah, an earlier Nawab, Asaf-ud-daulah, too, went on elaborate three-month hunts and commissioned Mir to write poetry on his bravery and adventures.¹⁵⁶

Kavita Singh explains the political charge of such hunts in a courtly context:

The royal hunt is one of the recurrent themes in court painting. Often spoken of as entertainment the hunt was much more than a manly pleasure. It was a symbolically charged activity: when the king overcomes his prey, he embodies the victory of civilization over savagery.¹⁵⁷

In *A Lion Hunt* the city/forest dichotomy is at play with the city, fortified and strong, standing in as the civilized, better and more powerful actor in the negotiations of sovereignty. Thus, the image, considering the history of the trope of "wildness" standing in for "tribal" or *adivasi* communities, works to establish the supremacy of the Nawabs over such communities. At the same time, the negotiation of political sovereignty by the Nawabs is also in contestation

¹⁵⁶ Mir, *Zikr-I-Mir*, 125.

¹⁵⁷ Kavita Singh, "Paintings of Life at Court", *Power and Desire* (San Diego: San Diego Museum of Art, 2003): 13 - 15.

with the British colonial presence. In *A Lion Hunt* the Nawab is slaying a tiger with a sword in spite of the fact that others behind him actually hold muskets, which were symbols of British command. Thus, in locating more power and agency in the sword, a Nawabi symbol of authority, the rhetoric of civilization and the performance of authority underlying the hunt come to challenge the colonial discourse of British superiority. Also, if Gentil's *Map of Avad* (see fig.5) re-orders space to facilitate colonization, it must be remembered that the map is full of different types of wild animals, strategically placed around the periphery of the cartographically rendered map. In *A Lion Hunt*, Nawabi authorities are (re)asserting territorial control and claims of sovereignty through the "taming" of beasts in a spatially central and visually spectacular display of power.

The figure of the woman is operative in all the layers of this civilizational discourse. As pointed out before, colonial powers deployed the figure of the oppressed brown woman to construct India as a land ruled by "barbaric" men, constructing themselves as bearers of a more "just" and "liberated" government. Though not represented in the *Map of Avad*, other maps in Gentil's Atlas portray scenes of sati, which was to become a key site for performing this narrative.¹⁵⁸ Thus, the British claim of territoriality and intervention fundamentally relied on the discursive use of "woman", and this also stands true for the Nawabs, though within a different kind of rhetoric. In the "wilderness" of *Krishna and the Gopis Take Shelter*, Krishna seduces the *adivasi* and "low" caste woman as embodied in the figure of Radha, asserting control over her and over "nature", another emblematic trope for *adivasi*-ness. The hunt reconfirms this as an agenda of kingly sovereignty; *A Lion Hunt* highlights how Awadhi assertion over an "untamed" landscape, coming from a Muslim rulership, colludes with the discursive production of *adivasi*-ness in a dominant narrative of Hinduism. Furthermore, in so far as the story of Radha and

¹⁵⁸ Gentil, *Maps of Mughal India*, 45.

Krishna is at one level about the availability of women of the lower strata to a king (which Krishna became), it is no coincidence that another important visual narrative of Holi revolves around women in the harem celebrating with the ruler, a history extending to both Hindu and Muslim kingdoms.¹⁵⁹

The othering of *adivasi* communities within the negotiations of territoriality, as in the trope of “wildness”, is then a pervasive gesture. However, this is clearly part of an ideological and discursive construction and as documented, Bhars and Aherias (which include Bhoksa and Bhils) did not only live in the “wild” but were present in the forest, the countryside and the city. The ascetic is also commonly linked to the forest and in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* and *Map of Avad*, the “marginality” of ascetics is constructed through correlation to an “outside”; this “outside” prominently includes “nature” as embodied in the shorthand of trees and fire. However, both the *adivasi* and the ascetic are not to be literally contained in “nature” or the “forest”, though it stands as a marker of their alterity.

¹⁵⁹ Importantly, Radha was not the one that Krishna married and that once again points to the phallogocentric economy of desire, whereby those women who are *adivasi*, “low” class and caste etc. are not only more available but also more disposable. This disposability was deepened under colonialism and the history of the courtesans in Lucknow is a case in point. These women are not to be collapsed into the figure of the subaltern woman but they do help flesh out another way in which colonialism constructed a female body. According to Veena Talwar Oldenberg, “Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow,” *Lucknow: Memories of a City*, ed., Violette Graff (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), the courtesans were an influential female elite who, under British colonial legislation, came to be regulated, disciplined and inspected in order to ensure that they were free of venereal disease as British soldiers were stationed in the city. From courtesans they became designated as “singing and dancing girls” and their vocation was stigmatized and targeted to ensure cheaper and easier access to their bodies for European soldiers. This trajectory gathered force much later than 1800, but the seeds of the construction of a “secular”, “public” domain that would regulate and bring into being good citizens is there in the “commonness” of *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, and it is the conception of the legal and moral within such a framework that increased the disempowerment of these women. If the debates around sati are more contemporary with the production of the image and capture how women were the ground of the debate and not its subjects, the historical playing out of the bringing of modernity to India, as envisioned by the British, captures the drastic loss of arenas of manoeuvre in relation to the courtesans. Thus, in the encounter between Nawabi authority and colonialism, and their different patriarchal structures, there is the intensification of the instrumentalization and commodification of the female body. As Oldenberg also points out, the courtesans have been able to confront this transition, thanks to the incredible skills and the wealth they had acquired, and hold onto some of the privilege they once enjoyed, both in colonial and postcolonial India. Moving into the contemporary moment and how that history haunts us, this is not the case for the figure of the *adivasi* woman in India and this is brought out devastatingly in Mahasweta Devi’s fiction as well as activist writings.

Besides, it must be remembered that forest and plains were markers of a shifting, overlapping terrain, not only in terms of at times shared, and at times distinct, flora and fauna, interruptive yet bleeding boundaries of patchy forests and fallow plains, but also intertwined histories of mobility and migration.¹⁶⁰ According to Skaria, mobility in the plains was restricted under colonialism and it was made much harder to practice shifting cultivation there than in the forest regions; the interaction and influence of forest polities on the plains was heavily reduced and agricultural colonization wiped out interrupted forests, deepening the chasm between the plains and the forests.¹⁶¹

Although Skaria's research is on Western India, I found references to this process in Abu Talib's writings on Awadh. Talib mentions that because the "jungle" between the plains acted as a refuge for rebels and that they had forts within them, he hired labourers to cut down the forest.¹⁶² Talib's allegiances were not with the Nawab but with the British who actually resented the decentralized and fairly independent nature of landlords and different groups in the province. Throughout Talib's account the underlying concerns are the waste of land through grazing and cattleherding (shown in Gentil's *Map*), the lack of settled agriculture, the need to enforce colonial systems of law and governance and the proper collection of revenue in Awadh.¹⁶³

Colonial letters dating from the late eighteenth century rehearse the same kind of rhetoric. They mention that in Rohilkand, a part of Northern Awadh by then, jungles have taken over roads and bridges, weeds and grass are to be found in the "luxurious plains", villages have been

¹⁶⁰ Skaria, *Hybrid Histories*, 146 - 152.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. , 162 - 163. It has been made very explicit and clear in my thesis, right from the introduction, that "nature" acts as a trope and is not be equated or collapsed with *adivasi* identity. As I go on to develop how the division between "forests" and "plains" is not a stable one, it is meant to question another foundation on which stereotypes of *adivasi* peoples is built. This critical gesture comes in the spirit of deconstructing how dominant narratives border subaltern identities.

¹⁶² Talib, *History of Asaf-ud-daulah*, 51 - 52.

¹⁶³ Ibid. , 43.

deserted and wild beasts “destructive to mankind” roam around freely.¹⁶⁴ This evocation of wilderness is intended to create an argument for British intervention that would bring prosperity to this “miserable country”. According to colonial officials the people themselves cannot wait for the Company to take over control;¹⁶⁵ this control was to be facilitated by colonialism’s effort to create fixed boundaries between forests and plains, ensuring better surveillance and more extensive permanent cultivation. This effort went hand in glove with fashioning fixed and rigid identities of communities to further the colonial agenda of exclusive sovereignties and singular allegiances, within which militant ascetics, *adivasis*, “nomads” and independent zamindars were to be disciplined into moral subjects of the Raj, and given fixed and stable sets of “rights”.

In *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, if the representational frailty of the ascetic holding the fire is more accessible than the history of ascetic militancy and other hybridized aspects of ascetic identity, it needs to be located in the deepening of such a colonial vision. The long history of evacuating armed asceticism and its attendant social mobility is present in the rendering of ascetics in Gentil’s *Map of Avad* (see fig. 5) and Skinner’s album (fig.7 and 8). Within Gentil’s map, the ascetic is prominently present in the top register, depicted as a frail figure carrying a stick and a begging bowl or one performing ritual or *tapas* (bodily discipline). The physical activities that ascetics are performing are part of this bodily discipline and only one of the scenes include other social actors; in it we observe a woman making an offering to one of the ascetics. Within the rhetoric of Gentil’s map, the attention given to ascetics in multiple scenes constitutes an important element of the “exotic” that works to constitute India as a “bizarre” space and place in colonial imaginings.

¹⁶⁴ *Letters, Political, Military and Commercial*, 36.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

In contrast to the *Map of Avad*'s larger cartographic and compartmental visual narratives, the Skinner album frames the ascetics individually in space. *Bhajan Das Bairagi* (see fig.7) is situated in relation to a shrine in the background and *The Naked Ascetic* (see fig.8) is situated in an uncultivated, dry landscape. The bairagi figure is frail and the matted hair, the lion cloth and the sacred thread as well the red *tilak* and prayer beads, along with the shrine in the backdrop, serve to build his image as a Hindu religious type. The more robust ascetic is titled "naked" and this is a strategy of othering. The manifold ways of embodying asceticism are marginalized and nakedness, not uncommonly associated in the colonial mind with "primitiveness", becomes the primary index of the individual represented. The dry, uncultivated landscape further creates the sense of the ascetic being on the "outside" of civilization as embodied in cities and in the practice of agriculture, evacuating the militancy evoked through the spear, gun and sword that the *Naked Ascetic* carries. Clearly, it is not the self-representation of the ascetics or their long history of engagement with the social world that is being captured. They are rather meant to serve as representatives of entire sects and communities in keeping with the Skinner album's agenda of depicting "castes" and "tribes" by their profession or religious affiliation.

This epistemic violence on social bodies cannot be undone but the traces of other-ed histories can be read against the grain to destabilize colonial vision. For one, the begging bowl along with the emaciated body of the ascetic marks a rejection of participation in the money economy and the labour market, disturbing authority based on control of worldly resources and the labour of others, a process in which the British East India Company was violently engaged. The frail body of the ascetic in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* echoes this critique, which is further accentuated by the non-labouring expressions of joy and dance in the image. At the same time, though the ascetic may claim power through being on the "outside" of the social in a particular manner, that is only one discursive element constituting his multivalent identity. In

fact, the physical body of the ascetic, both through its frailty and its yogic practice, recalls *tapas*, which is tied to both militant action and social mobility in the caste system.¹⁶⁶

I will now inscribe the traces of physical prowess and militancy embodied in the sword yielding figures in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, and marked through the weapons held by the *Naked Ascetic* and the *tapas* performed by ascetic figures in the *Map of Avadh*, with a specific and resistant history. In Awadh, apart from the Satnamis, there is a strong history of the presence of major *naga* (warrior) *sadhu* soldiery (*gosain* and *bairagi*)¹⁶⁷ who were employed by the state.¹⁶⁸ For example, Anup Giri was a Gosain Raja who commanded more than half of Awadh's army, and as colonial demands drained the wealth of the kingdom and non-payment of wages led to revolts and bloody suppressions, he resigned.¹⁶⁹ The hidden agenda was to force the Nawab to deploy the Company's own forces in Awadh.¹⁷⁰ The colonial powers had thus been marginalizing and criminalizing peasant and ascetic mercenaries directly and indirectly, as in the case of Anup Giri's armies. In response, for almost four decades leading up to the late 1790s, there had been several *sadhu* and *fakir* uprisings in response to agrarian conflict, demilitarization and control of mobility.¹⁷¹ Around 1800, when *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* was executed, was when *naga* armies were finally disbanding their reach and contribution to territories beyond Company rule, thereby marking deeper colonial control.¹⁷² The colonial renderings of ascetics must be seen as ambivalent and unsettled in this moment – if the representations mark the

¹⁶⁶ William Pinch, "Subaltern Sadhus? Political Ascetics in Indian Myth, Memory, and History" *University of Virginia Website*. 1997. May 26, 2003. <<http://www.virginia.edu/soasia/symsem/kisan/papers/sadhus.html>>

¹⁶⁷ Gosains are Shaiva *nagas* and Bairagis are Vaishnava *nagas*. For the complex configuring of Vishnu and Shiva as gods see C. J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 32 - 36.

¹⁶⁸ Talib, *History of Asaf-ud-daulah*, 14.

¹⁶⁹ Barnett, *North India between Empires*, 111.

¹⁷⁰ *Letters*, 20.

¹⁷¹ William Pinch, Online.

¹⁷² *Ibid*.

“fixing” of identities and the violent disempowerment of ascetics, they are at the same time haunted by memories of rebellion and agency, both worldly and divine.

To more fully think through colonial control and devastation as well as Nawabi oppression, I now turn to the labouring body in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*. The Satnamis and other castes and “tribes” I explored were labourers (Chamars, Aherias, Bhars), artisans (Chamars, Kori) and cultivators (Pasis, Kurmi, Ahirs, Aherias). These class and caste identities intermeshed with those of the ascetic: Satnamis were ascetics who worked in the military and as labourers, Kurmis were linked to a lineage of fakirs, some of the “tribes” like the Aherias were described as “disguising” as fakirs in order to commit crime, and the others generally had fakirs/ascetics as part of their communities. Thus, the labouring body is a hybrid body, also marked by asceticism and *adivasi*-ness, and the workings of authority must be seen in relation to this identity-hybridity. Neelam Choudary has documented how under the Mughal Empire, from which Awadh emerged, peasants and artisans had subsistence wages.¹⁷³ Richard Barnett has expanded on how exploitation in the Awadhian countryside was also coercive and how rent contractors had their own cavalry, infantry and artillery backing them.¹⁷⁴ Under the Nawabs, conditions and wages continued to be poor in the city and the countryside; however, they were further exacerbated by the enormous subsidy demanded by the British and the subsequent pressure to “stabilize” land use and make the labor force more “efficient”. These factors led to a devastating famine in Awadh in the 1780s and continual periods of underpayment of wages.¹⁷⁵

The politics of labor are complexly coded in the bent figure in the centre of *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* in which a Mughal convention of depicting movement bursts forth. In

¹⁷³ Neelam Chaudary, *Labor in Mughal India* (New Delhi: Aravali Books International, 1998).

¹⁷⁴ Barnett, *North India Between Empires*, 181.

¹⁷⁵ Oldenberg, *Making of Colonial Lucknow*, 59. Horrors of the famine are described in Talib, 66. Also, for discussion of agrarian politics and policies in Awadh see Thomas R. Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the British Raj: Northern India in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

rupturing the newly emerging colonial style of the painting, and in bringing to the fore the hybridity already always present in images, a series of new possibilities of readership/viewership are opened. In being destabilized aesthetically, this figure, whom I read either as a labouring body or rather a labouring body inhabiting a space now beyond its capacity to labour (joyous, dancing, intoxicated), disturbs domestication that occurs in the orbit of a *darbar* or one in which the body is there to be catalogued, disciplined and civilized under the colonial gaze. This body is haunted with its history of violent shuttling between Empires and kingdoms at the same time as it inscribes the hopes of an emergent, resistant body inhabiting diverse narratives of being in the world. The oppression of this body would be deployed as an ideological instrument justifying India's colonization, while being even more thoroughly and systematically dispossessed, and thus the wresting of the body from the space of the Mughal Empire and Nawabi authority can undoubtedly serve British imperial agendas. I, however, hope that in giving presence to this body through other/ed histories and memories, the resistant potentialities in *The Holi Festival of Lucknow* become visible.

Lila, Bhakti and Sufism

In this last section, I investigate how other/ed ways of being in the world configure in the traditions and paradigms of *lila* and *bhakti* as well as Sufism, a heterodox and mystical branch of Islam with an important presence in Lucknow. Specifically, I will foreground *lila* as play and as the performative, *bhakti* as participation and as a theology of embodiment, and Sufism as a critical discourse on authority. I will explore the gendered nature of these traditions and also highlight how their discourses allow public space and presence as taken up by “common” bodies (ascetic/ *adivasi*/ peasant/ artisan) in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* to be rethought.

Lila, or play, has to do with both this worldly as well as the other worldly in which divinity is embodied in the social world, a world that is a small part of the larger cosmic *lila*.¹⁷⁶ *Lila* haunts *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* through the parodying of kingship, reversals of caste and class, and the joy and dancing of (otherwise) labouring bodies. In the image, the bodies intermingle and their overlapping not only creates movement and depth but also makes all space “impure” and in transformation – a space in the process of becoming something else – and it is within such a space that reversals, such as those of class and caste, become possible. This process of *lila* gains legitimacy through the history of the mingling of Radha and Krishna, of the beloved with the devotee, as a transformative experience that is fertile and regenerative – the story of Radha and Krishna, at one level, celebrates nature, love and sexual union, resonating with the thematics of Holi, a spring festival.

Spring also recalls fertility in the form of crops, which summons up the relationship between the countryside and the city. The gateway and the street are liminal spaces negotiating these sites, and within the context of the parodying of authority through *lila*, the potential of transforming unequal and exploitative relationships opens up. Furthermore, the assertion of power and wealth is critiqued through the cosmic aspect of *lila* in which worldly authority is rendered largely immaterial. However, *lila* is a much-contested paradigm and some scholars have argued it domesticates the sufferings of the subaltern by casting poverty and oppression as part of God’s larger designs and his mysterious play.¹⁷⁷ It is possible to argue that in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* the reversals and parodies occur within a very sanctioned space and place of ritual, but only if the narratives are read from a dominant perspective and do not account for the subaltern re-workings of self and community. A subaltern perspective does not involve putting

¹⁷⁶ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 167.

¹⁷⁷ Norvin Hein, “Lila,” *The Gods at Play: Lila in South Asia*, ed., William S. Sax (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 13-20.

under question the violence and oppression that social bodies suffer, but rather haunts the narrative of dominance and erasure with a sense of the manifold strategies of survival and self-assertion in the world, a world in which god and spirits are always already among us.

Resistances and other-ed histories can in fact be shored up through *lila* as it elaborates divinity through creativity and not “lack” and thus can be seen to open the social world to different potentialities.¹⁷⁸ Further, in also being a discourse of the performative,¹⁷⁹ *lila* opens up room for reinscription, a form of creativity and a reworking of social identity. Although the play with identities and boundaries through reversals and parodies may seem innocuous, *lila* does denaturalize the categories of this world, and its socio-temporal imaginings. In doing so the ideas of freedom and spontaneity associated with *lila* gain the potential to be wrested for socio-political critique or at the very least to create room for sites of resistance.

Lila has also been viewed as affirming the phallocentric economy of desire.¹⁸⁰ It is the case that in Radha and Krishna’s *lila*, as codified in the *Gita Govinda*, that Krishna’s journey and passion is made more central and Radha occupies an instrumentalized role within it.¹⁸¹ However, as I have already argued before, subaltern readings provide a more nuanced sense of social relations and that gendering of discourses is richest when considered in its intersections with class, caste, colonialism etc. For example, to contrast *Krishna and the Gopis* with *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* as an all male space, and therefore a display of masculinity that relies on exclusion of women from public spaces would be to buy into the colonial vision that is attendant upon it. Whereas from a Nawabi point of view, noble (elite) women were central in patronizing festivities of all religions; what is more, the begums of Awadh held substantial rights to land, to

¹⁷⁸ William Sax, “Introduction” in *Gods at Play*, 4.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁸⁰ Robert E. Goodwin, “The Play World of Sanskrit Poetry,” in *The Gods at Play*, 68.

¹⁸¹ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997): 50 - 55.

the treasury and to administration before they were dispossessed to accommodate excessive colonial demands.¹⁸² Yet, to posit this version against the colonial one is not sufficient as it ignores that royal and upper class women's participation in public life was highly different than those of subaltern women, who in many cases were sexually exploited by the royal and landed elite. Also, the public-ness of subaltern women's bodies was inscribed in sites and locations that were class, caste and labor specific and – when *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* was painted – within a diversity of “low” caste and *adivasi* spaces. These spaces, though imbricated in the larger play of patriarchal norms, recreated and maintained communities in which women's status and role was more substantial, and this legacy continues today, in part, and in tension with more conservative borderings of women's bodies. Mahasweta Devi has powerfully documented this phenomenon in her fictional as well as activist writings.¹⁸³

What allows *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* to be read more multiply is that it is not only *lila*, with its disorder and play, but also *bhakti* that informs the dynamics of social bodies. A substantial body of scholarship translates *bhakti* as devotion to a personal deity;¹⁸⁴ however, to translate *bhakti* as personal devotion rather than participation has a long colonial history that tends to disregard the importance given to thought and action in the discourse and rather constructs the “devotee” as much more driven by emotion.¹⁸⁵ This clearly fits into the British agenda of constructing India as a “religious” country with “blind faith” and “repetitious ritual”, a

¹⁸² Juan Cole, “Shi’ite Noble Women and Religious Innovation in Awadh,” in *Lucknow: Memories of a City* and Barnett, *North India between Empires*, 122.

¹⁸³ Mahasweta Devi, *Imaginary Maps*, trans., Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Routledge, 1995) and Mahasweta Devi, *Dust on the Road: The Activist Writings of Mahasweta Devi*, ed., Maitreya Ghatak (Calcutta: Seagull Press, 2000).

¹⁸⁴ Examples include C.J. Fuller, *Servants of the Goddess: The Priests of a South Indian Temple* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) and Thomas B. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devi-Mahatmya and a Study of Its Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

¹⁸⁵ Karen Pechilis Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 17 - 24.

gaze attendant upon *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*.¹⁸⁶ Karen Pechilis Prentiss has convincingly argued that *bhakti* is more accurately captured through the idea of participation, which also happens to be its root meaning.¹⁸⁷ In addition, new scholarship has advanced that *bhakti* concerns not only the *saguna* (with attributes) imagining of the divine, but also the *nirguna* (formless) construction of divinity¹⁸⁸ – this helps articulate, at one level, why the rhetoric of *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* can be read strongly within the paradigm of *bhakti* despite the absence of a deity.

Instead of a deity, the procession is of a “low” caste figure participating in a scene of reversal that parodies both the performance of *darshan* and of a *darbar*. The effect is that divinity is distanced from kingship, and instead of the “courtly” dress keeping the social bodies contained in the domain of Nawabi power, the embodiment of divinity comes to suggest a possible space and place where the courtly or the colonial may be unable to domesticate these bodies. This reading of *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* becomes more charged through the recent rethinking of the very paradigm of *bhakti*. Prentiss has translated *bhakti* as being more of a “theology of embodiment...embedded in the details of human life.”¹⁸⁹ As such “details” are socially and historically located, she argues for the need to think through the concept of *bhakti* in terms of the particular.

This conceptualization of *bhakti* allows it to be elaborated as a practice in which the historicized “details” of gender, asceticism, caste, labour, and colonialism, as they pertain to Awadh, have an important place. Rather than domesticating these aspects of embodiment, *bhakti* provides a paradigm for foregrounding their significance without falling back into Eurocentric

¹⁸⁶ Prentiss, 20.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹⁸⁸ Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987). Also, see John Stratton Hawley, “The Nirgun/Sagun Distinction in Early Manuscript Anthologies of Hindu Devotion,” in *Bhakti Religion in India*.

¹⁸⁹ Prentiss, 6.

imaginings of the “secular” and the “rational” where they cannot already always inhabit the divine. This framing of *bhakti* differs widely from that of Ranajit Guha, who in *Dominance Without Hegemony* argues “all the inferior terms, in any relationship of power structured as D/S [Dominance/Subordination] within the Indian tradition, can be derived from it [Bhakti]”.¹⁹⁰ He attributes this to the three dyads – Palaka/Palya (Protector/Subject), Prabhu/Dasa (Master/Servant) and Lalaka/Lalya (Superior Relative/Inferior Relative) – that are central to the “great” traditions of *Bhakti* and that according to him “comprehensively” encompass “the nature of authority in precolonial India.”¹⁹¹ He asserts:

It was these [Bhakti cults] that spiritualized effort, fatigue and frustration involved in the labor and services offered by peasants, craftsmen, and subaltern specialists to local elites...In all such instances Bhakti conferred on the superordinate the sanctity of a deity or his surrogate, and translated dominance into the benign function of a palaka, prabhu, or lalaka...to whom the subordinate related as a devotee. Correspondingly, the latter’s submission, which rested in the last resort on the sanction of force, was made to appear as self-induced and voluntary – that is, as collaboration in short.¹⁹²

My approach, unlike Guha, does not think of *bhakti* as defined by the dominant actors, which in the case of Lucknow would be the feudal and Nawabi elite. Nicholas Dirks has observed Guha’s tendency to “resort to Sanskritic sources for indigenous political theory and historical consciousness [that] seems to betray a general commitment to writing subaltern history against the grain in most other contexts.”¹⁹³ My reading of *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* acknowledges the powerful force of both colonial and Nawabi agendas, but goes on to investigate the “little” traditions and traces that carry “other-ed” memories, histories and theories.

¹⁹⁰ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony*, 49-50.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 50.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Nicholas Dirks, “The Burden of the Past” in *Castes of Mind*, 313.

The gendering of *bhakti* can be articulated differently as well. It is true that Guha's argument that *bhakti* is sexist and phallocentric¹⁹⁴ is operative in the visual arena – in *Krishna and the Gopis Take Shelter from the Rain* (see fig.9), Radha's body is turned towards Krishna, who is embracing her and whose body is depicted frontally thereby representationally exuding openness to love and devotion, not only of Radha, but also of all the gopis. The gopis holding the cloak over Radha and Krishna are stretching their arms to allow the displaying of their bodies and the entire pictorial program revolves around Krishna - this narrative of availability is coded as "devotion". However, this rhetoric is one found within Sanskritic and kingly arenas and Radha, standing in the image for an *adivasi*/Ahir woman, cannot be construed as unequivocally "obedient" or as part of a homogenously sexist social system, as ideologically defined from above. In fact, if one closely examines Gentil's *Map of Avad*, a woman is shown worshipping the ascetics and to view this as "devotion" that is straightforwardly "oppressive" is to buy into the colonial rhetoric of the brown woman who has no agency and needs saving from the aberrant "religiosity" of the subcontinent.

The "woman's question" as defined by this colonial logic would develop into a major ideological site for constructing the European subject as more "civil" and "just". Within the context of *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, several narratives open up that participate in the contentions of this debate – the evocation of caste combining with the polemic of women's oppression to constitute "backward" and yet to be "civilized" subcontinent; the "official" story of Radha and Krishna, a deeply patriarchal narrative as constituted from above, getting reinscribed as (superficial) mobility and agency of the Indian woman to counter the colonial agenda but actually producing the (fractured) collusion of colonialism, feudalism, kingship and canonical Hinduism in the subjugation of women. All these narratives are also tied to the construction of

¹⁹⁴ Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, 50-55.

the identity of India as “Hindu”, which works to erase *adivasi* and other hybrid histories.

This is a clever strategy because within the context of gender debates, the *adivasi* / “low” caste female body could be highly disruptive as the traditions of bride-price, of widow remarriage, that for example in part constitute that body within the subaltern social system, has the potential to put into crisis both the elite Indian intellectual male discourse and the colonial discourse.¹⁹⁵ Thus, these norms of gender and sexuality were to be constituted as “primitive”, “immoral” and “aberrant” in order to “manage” the *adivasi* and “low” caste female body. At the same time, colonization was to make collusion with other patriarchal structures a route to some upward mobility for the subaltern male body. This would of course be a deeply limited mobility considering how colonial paradigms would border that body as “lowly”, “illiterate”, “rural”, “criminal”, “superstitious” etc.¹⁹⁶

To continue envisioning paradigms with subalternity in mind, I now return to the Satnami community to reason how they make it possible to think of *bhakti* differently. For example, the Satnami community, founded by an anti-status quo *bhakti* figure, Baba Jagjivan Das, redefined the figure of the ascetic as a militant and a household man, identities residing in subaltern bodies like the Chamar. This reimagining of self helps question Ranajit Guha’s assertion that spiritualising efforts springing from *bhakti* only serve the dominant. The Satnamis’ reconstituting of asceticism and of the dominant “religious” traditions were an effort to claim humanity and divinity in the face of discrimination and oppression. This acted as source for building strength, which though certainly not devoid of conservative norms (such as parameters of who drinks from the guru’s feet) or its set of ambivalences (urge to both think of god as formless and to appeal to

¹⁹⁵ These *adivasi* traditions are pointed out by Devi in *Imaginary Maps*, but are also documented even in mainstream anthropological literature in India today. See Hassan, *Meet the UP Tribes* and H. S. Saksena et. al, *Perspectives in Tribal Development* (Lucknow: Bharat Book Centre, 1998).

¹⁹⁶ The works of Mahasweta Devi document this forcefully.

the dominant order by including Ram as a deity), worked as a strategy for rebellion against the Mughals and for recognition by the Nawab of Awadh. Such subaltern histories of the *bhakti* movement, along with the concept of *lila* that disrupts the more “orderly” aspects of it, give the parodies and reversals in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* a strong import that is critical of the denial of dignity and divinity to all those that inhabit this world. In the image, the “low” caste figure becomes a parodied king, but it is significant that in claiming the power to play with social boundaries, the marginalized bodies are destabilizing social hierarchies and their ability to contain the true strength of what it means to be human and to be close to the divine. The contestations of hegemonic religious norms by the Satnami community highlight how such processes have the potential to be wrested by a low “caste” community for reinscription of hierarchy and divinity.

Sites of pilgrimage like Ayodhya in the vicinity of Lucknow, or Banares and Allahabad, give *bhakti* a regionally strong presence in Awadh as they circulated as more effective sites for enacting *bhakti*.¹⁹⁷ These sites were important for the Nawabs of Awadh as they collected substantial revenue through the toll on pilgrims, and deployed them as key locations for demonstrating their ideology of tolerance, and for negotiating power with different social bodies and communities.¹⁹⁸ Asaf-ud-dualah had continued the Nawabi policy of promoting Ayodhya, the city most closely associated with the *Ramayana*, into a major pilgrimage centre, and as Peter van de Veer documents, this was a strategy to strengthen relations with its *naga* soldiery and administrative Hindu elite.¹⁹⁹ Ayodhya was also an importance place to Bhars, Bhils and Ahirs, who with their intermeshed histories strongly shore up *adivasi* claims to the city, at the same

¹⁹⁷ Barnett, *North India between Empires*, 168.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Peter van de Veer, *Gods on Earth: The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Centre* (London: Anthlone Press, 1988): 37 - 38.

time as claims of being Rajput by various “low” castes and “tribes” points to the ambivalent negotiations with the semiotics of high “Hindu-ness” and its congealing under colonialism.

Further, as I have been arguing, *bhakti* is not a homogenous tradition but is highly hybrid. Krishna, a dominant marker of *bhakti* and of Holi, is considered by many scholars to have been incorporated into Hinduism from non-Indo-European cultures.²⁰⁰ It is argued that originally Krishna as an agrarian god had his basis in opposition to Brahmanism, and was later incorporated and assimilated through his identification with Vishnu-Narayan of the Brahmanical pantheon.²⁰¹ Krishna translates as “black” or “dark skinned” and the presence of black Krishnas in the subcontinent today is also posited as evidence of his non-“Aryan” origins. The colonial documents point to how in Awadh specifically, the Ahirs who claim descent from Krishna were closely linked to the Bhars, an *adivasi* community that once ruled over Ayodha as well as Lucknow. Moreover, Ahirs also worshipped Sufi *pirs* thereby making the imagining of Krishna and of *bhakti* within a “Hindu” space difficult, and instead *bhakti* emerges as part of a larger and always hybrid, reconstituted discourse and practice.

I wish to now connect the different sites of *bhakti* as they collide with *lila* at Holi through dance, laughter, non-normative behaviour and intoxication, all marked in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*. In particular, the histories of *lila* as tied to the demonic in North India include Banares, as cited in Nita Kumar’s study, and in relation to Lucknow, the worshipping of Kali as Bhawani are found in colonial documents on thuggee.²⁰² Kali in this case represents her dark and violent nature and the ambivalence in her divinity comes from her “low” caste and *adivasi* traces and their negotiations with dominant traditions. The role of Kali may not directly relate to the

²⁰⁰ I. H. Azad Faruqi, *Sufism and Bhakti* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1984): 36.

²⁰¹ Faruqi, 38-39.

²⁰² Nita Kumar, “Class and Gender Politics in the Ramlila” in *The Gods at Play*, 168 and Martine Van Woerkens, *The Strangled Traveler: Colonial Imaginings and the Thugs of India*, trans., Catherine Tihanyi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002): 172.

occasion of Holi but it is certainly part of its discursive charge through the non-normative behaviour legitimated through *lila*. The goddess and her demonity are part of a social matrix and this matrix includes the worshipping of Panchon Pir and of different heroes or *Birs* (heroes) by the “castes” and “tribes” in Awadh.

Diane Cocarri argues that the figures of *Birs* derive their power from “the violent, untimely, tragic or unjust nature of their deaths”²⁰³ – her investigation of local Ahir *birs* in Banares reveals that the stories told about them narrate conflicts with kings and the landed class, and that the militant asceticism and martial status attached to the *birs* is an act of resistance.²⁰⁴ What is to be noted and also present in the colonial archive is the aniconic image of the *birs*, *pirs* and goddesses that recalls *adivasi* traditions.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, the brave and deified “low” caste figures die proudly and violently at the hands of their oppressors.

Scholars like Shulman, Rao and Hildebeitel, although they focus on South India, do allow one to reflect on negotiations of divinity by “untouchable” and “low” caste figures. The examples explored in their works are of Kattavaryan and Katamaraju, both guardians of the “wilderness” and the latter more explicitly an avatar of Krishna.²⁰⁶ In both cases the hero is an “untouchable” figure who desires and steals a Brahmin girl, and either kills Brahmins or insults them on several occasions. These transgressions and criminality all become part of the figures demonic divinity and power with the narrative concluding with repentance or the unavoidable death on the stake.²⁰⁷ The tragic fate of the brave “low” caste figure is one that also informs the Ahir *birs* in Awadh, and because of already marked “tribal” origins of Krishna even in North

²⁰³ Coccarri, 260.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 261 - 267.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 256. See Crooke on Ahirs.

²⁰⁶ David Dean Shulman, “Outcaste, Guardian, Trickster: Notes on the Myth of Kattavaryan” in *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees*, 35 - 68. Also, Velcheru Narayana Rao, “Tricking the Goddess: Cowherd Katamaraju and Goddess Ganga in the Telugu Folk Epic” in *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees*, 105 - 122.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. and Alf Hildebeitel, “Introduction” in *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees*, 1 - 18.

India, the relating of Katamaraju and Kattavaryan as guardians of the “wilderness” and as “untouchable” clarifies this as a trope for constructing *adivasi*-ness. It is clear that the “low” caste and the “tribal” are incorporated into the dominant cultural order in a way that constitutes them as aberrant, but this also becomes the basis of an ambivalent power and divinity.

Understood within the larger histories of subaltern bodies and their social practices, these ambivalent narratives emerge as sites of domination and of resistance, as transgression and mocking as witnessed in *The Holi Festival of Lucknow* become ways of inhabiting power and enabling critique. Furthermore, the ascetics swinging over fire in Gentil’s *Map of Avad* are claiming physical and divine power through their performance. In *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* the flinging of powder, along with the music and the play with social boundaries, is meant to connect the social bodies to the divine in a transformative manner. Thus, within the performative as coded in *lila* and *bhakti* “low” caste or “aberrant” bodies may claim presence in a forceful manner.

This assertion is directly linked to status, identity and knowledge – the Nawabs in Awadh negotiated their authority in relation to the prevalent discourses that gave power to fakirs, ascetics and other subaltern social actors. For example, in *Zikr-I-Mir*, Mir, a poet and courtier first in Delhi and then in Lucknow, works hard to assert that his father was a man who did not care for those in power but rather wandered among “common” people like a fakir, and that he himself is deeply knowledgeable of Sufi traditions.²⁰⁸ What is further laid out is the miraculous power of ascetics and the respect accorded to them by nobility.²⁰⁹ Here two things become clear – the claim to divinity and spiritual agency carried political weight and that it also involved a claim to knowledge coded here as miraculous. In revisiting Gentil’s map, it is now noteworthy

²⁰⁸ Mir, *Mir-Taqi-Mir*, esp. 25 - 73.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 30 - 33 and 36.

that in the lower left corner there is a saint's tomb that could very well be a shrine of a *pir*. This is a visual trace of a popular and powerful presence in Lucknow and in the late eighteenth century, Sufism was in heated contest with official Shia clergymen, from mostly small and middle landholding families, who were increasingly seeking more exclusive control of the Muslim religious discourse in the city.²¹⁰

Sufi *pirs* and their assertion of enjoying divine graces, performing miracles, and direct inspiration from god (*kashf*) were threatening to the more bureaucratic and institutional Shia ideologies and they were banned from official congregations in the late 1790s.²¹¹ The *pirs* were also noted as supporting wandering fakirs and bairagis, and as providing access to authority for the *bazaari* classes; the artisan and labouring classes deployed the charismatic and non-scriptural claims to power, available through Sufism, to carve out an alternative domain of legitimacy. Thus, Sufism is another important arena from which to imagine how the “low” caste and class bodies in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* may be invested with influential presence. Its discourse of the miraculous and of the divine is open to subaltern bodies and within the context of Holi and its celebrations becomes even more accentuated, as the use of music and revelry in the celebration of God was an important aspect of Sufism. The discourses of Sufism would be relevant to Holi as there was an important cross-class, cross-cultural and cross-religious following of Sufi *pirs* in Lucknow.²¹²

Nevertheless, the Shia orthodoxy in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Lucknow looked down upon Sufism's diverse appeal and objected to Sufi criticisms of the wealthy, their employment of music and “uncontrolled passion” for love, intense and

²¹⁰ Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiism*, 146.

²¹¹ Ibid., 147

²¹² Ibid., 146 - 147.

overflowing.²¹³ This policing attempts to control not only critique but also emotions as experienced by subaltern actors – the anger, the courage, the spirit of the subalterns is made an “aberration” and what is also targeted is the expression of joy. Achille Mbembe’s *On The Postcolony* demonstrates how such indexes of bodily subjectivities are profoundly affected by colonialism and imperialism, which work to create an “intimate tyranny.”²¹⁴ What Mbembe reveals is that the “ambiguous, fluid, modifiable” behaviour of the colonized body, as it dances, laughs, fills up the street, in its “constant compromises, small token of fealty, inherent cautiousness” is a body that is to be seen not for its “resistances” but also for continuing control and powerlessness, as the violent epistemology of colonialism is internalized.²¹⁵ Thus, while I read *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* against the grain and unearth traces, memories and histories to open up the image, the profound congealing of the colonial vision through such images, and the violent repercussions of internalizing it, as the trajectory of independent India demonstrates, must not be forgotten.

At the same time, it is vital to remember that Sufism underscores a concept of devotion/participation that promotes the translation of the spiritual ideals of love into practice through service to humanity.²¹⁶ In the words of Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti of Ajmer, the highest devotion to God is “to redress the misery of those in distress, to fulfill the needs of the helpless and to feed the hungry.”²¹⁷ Muinuddin Chisti also remarks that to be close to God is to exercise

²¹³ Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiism*, 153.

²¹⁴ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 102 - 141, 173 - 211.

²¹⁵ Ibid. , 128 - 129.

²¹⁶ Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, “Impact of Sufi Saints on Indian Society and Culture,” *Contemporary Relevance of Sufism*, ed., Syeda Saiyidain Hameed (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1993): 139 - 167.

²¹⁷ Ibid. , 141. Muinuddin Chisti was the founder of the highly influential Chisti order. His legacy had a huge impact on Sufi practices in the subcontinent and he is today one of the most revered of Sufi saints. Within the context of Lucknow, it was a Chisti leader, Ali Akbar Mawdudi, who in the 1700s came head to head with Shia orthodoxy. See Cole, 149 - 151.

“first, river-like generosity; secondly, sun-like affection; and thirdly earth-like hospitality.”²¹⁸

Thus, openness of spirit as a way to social change inhabits Sufi teachings and if one considers how colonialism employed the doctrine of divide and rule, and how social hierarchies work to deny human-ness for the hoarding of power and privilege, the potential of Sufism for decolonising imaginations becomes evident. As Gamal Abdel-Shield argues, oppression along lines of gender, class, “race”, sexuality is not only something that sediments in “facts” or “hard” forms of knowledge, but in “soft” forms too as it has deep psychic and cultural effects.²¹⁹ Sufism, in theorizing how in dominating others we do so only at a huge cost to our divinity and spirit, allows one to have a valid springboard for searching for the “soft” yet deep ways in which injustice affects oneself and others. Thus, Sufism, being an important context in Awadh for thinking through devotion/participation and love, can provide a useful way of reading *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* against the Shia orthodox and colonial lens.

Additionally, Lucknow is credited with being the most important centre for the development of the Urdu language and literature, which was born out of the encounter between Persian and regional languages and dialects of North India. A major type of Urdu poetry that emerged was the *ghazal* whose etymology is “talking to a woman about love” and sexual union in the genre is intimately tied to spiritual union with God, due to the influence of Sufi mysticism. Like the rituals of Holi, ghazals were about love, nature and union with God. Moreover, disapproval of authority or being a “kafir” was a term of endearment in the genre.²²⁰ The assertion of the relationship between the devotee and God through the parodying of authority is similar to how Holi constructs the worshipper. The coming together of such histories of Sufism

²¹⁸ Nizami, “Impact of Sufi Saints on Indian Society and Culture,” 146.

²¹⁹ Gamal Abdel-Shield, “How Do You Quantify an Emotion? The Empire of Facts and the Ghosting of Anti-Racism,” Canadian Critical Race Conference, University of British Columbia, May 2-4 2003.

²²⁰ Harbans Mukhia, “The Celebration of Failure as Dissent in Urdu Ghazal,” *Modern Asian Studies* 33, 4 (1999): 861-881.

and those of *bhakti* and *lila* in the context of Holi, and their potential to act as sites critical of orthodoxy and authority lends great weight to the emergent “potential” of the “common” bodies in *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*.

Conclusion

My project has sought to think through *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* in a way that would address issues of authority, both Nawabi and colonial, in relation to subaltern bodies, memories and histories. I began this task by locating the visual as a complex and entangled discursive arena in which meanings are multiple and contested. In exploring in detail *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* and its relationship to other images and discourses, I hope to have suggested new ways of thinking through *adivasi*-ness and the frameworks of religious systems. Instead of looking at Holi as a site of constructing and de-constructing power within one primary field, such as popular “Hinduism” or colonial narratives, I have exploded it into a multifaceted site of social struggles. I found this to be a highly productive manoeuvre that allows the hybridity of subaltern identities and the dense sites of resistance to be forcefully brought out.

I have contended that *The Holi Festival at Lucknow* was an early and important articulation of colonial aesthetics that drew upon the vocabularies of the picturesque and the sublime for a construction of knowledge that would be instrumental in justifying colonization. I have also attempted to demonstrate that colonial power/knowledge was an anxious exercise and that it was continuously put into crisis not only by its ignorance and un-looking but also by how kingship and sovereignty were negotiated in Awadh. If caste was reworked into a key colonial trope for othering and homogenizing India, it was also an important and intricate site for kingship to broker its power and reach. Thus, caste emerged as a site of hybrid and contesting narratives of authority, which in turn were continually disturbed by the proliferating, rebellious and resistant identities it wished to domesticate.

The hybrid and diverse identities required construction of a range of stereotypes and strategies, with the discourse of “criminality” being central. However, reading colonial rhetoric on “criminal” castes and “tribes” against the grain, I illustrated how asceticism, *adivasi*-ness,

peasanthood and militarism shared ground, and in refusing to be expunged of traces of other ways of being in the world, came to disturb colonial agendas and Nawabi power. In locating these traces within the discursive field of the rhetoric of *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, I suggested how narratives arising from within the social practices of subaltern communities, related to *lila*, *bhakti* and Sufism, were full of subversive potential.

I delineated how *lila*, *bhakti* and Sufism could provide important theoretical tools for thinking of agency and subjecthood that were more attuned to the presence of gods and spirits, and thereby escape the limitations of the modern-historical imagining of time/space as only singular and secular. I demonstrated that such a model could remain attuned to violence and oppression that is attendant upon social bodies and did not imply disregarding the politics of caste, class and gender.



Figure 1:
Anonymous, *The Holi Festival at Lucknow*, circa 1800.

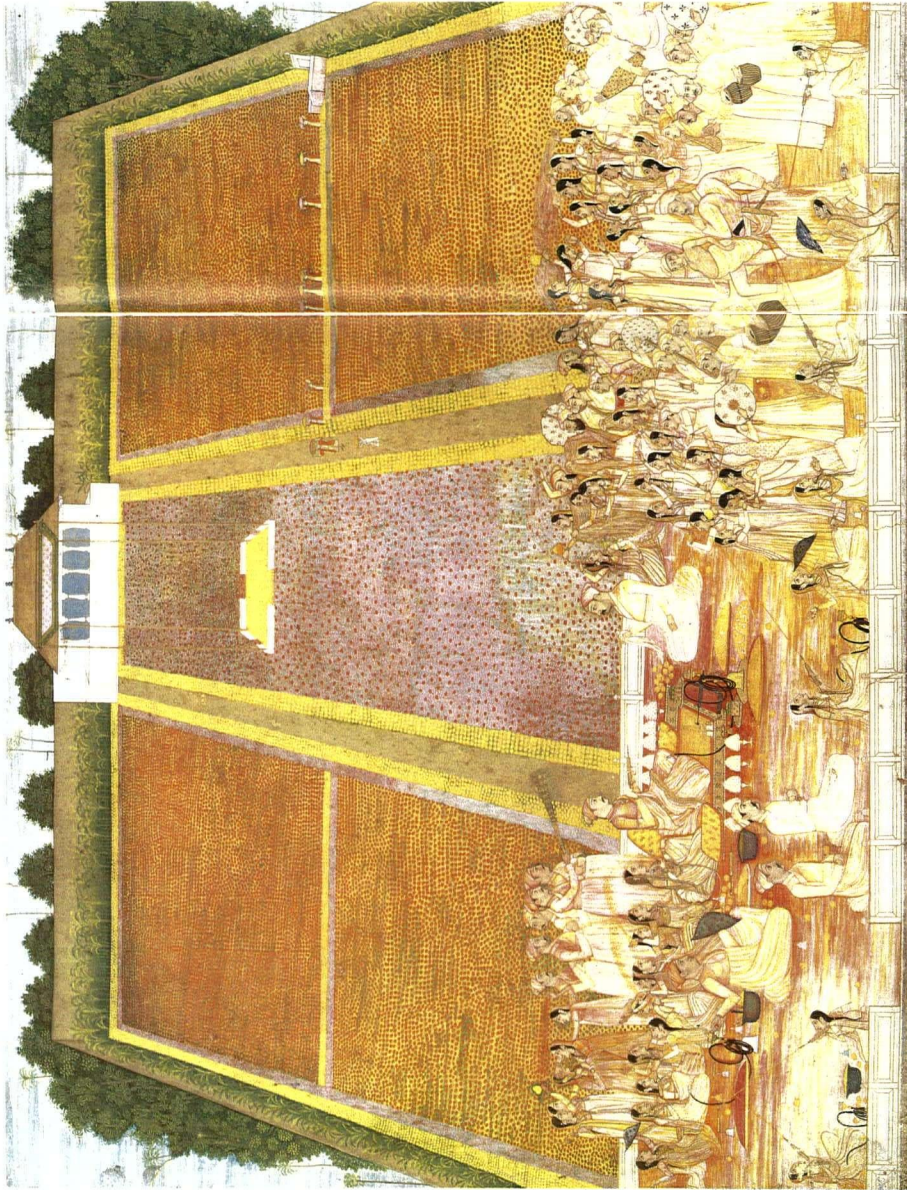


Figure 2:
Anonymous, *A Holi Celebration*, circa 1765.

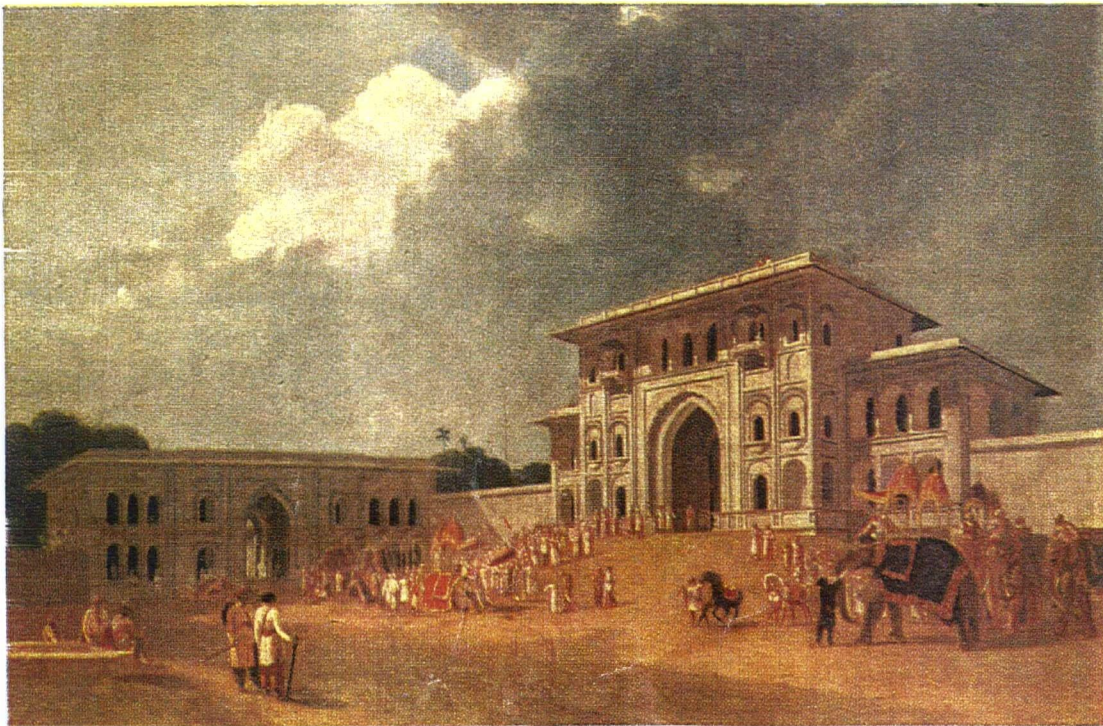


Figure 3:
William Daniell, *Gates of the Palace at Lucknow*, circa 1801.

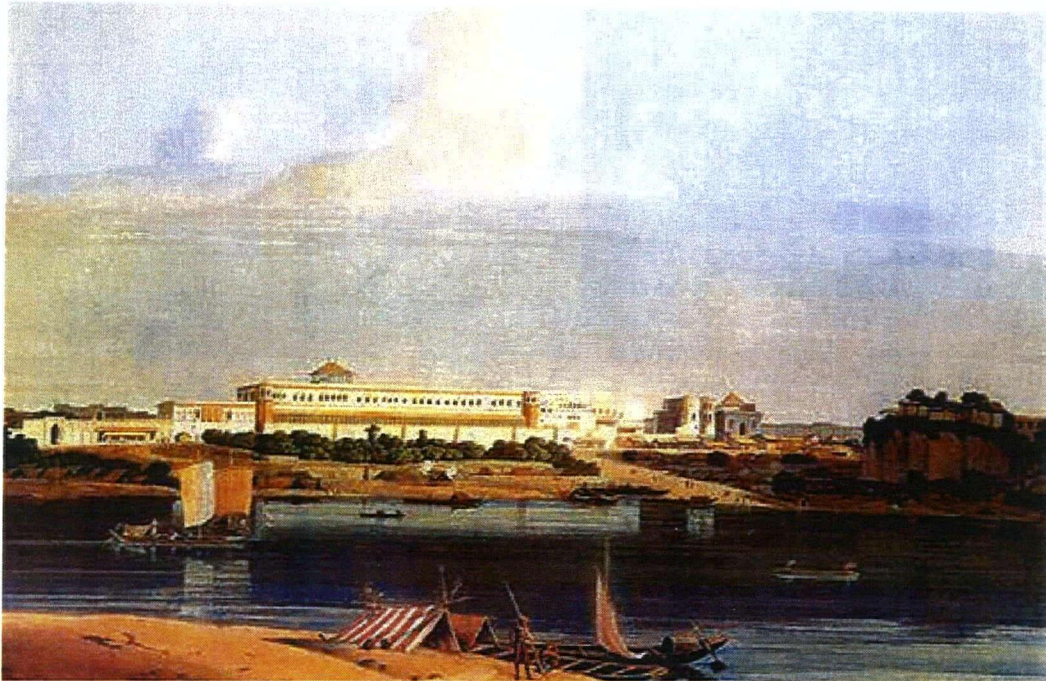


Figure 4:
Thomas and William Daniell, *Palace of Nawab Shuja-ud-daula at Lucknow*, n.d.

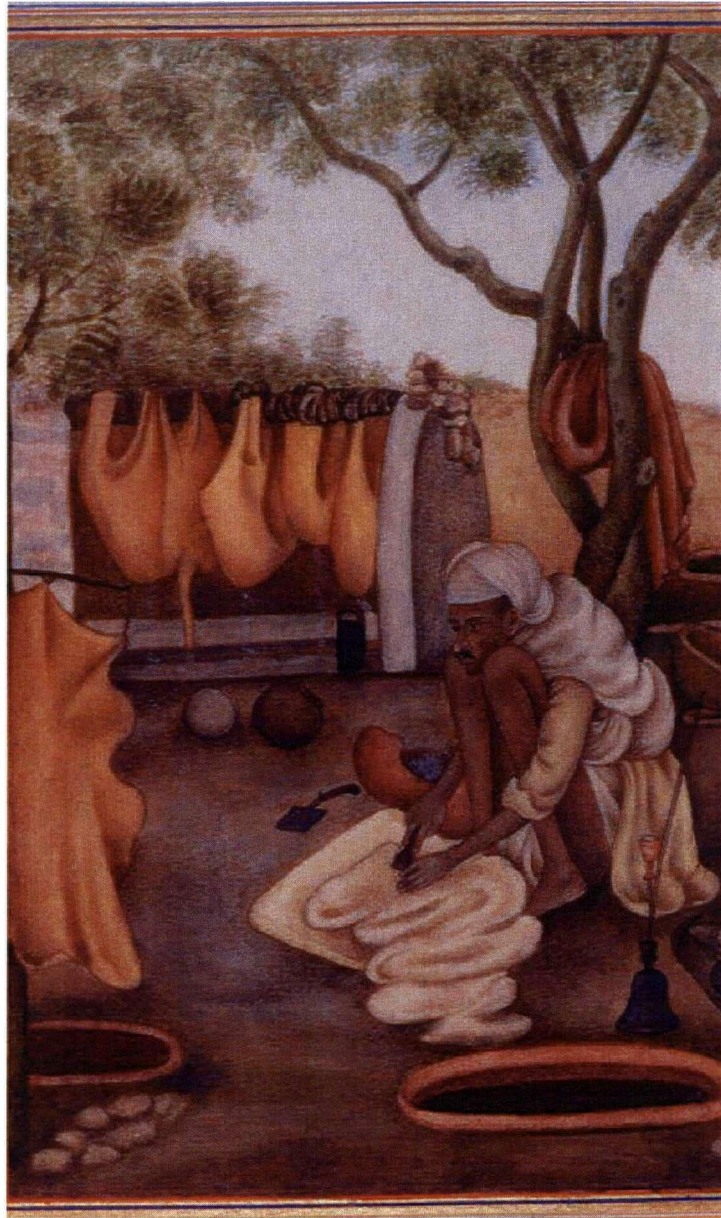


Figure 6:
Anonymous, *Camar*, circa 1825.

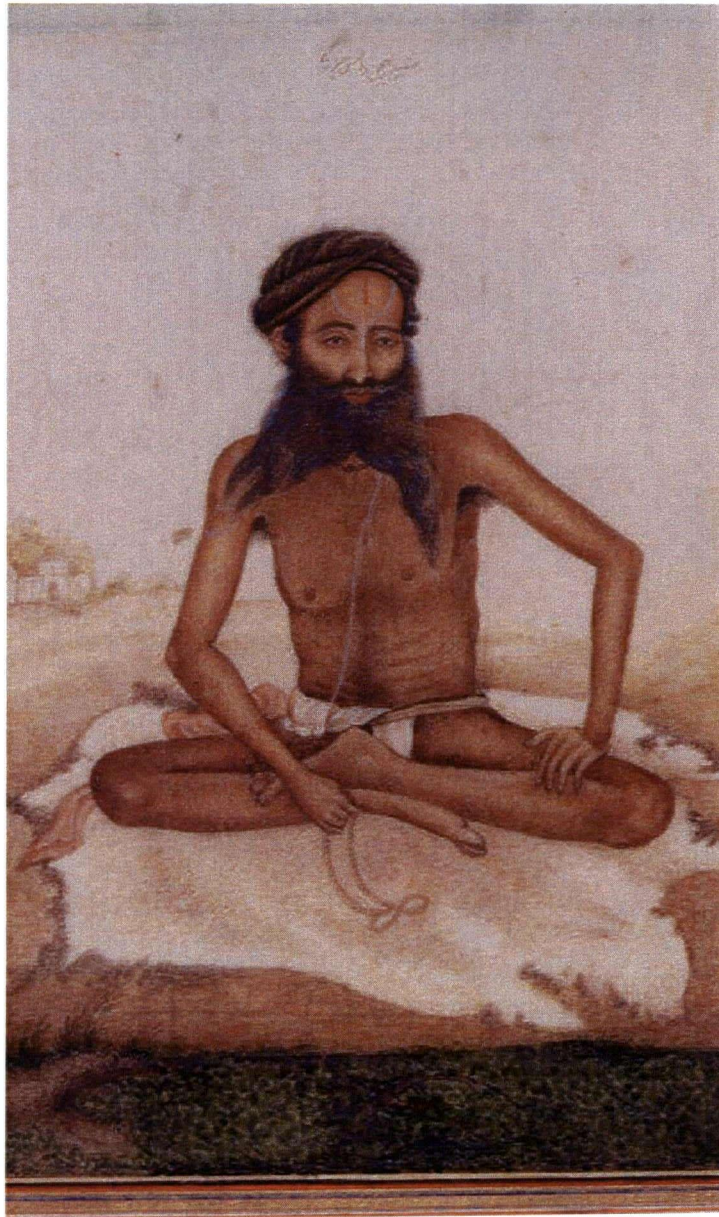


Figure 7:
Anonymous, *Bhajan Das Bairagi*, circa 1825.



Figure 8:
Anonymous, *Naked Ascetic*, circa 1825.

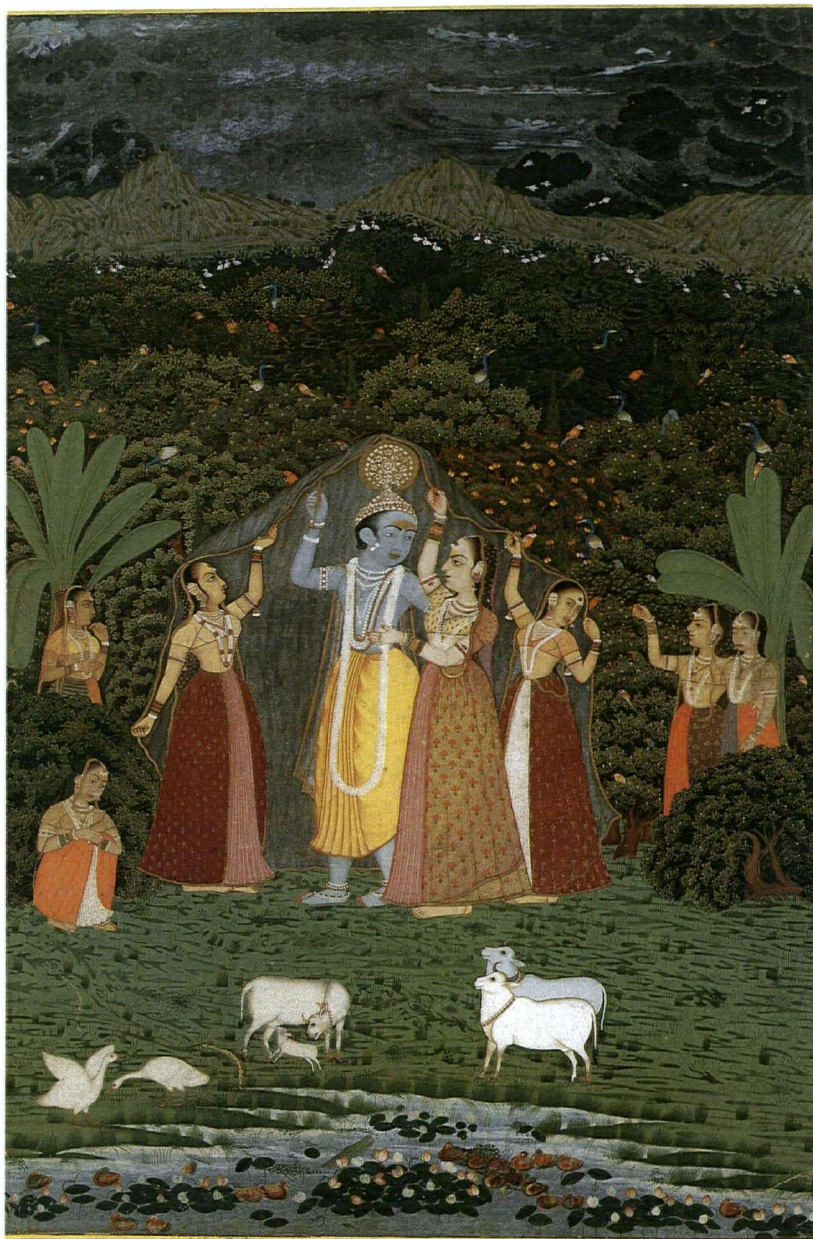


Figure 9:
Anonymous, *Krishna and the Gopis Take Shelter from the Rain*, 1760.



Figure 10:
Mir Kalan Khan, *A Lion Hunt at Allahabad*, circa 1760-65.

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