ROUTLEDGE

RELIGION AND PSYCHOANALYSIS IN INDIA

Critical Clinical Practice

SABAH SIDDIQUI

CONCEPTS FOR CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY | DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES RETHOUGHT

RELIGION AND PSYCHOANALYSIS IN INDIA

Religion and Psychoanalysis in India questions the assumptions of an established scientific, evidence-based global mental health paradigm by examining the practices of faith-based healing. It proposes that human beings demonstrate a dual loyalty: to science as faith and faith as science, both of which get reconfigured in the process. In this particular context, science and faith are deployed in ways that are not only different but at times contrary to mainstream discourses of science and religion, and faith healing becomes a point where these two discourses collide head-on in negotiating cultural values and practices. The book addresses key questions, such as:

- What is the value of 'faith healing' in understanding distress and treatment in different cultural contexts?
- What is a critical psychological perspective on faith and religious systems?
- What challenges do alternative religious practices pose to critical psychology?
- How should we re-imagine clinical work in a context marked by science and religion?

Situated between 'West' and 'East', between the global mental health movement and local faith-based practices in India, the book addresses a wide audience that includes students and researchers, in psychology, cultural and medical anthropology, the sociology of religion, cultural theory, post-colonial theory and the sociology of science. It will also appeal to policy-makers and practitioners interested in the work of NGOs and the legal frameworks driving mental health movements in India.

Sabah Siddiqui is a full-time funded doctoral researcher in the School of Environment, Education and Development, University of Manchester, UK.

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PREFACE

Ian Parker

This book takes us into places that will be unfamiliar to most psychologists in the 'West', unfamiliar even to most 'critical' psychologists. The journey Sabah Siddiqui describes enables her to 'defamiliarize' assumptions we might make about the relationship between psychiatric treatment and the State, and to illuminate the role of subjectivity in alternative healing practices. In this way, at the very moment that we enter into the place of the temple sites in India, as we are drawn into a deeper understanding of that particular context, we are forced to step back from what we think we know about psychological, spiritual and therapeutic worldviews. The book opens a space for religion as a resource for alternative conceptions of treatment – religion that operates as a humanizing counterweight to the medical psychiatric Western tradition – but then shows how that space is being hemmed in and colonized by the State. The particular focus on a Muslim shrine that is besieged by the ascendant Hindu nationalist community in Gujarat – Gujarat as the local state that was the testing-ground for many of the policies now being rolled out nationwide – serves to intensify the question of what a progressive alternative to dominant conceptions of subjectivity, normality and pathology might look like.

The opposition between so-called 'scientific' psychiatry endorsed by the Indian government and faith-based healing practices is then given a political charge as some religions more than others – in this case it is Islam that is the target more than Hinduism – are accused of being 'superstitious'. Psychology

is then torn between an allegiance to a scientific worldview on the one hand – an allegiance which means that the discipline of psychology ends up acting as the helpmeet of medical psychiatry – and an attempt to connect with the lived experience of those suffering, those distressed, those we encounter and describe as suffering from 'mental' distress on the other. This is where psychoanalysis comes into the equation, but not psychoanalysis functioning as a Western form of knowledge, which is the way that psychiatry and psychology has been functioning in India for many years, but psychoanalysis that connects with something in the human subject that escapes, that escapes both the endeavour to scientifically predict and control behaviour and also immediate lived experience. A detailed analysis of religion in the shrine-sites operating as a faith-based healing alternative to psychiatry now leads us not so much into mysticism but into the unconscious.

Freud argued that psychoanalysis should not be a 'worldview'; that is, for him psychoanalysis should not attempt to explain anything and everything. The closest that psychoanalysis came to being a worldview, he argued, was when it participated in the worldview of science. But, as this book makes very clear, even though psychoanalysis might come closest to the worldview of science out of all the many possible worldviews around in the world today, it is still itself actually not a science, not scientific as such. Psychoanalysis does not endorse a scientific explanation or treatment of pathology – the kind of explanation and treatment that psychiatric interventions in the shrine would wish for – and neither, of course, does it operate as a religious worldview. Psychoanalysis is 'outwith' both, at the edge; just as what is going on in India now is both at the edge, 'outwith' the West, and intimately bound up with it, with lessons for all of us wherever we are. *Religion and Psychoanalysis in India: Critical Clinical Practice* weaves a narrative through these issues as we journey into the world of the shrine and it leads the reader to reflect on what a really critical approach would be to clinical work; this book offers a theoretical account that draws on existing practices to enable us to develop new ones.

Ian Parker
University of Leicester

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I would also like to acknowledge all those who have contributed to this work at the different stages of its development: Bhargavi Davar at Bapu Trust for Mind and Discourse, Pune and Milesh Hamlai at Altruist, Ahmedabad who greatly facilitated me in the research; Stephen Frosh who generously shared his work with me, especially *Hauntings*, and gave me invaluable feedback on parts of the thesis; my kindly if coerced thesis proof-editors, Kimberly, Karuna Chandrashekar, Vikas Deepak and Varun V; Hsing-Wen Chang, Wing-Kwong Wong, Shubhra Nagalia and Shifa Haq for pushing

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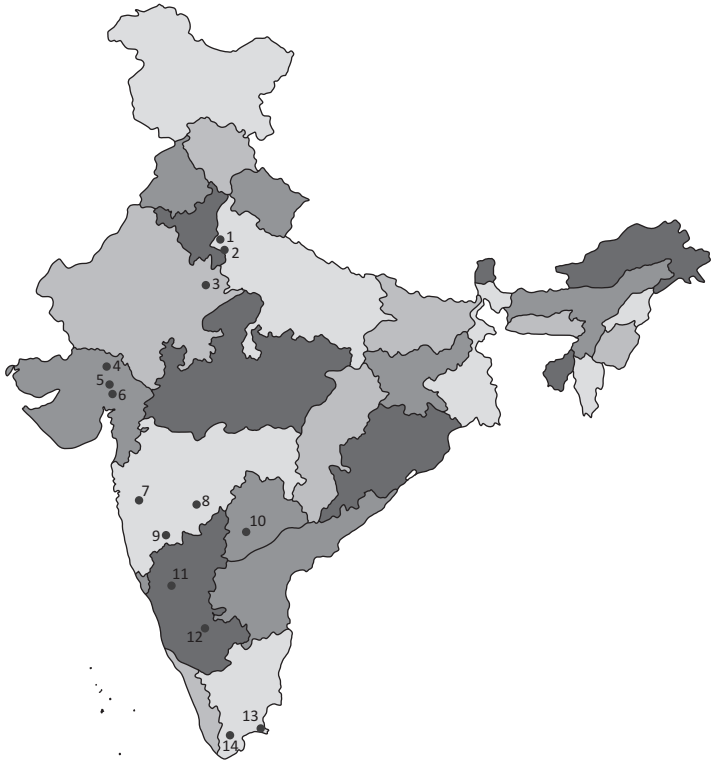

1. Nizamuddin Dargah, Delhi
2. Saarthak, Delhi
3. Balaji Mandir, Mehandipur, Rajasthan
4. Mira Datar Dargah, Unava, Gujarat
5. The Atruist, Ahmedbad, Gujarat
6. Burhanuddin Qutb-e-Alam Dargah, Gujarat
7. Bapu Trust, Pune, Maharashtra
8. Bhavani Mandir, Tuljapur, Maharashtra
9. Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti, Sholapur, Maharashtra
10. Langar Hauz Dargah, Andhra Pradesh
11. Dattatreya Bababudhan Dargah, Chikmaglur, Karnataka
12. Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion & Inclusive Policy, National Law School of India University, Bangalore, Karnataka
13. Erwadi Dargah, Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu
14. St. Anthony's Shrine, Puliyampatti, Tamil Nadu

Adapted from http://www.prokerala.com/maps/india/

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1

INTRODUCTION

The first decade of the new millennium has seen a spirited debate between the scientific and the spiritual apropos mental health care in India. The movements for rationalist reform of superstition have come face-to-face with the movements for critical alternatives to psychiatry. The rationalist movements have pitted the virtues of science against the sins of superstition; while distress has been attributed to stem from scientific and mental origins or from superstitious and supernatural origins, the rationalists are unequivocal about the cause and the treatment of distress – it is to be found within Science alone. Psychiatry is the weapon of choice against the forces of backwardness and blindness, notwithstanding its own slightly dubious position in the hierarchy of evidence-based medicine. Ironically, while psychiatry as an agent of science is welcomed by rationalists to combat the evils of superstition and fallacious beliefs and practices, within the medical sciences it is seen as less scientific, as it is handling the subjective and shifting states of mind. For psychiatry to become respectable it must be made more objective, more neurological, more genetic and more chemical. Thus, the discourse of psychiatry and psychology has been seen to tie distress to narrow causes, usually as defects within the individual. This discourse acquires hegemonic proportions when the individual must bear the burden of carrying a personal defect or lack that needs correction and is therefore the bearer of unreason and madness in an otherwise sane world. Activists have furthermore cried foul of the vested interests of Global Capital in this scene with the surging

sales of pharmaceutical companies peddling psychotropic medication for the grossly 'insane' and even the slightly 'disordered', and thus doing very well for themselves under the flag of science. Critical alternatives to psychiatry have been sought in community approaches, in art-based therapies and even in indigenous approaches to healing, an instance of which is faith-based practices. While the rationalists feel that they are beleaguered by the forces of the religious and the ritualistic where anything goes in the name of the gods, the advocacy groups feel stifled by the pressure of psychiatric discourse that has only the one god of Universal Reason. Caught in the sights of this debate are the supposedly indigenous, local and faith-based practices, provisionally being called 'sites of faith healing', which are represented in myriad self-serving ways by different service camps.

It is in this milieu of complicated relations to psyche and society that we must look at faith healing not only for its use but how it is caught up in multiple discourses and how it serves to function today at the site for the clash of global scientific advancement, Indian nationalist development and individual religious freedom. Faith healing may be an old tradition whose historical roots still need to be traced but it is also a new problematic that derives from, as well as challenges, established critical theory in general and critical psychology in particular. As such, the book presents another moment in re-conceptualizing disciplinary knowledges.

The question we must ask ourselves before going any further is why should one cite them as sites of 'faith healing' at all? Why invoke faith (and not science) and why invoke healing (and not cure)? Why prefix healing with faith? What are they healing and how are they doing it? How do we understand these sites found nearly all over India? Whether or not faith healing resists comprehension, it definitely complicates the map. It is in this milieu of complicated relations to psyche and society that the discourse of Science and that of State come together in producing startling interventions, such as legalization to eradicate superstition (or blind faith) itself from society or a mental health initiative that seeks to dispense prayers (*dua*) and pills (*dava*) so as to appease *all* the gods. The following section will follow some of the important ways in which the Science–State complex has intervened in the area of faith-based healing practices starting from August 2001 up to December 2013. Three intertwined sets of events can be deduced:

- The Ervadi *dargah* and its aftermath: Following the accidental fire that broke out at the Ervadi *dargah* in 2001, Public Interest Litigations (PIL)

were filed with the Supreme Court of India, which forced the governments, both at centre and state level, to take action.

- The introduction of an Anti-Superstition Bill: Narendra Dabholkar and the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti brought their decades-long campaign to eradicate superstition in the form of the Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Draft Bill in 2003.
- The Dava-dua programme: The implementation of the Dava-dua programme where psychiatrists and psychologists work alongside local healers in sites of indigenous and faith-based healing at the Mira Datar Dargah in 2004.

State, science and superstition

The Ervadi dargah *tragedy and its aftermath*

In 2001, the *dargah* of Syed Ibrahim[1] in Ervadi of the Ramanathapuram District of southern Tamil Nadu caught fire and the tragedy that followed became the focus of national attention, attaining notoriety for its treatment of those deemed to be mentally ill. Prior to this event, the *dargah* was renowned for other reasons; it was a much-visited shrine for those afflicted by 'satanic illnesses' or 'magical maladies'. The very soil at Ervadi was considered holy due to the presence of soil from Madinah mixed into it and those afflicted with problems of a supernatural origin were brought here for treatment. The call by the supplicants that rings on the Urs (holy day) is '*Ya Shaheed! Murad Haasil!*' (Oh Holy Martyr! Grant my wish!). Of the people brought here for treatment, many had been abandoned by family members, left to the mercy of the saint and the caretakers of his *dargah*, and they continued to live here for years and even decades in squalor and poverty. The miserable living conditions, however, did not become a cause for State intervention. Around the shrine, according to a report by Davar and Lohokare (2009), private parties had set up many hutments to keep people labelled as mentally ill, many of whom had been kept chained and/or left unattended. The fire that broke out in these cramped and squalid hutments on August 6, 2001 claimed the lives of 25 people chained to their beds (11 women and 14 men) on the spot, while three more succumbed to their injuries later.

Spurred on by this event, civil groups such as Saarthak, a Delhi-based mental health organization started by Dr Achal Bhagat, and others

petitioned the Supreme Court to ensure that all mentally ill people in India received the proper care and treatment entitled to them under the Mental Health Act of 1987 (Writ Petition (Civil) No. 334/2001). The conditions of asylums and hospitals offering services to people with mental health conditions were (and still are) dismal. Gross mismanagement and violation of human rights have been observed and reported but those Public Interest Litigations (PIL) have not fared as well in the court as the Erwadi *dargah* petition surprisingly did. The Supreme Court within days of the PIL being filed moved the state governments to report on the condition of mental health services within the state. This is how Agarwal et al. (2004) reported the situation:

> [The] unfortunate victims were inmates of an unauthorised asylum being run in a *dargah* which attracted a lot of patients suffering from mental disorders owing to the miraculous curative powers attributed by the believers to its presiding saint. Moved by this terrible outrage, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India took *suo moto* notice of the incident in the form of a PIL (CWP No. 334 of 2001). Notices were issued to the Union of India and to the state of Tamil Nadu. Subsequently, the Hon'ble Court directed the Union of India, vide its order, dated 15 October 2001, to 'conduct a survey on All India basis with a view to identify registered and unregistered asylums as also about the state of facilities available in such asylums for treating mentally challenged'.
>
> *(Agarwal et al. 2004: 114)*

Through the action of the Supreme Court the *dargah* came to be recognized as an asylum that treats people with mental disorders ('an unauthorised asylum being run in a *dargah*') and thus within the purview of psychiatry and science. This marks a shift in how the *dargah* is regarded; what was designated as a place of healing involving faith-based practices and a community of followers was coming under the purview of what I have termed the Science–State complex. In Ervadi, the ones camped around the shrine, now deemed to be mentally ill, were shipped back to their families … those families which in many cases had abandoned them in the first place. Those who could not be returned this way were involuntarily admitted into mental hospitals.

Can a *dargah* be made to conform to the (oft-disregarded) tenets and injunctions of the Mental Health Act and thus also to another worldview regarding distress and disorder, prayers and pills? Apparently the government of Andhra Pradesh thought so since, as Davar and Lohokare (2009) report, within the same month a five-member 'expert' committee of psychiatrists put

together by the Department of Medical Education visited the Langar Hauz *dargah* of Syed Shah Meeran[2] in Hyderabad, and (unsurprisingly) found human rights violations. In March 2002, the licensing authority submitted its report to the Supreme Court and it demanded that the *dargah* turn over those living on the premises who were mentally ill either to their families or to the State, who would place them in the care of asylums/mental hospitals. The response of the caretakers of the *dargah* is particularly interesting to note since it speaks in a different vein altogether than the Department of Medical Education:

> Noting the 'ancestral' nature of the Dargah, Syed Mohd. Qadiri emphasized the belief and faith that the Dargah instilled in its devotees. He noted the voluntary nature of people with problems visiting the center and that persons get 'consoled with the spiritual powers of the saint'. The letter concludes by noting that as the Dargah is not a 'mental hospital', and there are no 'patients', the question of handing over patients does not arise!
>
> *(Davar and Lohokare, 2009: 61)*

People are not patients at the *dargah,* although Syed Mohammad Qadiri, the *sajjāda nashin* (spiritual heir and chosen representative of the saint) of the *dargah,* himself is not untrained in the ways of Western science; he holds a Masters in Agriculture and is a professor of soil physics at the Acharya N. G. Ranga Nagarjuna Agricultural University in Hyderabad (Rothgery 2008: 196) but being in the lineage of the saint is also skilled in 'exorcisms, *dam ka pānī* [water which has Qu'ranic verses blown over it for ingesting], *tā'wīz* [amulet], *tashtarī* [vessel with engraved inscriptions from the Qu'ran], and *phūl* [flowers], and *nahāvan* (ritual bathing)' (p. 197). This *dargah* is famous for treating possession by *jinn* and like most Sufi shrines in India draws Hindus and Muslims seeking relief from states of possession or black magic. The Jinn is a being made of smokeless fire located in another dimension but occupying the same space as the human in Muslim folklore, however the concept of Jinn in the Arab lands predates the advent of Islam: 'the existence of preternatural jinn, or spirits, was a deeply rooted notion among the pagan Arabs, that was perpetuated by Islam' (Dols 2012: 212).

The healing rituals offered by the *khādims* at the *dargah,* despite looking archaic, even sometimes violent as well as exorbitant and sometimes simply exploitative, draw pilgrims who want to lay down their troubles at the grave of the saint. While raids and surveillance from expert committees and

the police can put pressure on *dargahs*, and bring an awareness of human rights and the rights of the mentally ill according to law, it cannot altogether stop the flocking of the tens of thousands of devotees who 'voluntarily' come to shrines of various denominations every year. In Pune, the Bapu Trust for Mind and Discourse took this occasion to conduct a study on 'Health and Healing in Western Maharasthra: the role of traditional healing centres in mental health service delivery' between 2003 and 2006.[3] They found that 'users are inclined to access places where they can express their problem as they experience it, where they sense a match between their causal models of illness and the models prevalent in the healing space; places which will address cosmological and personal, existential issues; where they will not be forced to directly confront their problems at the individualistic level, as a "disorder", but can depend on divine [serendipitous] or collective mediation'. The strict rationality of science does not appeal to all in the South Asian context; psychiatry has not made as many inroads into the social scenario of India riddled with its messy and alien 'Oriental' psychic structures. It would seem that some other kind of intervention would be required to check the superstitious and religious activity breeding here.

Narendra Dabholkar and the eradication of superstition

The Anti-Superstition Bill is a rationalist manifesto, drafted in 2003 and promoted by Dr Narendra Dabholkar. Dabholkar (1945–2013), a medical doctor and social activist, had founded Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (MANS) in 1989 to combat and eradicate superstition (*andhashraddha*), which he considered a social evil full of fraudulent and exploitative practices that should be replaced by the rational principles of science,[4] and thus was to continue the work of social reformers such as Babasaheb Ambedkar, Sant Gadage Baba and B. Premanand. The MANS tried to spread the message of rationalism through a grass roots movement in Maharashtra by travelling from town to town, debunking myths and illusions through a proper exposition of science. In the area of mental health, they 'targeted the ingrained practice of taking the mentally ill to babas who claimed to chase out the devils possessing the patient. Activists held mental health awareness drives in remote areas and villages and invited psychiatrists to speak and counsel' (Mathias 2013: 27). Dabholkar had offered an award of 21 lakh rupees for anyone who could prove that he/she had divine powers to perform miracles that are beyond the existence and approved laws of science (*Herald* 2009). The Bill that was brought to the

legislature had more than a decade of activism by Dabholkar and the MANS packed into it.

However Dabholkar was not to see the draft bill pressed into service for on August 20, 2013 he was shot dead in broad daylight in Pune. The murderers of Dabholkar are widely believed, by his family members as well as members of the MANS, to be belonging to right-wing Hindu political groups. Teltumbde, a Dalit scholar and an associate of Dabholkar, writes indignantly, 'he was openly opposed by the *sanatani* Hindus who sided with these fraudsters as part of their religion and condemned him as their *dharma shatru* [enemy of faith/duty]. In their temerity, they justified his murder as the *karmaphal* (fruit of his karma) and continue spewing venom against him even to this day' (Teltumbde 2013: 10). However if the opposition had hoped to put an end to his crusade by ending his life, they would have been dismayed by how the deed achieved the opposite and brought the ordinance into being. The day after the shooting the Maharashtra government approved the bill as an ordinance and on August 24, 2013 K. Sankaranarayanan, the Governor of Maharashtra, signed the ordinance, a section of which is quoted below:

> MAHARASHTRA ORDINANCE No XIV of 2013.
> AN ORDINANCE
>
> *to bring social awakening and awareness in the society and to create a healthy and safe social environment with a view to protect the common people in the society against the evil and sinister practices thriving on ignorance, and to combat and eradicate human sacrifice and other inhuman, evil, sinister and aghori practices propagated in the name of so called supernatural or magical powers or evil spirits commonly known as black magic by conmen with sinister motive of exploiting the common people in the society and thereby destroying the very social fibre of the society; and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.*

Superstition is 'destroying the very fibre of the society'. Like a deadly virus, it must be altogether eradicated but since the common man and society itself is participating in it, ignorant and common as it is, the will of bringing 'social awakening and awareness' will need to come from strong laws that rest on a stern science. It is obvious that the Drug and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act passed by the Parliament of India in 1954 has not been doing the job, being both outdated and rarely enforced by the State. The 1954 Act seeks to control the advertisement and sale of

substances that claim to have either scientific or magical properties to treat any of the 54 diseases or conditions mentioned in the Act outside of proper medical practice. While the latter (Act of 1954) is aimed at the product, for example a miracle drug or treatment regimen that will cure cancer, the former (Ordinance of 2013) is aimed at the practice that makes the sale and purchase of the product possible.

One of the criticisms the draft of the ordinance had faced for years and continues to beset the present Bill is the lack of definable characteristics of what constitutes 'inhuman', 'evil' and 'sinister' practices. 'The movement has failed to distinguish adequately between faith and blind faith. In principle, the anti-superstition movement claims not to be against religion per se but only against exploitative religion. In practice, however, their discourse of '"inculcating scientific temper" often sets up an opposition between science and religion so that embracing science necessarily involves denying any space for the non-rational' (Ranganathan 2014: 13). The Bill and MANS have found themselves in the peculiar position of being criticized by orthodox religious groups as well as critical scholars working in this area. Given this, the way ahead for the Indian rationalist is arduous; Teltumbde says, 'the religion of the majority, Hinduism, not being an institution-based religion, provides vast space for individual godmen to thrive. Thwarting their menace warrants scrapping the IPC Section 295A,[5] curbing the blatant display of faith in public, cleansing the state of every sign of god/religion, discarding neo-liberalism, adopting people-empowering policies and actively promoting scientific temper' (2013: 11). The rationalist crusader could not be clearer about what 'eradication' means: all faith is blind necessitating the scrapping, curbing, cleansing and discarding of religion and its symbols, to pave the way for science, which will usher in an era of empowerment and social awakening.

Following the promulgation of the ordinance on August 24, the first arrests were made on September 5, 2013. Two persons – Liyakat Khan (25) and Amiruddin Abdul Latif (40) from Ghaziabad and Meerut respectively – hawking a miracle remedy for diseases such as cancer and AIDS were booked in Nanded (*The Hindu*, September 5, 2013). According to reportage by the MANS as many as 23 First Information Reports (FIR) were lodged with the police by December 2013 and at least 12 have resulted in action taken by the police. The bill to enact the ordinance was titled the Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Bill, 2013 (hereafter Anti-Superstition Bill, as it is popularly known), which was passed by the Maharashtra

Legislative Council on December 18, 2013 with one amendment: called the 'the third party amendment', it disallows anyone other than the person affected by superstitious and black magic rituals and his/her family members to register a complaint or FIR with the nearest police station (*Hindustan Times*, December 14, 2013). On the day the Maharashtra legislature passed the Anti-Superstition Bill, police arrested six men in Thane for murdering a 50-year-old woman in a ritual human sacrifice; the victim, Kalawati Gupta, was beheaded by Ramdhani Yadav (33) and Gulab Yadav (27) on the advice of 'godman' Sarvajit Ramdeo Kahar (57) (*Hindustan Times*, December 14, 2013). Several more cases have been filed with the police in the months that followed. Nonetheless, it is not clear to me what makes these crimes – booked for promoting and spreading superstition – different from crimes like theft and murder, which can be committed with or without religious sanction.

Concurrently, the draft for the Policy Framework and Model Legislation on the Karnataka Prevention of Superstitious Practices Bill, 2013 was prepared by the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion & Inclusive Policy (CSSEIP), National Law School of India University, Bangalore in November 2013. According to CSSEIP, 'while all persons are entitled to the freedom of conscience or belief, certain superstitious practices negatively impact public order, morality and health. With several recent incidents of this nature coming to light, the specific criminalization of such practices along with spreading awareness of the ill-effects of superstitious practices of this nature have become imperative. The proposed draft of "Karnataka Prevention of Superstitious Practices Bill, 2013" seeks to achieve these objectives' (2013: 7). Spurred on by the success of MANS as well as the tragic end of Dabholkar, this Bill will seek to emulate the Maharashtra Anti-Superstition Bill. However in the face of fierce opposition from the BJP, the tabling of the Bill in the Assembly has been stalled for now (*IBNlive*, November 19, 2013).

It would seem that there is no critique in the MANS' rationalist philosophy of science itself and the way it functions in society. Science is not seen as ideological (as ideological as religion) but universal. Under the assumption that science is universal is the belief that science must be secular and therefore unbiased in its approach to all religions. This position does not allow for an interrogation of how secularism gets deployed (or not) for the establishment of the Indian State. However, more deeply, this does allow for an interrogation of the 'secular', a word that is being bandied about a lot not only in India but globally today. 'This term, which issues etymologically from a certain notion of time, has come to stand in commonsense fashion for post-Reformation practices and institutions in the West that formally separate

private religious belief (or non-belief) from public life. […] "secular" can suggest a condition of being unreligious or antireligious, but also religiously tolerant, humanist, Christian, modern, or simply Western' (Asad et al. 2009: 10). The polyvalence of the word should alert us that secular is a word requiring deconstruction. The Indian rationalist argument in defence of science and adoption of psychiatry as a universal science has not extended itself to an exposition of what is exactly secular in the scientific, or indeed what is secular in the secular.

Dava, dua aur duniyadāri

If the Anti-Superstition Bill is a direct attack on the field of the non-rational, enacted between the gavel of the judge and the baton of the police, there is in Gujarat the first of its kind, a programme to reach out to the faith healing sector, somewhat like a gentle nudge, a caressing finger raised in admonishment. It is the 'Dava and Dua' programme that is operating from the Mira Datar Dargah in Unava, a shrine to Sayyed Ali, known through the sobriquet 'Mira Datar' connoting 'Brave and Generous One'. His shrine is known for its curative powers, especially for afflictions caused by black magic and evil spirits. The premises are owned and privately managed by a trust comprising family members, descendants from the lineage of his older brother. Every member of this family grows up with the responsibility of taking forward the holy work of Sayyed Ali. They say that to supplicate at the grave of Mira Datar, a *vakeel* (intercessor/lawyer) is required who has divine access to Sarkar (lord/judge) Sayyed Ali, a function the male members of his family are given to perform. Today the family has more than 700 members and the men and boys, numbering almost 400, work as *khādims* (servants) to the will of *Sarkar* and as *mujawars* (healers) at the shrine.

To find out more about the *dargah,* I made my way to Gujarat in July 2013 and as a first step interviewed Milesh Hamlai, Founder and Director of the NGO the Altruist. Among its other activities, it looks after the Dava-dua programme that is sponsored by the State government. According to him the present-day Dava-dua programme has its antecedents in an initiative of Dr Ravindra Bakre (Director of the Mental Hospital of Ahmedabad and Programme Officer for Rural Mental Health Program in 2001) and Dr Ajay Chauhan (Superintendent of the Mental Hospital of Ahmedabad) in 2001, who propelled to action by the Supreme Court directive of 2001 identified the Mira Datar Dargah as a site for medical and legal intervention. In the words of Hamlai, psychiatrists Bakre and Chauhan were of the opinion that

mere talk with the healers at the shrine would not bring a solution to the problem and therefore they came up with an idea of situating psychiatric and psychological treatment alongside faith-based healing practices in Unava. This would protect the livelihoods of the *mujawars* as well as the other participants in the political economy of the town. At the same time, the Indian State could be reassured that it was attending to patients suffering from mental illness, who have the right to health care under the Indian Constitution but for reasons of their own take recourse to sites of faith-based healing. Bakre and Chauhan started the Dava-dua programme in 2004 with funding from the Gujarat government. The project was conceptualized on the basis of the *Dai* (traditional birth attendant) Training Programs of the 1980s, wherein in the absence of gynaecologists, the *dai* would be trained with some basic medical knowledge to ensure the safe and hygienic delivery of the baby. The idea was transferred to the Dava-dua programme: the *mujawar* at the shrine could be trained to identify 'mentally retarded' people.

By 2006 the project was tapering out and in 2007 the Altruist stepped in to take it over. As the first move, they had to earn the trust of the *mujawars* of the shrine, who felt threatened by what they saw as the entry of the State in the guise of mental health workers. Through the machinations of the government, psychiatry was trying to take over their worldview and lived practices. After several months of negotiation, the mental health team of the Altruist was allowed to practice inside the premises of the *dargah* in 2008. The supplicants at the shrine, called *sawwallis,* were either referred by the small handful of cooperative *mujawars* or approached by the team members of the Altruist for testing, diagnosis and medical treatment as accompaniments to the healing rituals performed by the *mujawars* at the *dargah*. In 2012, according to Chandrakant Parmar, the senior psychologist at the Altruist, almost 17,000 patients made their way from the *dargah* to the Out Patients Department of the Altruist (a figure that can only be a fraction of all those who pass through the *dargah* annually), where a team consisting of three visiting psychiatrists, two clinical psychologists, a psychiatric social worker and administrative staff took care of their mental health needs. Psychiatric medicines and psychological counselling are provided free of charge at the clinic to the patients and their follow-up and documentation is managed by the Altruist team. They have reported overwhelming success in the Dava-dua programme, not only because of the access the *dargah* offers to patients who have always been out of the loop from the Science–State complex but because patients at the clinic report that the combination of *dava* and *dua* has worked very well for them. Patients are encouraged to take the drugs

supplied by the Altruist to the *dargah*, and to have a *mujawar* bless it by passing it over the shrine of Mira Datar. This double-action treatment has proved to be so successful, neither the psychologists nor the *mujawars* have wanted to look deeper into why it is so. Both camps believe it is their treatment that has really worked but the truce is so fragile that a wrongly-worded statement or a gaze held for a moment too long can end it. This also has contributed to the policy at the Altruist to neither question nor explore the treatment process at the *dargah*. The relation is of tolerance, not understanding; it is utilitarian, not relational. It is exemplified in the move of the clinic run by the Altruist from inside the *dargah* to outside it. In 2012, the Altruist procured an office inside the village, close to the shrine but no longer sharing the same space. The office is where the Out Patients Department and other work of the NGO is carried out today. Working together in such close proximity proved to be too difficult after all.

On a wall of the *dargah* is a notice by the Dargah Committee Trust that speaks in the language of the Dava-dua programme, which says (in Hindi and Gujarati),

- It is hereby advised to all travellers-visitors and devotees that it is very important to take care of [*sakhar karna]* those with mental illness [*mansik rog*].
- Please immediately notify the office of the *dargah* regarding the care of those with mental illness.
- For those with mental illness, the *dargah* can provide, alongside prayers [*dua*], the saint's priceless blessings [*nishulk sakhar*] and medicines [*dava*].
- The law has provisions regarding the care of those with illness. It is a criminal offence by law to bind the mentally ill. The warning is therefore issued that no person with mental illness should be bound physically and that every person is liable to obey this law.
- It is a criminal offence to break Human Rights laws [*manav mulbhut adhikaro*]. If any person is found to break these laws, such person will be subject to legal procedures and the trustees of the *dargah* and the *mujawars* will not be held responsible.
- It is forbidden to dirty/soil the premises of the *dargah*. If any person is caught/found doing such an act of dirtying the *dargah*, such person is liable to be fined.

  Hon. Chairman
  Syed Ali Mira Datar Trust, Unava'
  (2013: my translation from the Hindi).

That a religious site requires the putting up of notices on the treatment of mental illness would alert an uninitiated reader that here two worldviews are competing – the folk-religious and the medico-scientific. One could read the (translated) text as to what it is saying about the treatment of mental illness, of putting side-by-side the effects of prayers for the 'divine' attention of the patron saint of the shrine alongside the effects of medicines. The mixing of registers complicates our reading of the text. On one hand, there is an injunction of providing treatment to the mentally ill, where care is professionalized and made impersonal. However the shrine also provides care by encouraging a personal relation between a devotee and the patron saint. The Foucauldian discourse of the clinic does not apply straightforwardly here and finding an equivalence proves to be difficult.[6]

The accomplishments of the programme in Unava spurred the government of Tamil Nadu to emulate it by initiating a Dava-dua programme in Ervadi *dargah* on November 9, 2013. According to reports, it was jointly established by the State government and the Erwadi Dargah Haqdhar Management Committee on the lines of 'Dava and Dua' at the Syed Mira Datar Dargah in Unava after Chief Minister Jayalalitha sanctioned a mental health centre in Ervadi, and a six-member team, led by C. Balasubramanian (State nodal officer, District Mental Health Programme), visited the centre in Gujarat (*The Hindu*, November 10, 2013). Having a model in place, the Dava-dua programme in Ervadi was able to move considerably faster and within a couple of months had seen hundreds of 'patients'. 'Spiritual healers agreeing to take part in the programme and joining hands with psychiatrists to treat mentally ill people itself is a big success to the Dava-dua programme', said Ramasubramanian (*sic*) to *The Hindu*, 'We offer the best mental health treatment free of cost to patients without disturbing their religious faith as the patients visit the *dargah* with faith and belief' (*The Hindu*, February 20, 2014). The Unava model having proved to be successful can be faithfully replicated, what policy-makers and planners call being 'mainstreamed' and 'upscaled'.

The Dava-dua programme of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu has a direct relation to the rationalist movement of Maharashtra. If the anti-superstition movement in Maharashtra has tried to eradicate ritualistic and faith-based healing through legal channels after two decades of grass-roots activism, the Dava-dua programme in Gujarat is intervening in the inner machinations of the *dargah* by positioning scientific ideology alongside one based on faith. The blueprint of this plan is to slowly phase out the non-rational aspects of faith-based treatment by winning over not only patients but also the *mujawars* by

making them see the error of their ways and the rightness of the scientific treatment. Indeed, nowadays *mujawars* often come themselves and bring their relatives for treatment to the psychiatrists in the Altruist clinic.

Wraths of power

There are twelve clauses to the Anti-Superstition Bill that seek to define the criminal offence vis-à-vis performing superstition and black magic. According to Clause 8, it is a cognizable and non-bailable offence:

> [t]o create a panic in the mind of public in general by way of invoking ghost or mantras or threaten to invoke ghost, creating an impression there is ghostly or wrath of power inapprehensible by senses causing physical injuries and preventing a person from taking medical treatment and instead diverting him to practice inhuman, evil and aghori acts or treatment, threatening a person with death or causing physical pains or causing financial harm by practicing or tend to practice black magic or inhuman acts.

Clause 8, like the rest of the Bill, appears to be aimed at those forms of performances that exploit the seeker/sufferer by promising a cure that they cannot possibly hope to offer. This law presumes that the cure being offered is self-aware of its falsity and is only trying to cheat and swindle the innocents driven to this last resort out of despair. It is true that for many faith healing is the last resort after having tried several types of medical systems and paid the dues of many kinds of doctors. Davar and Lohokare (2009) cite the documentation of the Gujarat Mental Health Mission, 2003: 'In the Indian context, 74.7% of psychiatric patients had consulted a traditional healer before coming to the hospital. Out of these, 33.3% had consulted one place only, while 17.3% had gone to more than 10 such places. 30% of the patients in the above study expressed satisfaction and noted improvements in their condition. 45% of the patients have not found satisfaction and expressed disappointment. 25% suggest that they will advise others to go to traditional healers'. This also depicts how several devotees also take recourse to medical systems alongside treatments at the faith healing site … keeping a foot in both worlds, so to speak. The plurality of treatment modalities is considered to be generally enabling in the Indian context. Thus, in the context of the Anti-Superstition Bill, it begs the question, when does the offer and acceptance of ritual and faith-based cure become intentionally

deceptive? Or is it always deceptive, i.e. does the faith healer practicing it know of its speciousness and yet, in order to make money and/or find fame, continue to promote it? Is that why the one offering to invoke ghosts or exorcise them is considered to be committing a crime under the law? Is that what makes faith healing rituals inhuman and evil? Do ghosts not exist? Does the proof lie in the fact that they are 'inapprehensible to the senses'?

In the backdrop of some of the critical events in the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century, this book will seek to look at the scientific and the spiritual through the experience of being possessed by the 'wrath of power inapprehensible to the senses'. The coinage of the phrase 'wrath of power' is interesting since while its last term (power) has exploded in usage in the last century, the first term (wrath) is less commonly used. This work does seem like an eerie juxtaposition of an archaic topic with modern categories of analysis. It will inquire into ghosts and their ilk in the Islamic and Hindu traditions in India. It will ask what does it mean to be haunted by *jinn* or *preta?* Are these demons? Are they spirits? Are they hallucinations? Are they superstition? How should one look at possession by divine beings? What is the cosmology of faith that allows for such phenomena? What psychic processes are at work here? How are faith healing sites ordered? Why have they been so difficult to comprehend, let alone theorize?

Chapters 3–5 will explore possession in a few examples of faith healing within the larger context of contemporary India: a Hindu temple in Rajasthan that treats cases of *preta*-possession, a Dalit religious formation in Maharashtra with a tradition of *Devi*-possession and a Sufi shrine in Gujarat which registers cases of *jinn*-possession. The book will try to show that vested in *jinn, preta* and *Devi* indeed are wraths of power as yet unassimilated into the sociological and psychoanalytic scholarship surrounding ghosts and haunting since the Indian scenario is largely unexplored; there are, of course, nascent psychoanalytic attempts and far too many anthropological expeditions but the phenomena in question maintain an air of occult opacity. The scholarship that has looked at these phenomena, unapologetic of the ephemeral quality of haunting and unafraid to theorize the seemingly esoteric, has been few and far between: Avery Gordon in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997, 2008) and Stephen Frosh in *Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmission* (2012) have taken on the rather slim existence of ghosts and made it matter through an analysis of the historical and cultural analysis of power relations in Western society that are beset by spectres that will not go away.

Gordon uses the trope of haunting to produce a slashing critique of racial capitalism built on slavery and oppression, especially as seen in the Americas – North and South. Through the work of two women authors – Luisa Valenzuela and Toni Morrison – she explores the haunting quality of writing on subjugated knowledges, though she begins with another woman writer – 'Sabrina Spielrein who saw spirits […] haunts the institution of psychoanalysis' (2008: 36). An analysand of Carl Jung, Spielrein went on to become a psychoanalyst herself, and had written on the destructive drive ten years before Freud embarked on it in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Gordon does not find her in a photograph of the Weimar Congress she was supposed to attend in 1911. The photographic evidence of her absence distracts Gordon, teases her, haunts her. Spielrein disappears from the scene and what was considered 'personally conditioned' when a woman writes about it becomes the revolutionary turn in psychoanalysis; the death drive is remembered and repeated but *her* absence produces the effect of a haunting, which is 'not the same as being exploited, traumatized, or oppressed, although it usually involves these experiences or is produced by them. What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely' (Gordon, 2008: xvi).

Gordon produces a reading of *He who Searches* (1979) by Valenzuela; '[w]illing to entertain the idea that a certain kind of wicked sorcery has dominated Argentine life, Valenzuela has also made it her task to understand the sensitive issue of middle class quiescence and complicity during the years of terror, during the "dirty war", a war never officially declared but nonetheless undertaken' (2008: 67). Within the ambit of organized terror in Argentina, Gordon finds that State (military) and Science (psychoanalysis), in trying to dispel the spectre of subversion, created ghosts and phantoms of the ones they made disappear; thus a haunting is created! On the other hand, *Beloved* (1987) by Morrison is premised on the appearance of a ghost who walks into 124 Bluestone Road one day. 124 Bluestone Road is Sweet Home, a house of African American women, fugitives for having run away from slavery. It opens in 1873, the era of American Reconstruction, when the 'ghost enters, all fleshy and real, with wants, and a fierce hunger, and she speaks, barely, of course, and in pictures and a coded language. This ghost, Beloved, forces a reckoning: she makes those who have contact with her, who love and need her, confront an event in their past that loiters in the present. But Beloved, the ghost, is haunted too, and therein lies the challenge Morrison poses' (2008: 139). The ghost has

desires, surprisingly not ghostly desires but earthly ones. In fact, the ghost is *only* desire made spectral. She wants food, attention, love, memory; she wants everything. Beloved wants to consume Sethe, who killed her little baby girl, rather than let her be recaptured and enslaved. Gordon speaks on how we cannot choose our ghosts (like the way we choose the books we read), but when they find us, we find ourselves.

These women writers not only speak on the ghostly aspects of experience but they also have been rendered ghostly themselves, since what they speak of not only marks who they are but marks what the world should be. This writing is a political claim upon the world, which can be ignored if it be mere rambling or solely fiction, but Gordon would like us to extend the bounds of a sociological and historical rendition of the present. 'Luisa Valenzuela, Toni Morrison, and Sabrina Spielrein too, can see what is usually invisible or neglected or thought by most to be dead and gone. […] These women possess a vision that can not only regard the seemingly not there, but can also see that the not there is a seething presence. Seething, it makes a striking impression; seething, it makes everything we do see just as it is, charged with the occluded and forgotten present' (p. 194–5).

For Frosh, haunting has several associations. One is how psychoanalysis is haunted by its Jewish roots, which have been deeply buried as a reaction to anti-Semitism of the Second World War. Frosh says 'residues are to be found particularly in Freud and his historical period; but they have not gone away, and seem unlikely to do so. Judaism, Jewish identity and psychoanalysis are bound tightly together, which does not mean that no other cultures or traditions get a look-in, but rather that even when they do, the Jewish specificity of psychoanalysis still has to be dealt with' (2012: 10–11). It is especially interesting that in relation to Nazism, Frosh analyses how trauma passes down generations not only in the children of victims of anti-Semitic violence but also in the children of perpetrators of Nazi atrocities. He takes on board the question: What is one to do with a Nazi father, the Hitler *in uns*? Through a reading of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonomy* (1976, 1986), Frosh explores how the trauma of the Holocaust is encrypted in the unconscious and transmitted down the generations of victims and perpetrators, akin to the concept of transference. How would the notion of the psychoanalytic notion of the *crypt* throw light on shadowy presences that sustain secret absences? Frosh says, 'the crypt hides something alien: "the *crypt* as a foreign body included through incorporation in the Self, and the *ghost* effect, more radically heterogeneous insofar as it implies the topography of an *other*, of a 'corpse buried

in the other'" (Derrida, 1986: xxx). Moreover, the crypt is itself *hidden away* by an act of violence that does not announce "here is the safe" but rather buried it behind one wall and then another, until only a ghost who can pass through walls could possibly get out' (Frosh 2012: 49). Here the secret is so cryptic and violent that it further encrypts the violence; a secret within another, corpse within crypt, crypt within corpse, and thus the ghost is begotten.

Another connection Frosh makes that is particularly significant for this research is that between haunting and colonialism, especially in the context of European colonialist history; he writes on psychoanalysis, which has a tremendous emancipatory potential, turning coat when it aligns with repressive forces, sometimes for its own survival. He analyses how 'Freud responded to anti-Semitism by producing in psychoanalysis a theory that reconstructed human subjectivity according to the image of the disparaged Jew (we are all circumcised/castrated now). In so doing he also preserved the dynamics of racialized discourse, displacing it into his theorizing on the "dark continent" of femininity, and embedding in the idea of the "primitive" […] the seeds for much of psychoanalysis' later racial blindness' (Frosh 2012: 8). On the other hand, Frosh is engaged in a post-colonial endeavour that is not premised on 'a kind of romance of origin' (p. 59), a return to a mythical utopian past which can, as if, right all the wrongs that have been done. He may well be talking of the Indian scene today where there is an active attempt to recreate the glorious Vedic past of the Hindu homeland before Mughal rule, branded as Islamic oppression, destroyed 'the very fibre of the society'. Frosh warns that '[p]articularly in the context of ethnic and post-colonial context, this is a dangerous strategy in that it sets up a division between the "authentic" culture of the oppressed group – a fetish of the lost object, in psychoanalytic terms – and the reality that one still lives with the effects of colonialism even after its apparent demise' (ibid.). Instead the post-colonial enterprise charged with fantasies of melancholic attachment in the present to the ghosts of past suffering that it will not let go, forgo, forget is 'holding potential for messianic transformation' (p. 64) in the future … a remembering, repeating and working through.

Taking on board the violence the twentieth century witnessed in racism and colonialism, in gender and sexual politics, the insulation and subjugation of knowledge forms, in the construction of reified identities and neglecting of subaltern subjectivities, it would seem that both Gordon and Frosh have analyses of the wrath of power as the *power of wrath* … a cry for recompensation, retribution, acknowledgement for having been wronged,

ignored, silenced. The presence of ghosts calls for affirmative action and liberatory practice, in the absence of which phantoms of past outrage continue to rattle the doors which have kept the other safely outside. The dead and dispossessed squeeze through the cracks and ooze through the gaps to infiltrate the present.

With the speaking of death, the wrath of power is also the *wraith of power*. Wraith is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as (1) ghost, (2) spectral appearance of a living person supposed to portend that person's death. The wraith in psychoanalysis has been called the double (*Doppelgänger*) by Freud in *The Uncanny* (2003a [1919]). Unsurprisingly, Gordon and Frosh make their way through this provocative text. It is around this time – the First World War – that Freud begins to write on death and its psychoanalytic offspring: the uncanny and the death drive. Meeting the double of oneself is an unsettling experience because the double is all too familiar and in that moment reveals the compulsion to repeat. Freud opines that the double which was created as insurance against death, 'an energetic denial of the power of death' (Rank cited by Freud 2003a [1919]: 142) by putting away the finality of it, becomes an object of terror because the primitive mechanism it served has been surmounted in modern, civilized society and thus chancing upon it feels uncanny, like a portent of death in fact. Freud is theorizing that we are haunted by not only the memories of childhood and familial romance but by spectres of primitive society and the prehistoric past which we experience in the present as an unsettling blend of the familiar (homely) and unfamiliar (unhomely), that is, the uncanny. He attributes the prevalence of the idea of the double, of seemingly fortuitous chance encounters, of presentiment, of the 'evil eye', of superstition, and even madness, to the bringing forth of the uncanny.

Freud lays the experience of the uncanny as the residual traces of the 'old animistic view of the universe, a view characterized by the idea that the world was peopled by human spirits, by the narcissistic overrating of one's own mental processes, by the omnipotence of thoughts and techniques of magic that relied on it, by the attribution of carefully graded magical powers (*mana*) to alien persons and things, and by all the inventions with which the unbounded narcissism of that period of development sought to defend itself against the unmistakable sanctions of reality' (p. 147). This passage in particular – which is premised on the characterization of primitive people of times past as those who are less inured to the sanctions of society and in defence rely on the narcissism of omnipotent thinking – has been critiqued thoroughly by both Gordon and Frosh. In addition, according to Gordon, Freud loses

grasp of a promising beginning by reorganizing the social as the psychoanalytic fact of the unconscious: 'Having admitted a form of haunting that does not track itself back to the individual's personal psychic life, Freud is ready to minimize its significance before the discussion even begins. Where psychoanalysis, as a mode of thought or analysis, considers itself capable of identifying the visible and disquieting symptoms of repression and bringing the origins and nature to light, "reality-testing" simply refutes the reality of haunting by treating it as matter of lingering superstition' (2008: 53). Gordon would have us take haunting more seriously than that, as a material force that by the fact of taking place is both a commentary of and an intervention in the social forces at work in the appearance of ghosts.

In Frosh's reading of Gordon, her critique of Freud is 'not quite alert to everything in his text' (2012: 28) especially because psychoanalysis in general and Freud's writing in particular has a 'double-dealing tension' (ibid.) in it, inherent in concepts such as 'unconscious' and 'uncanny', alive with occult possibilities: 'Every time we meet ourselves coming back from somewhere, in every return of the repressed, in every compelled act of repetition, whenever we are absorbed in melancholy or made to shiver by some uncanny encounter, the primary drive is at work, and the evanescent displays of life are punctured by reminders that we are on the way to somewhere, that something solid lies in the background, but that it is not recognizable as "us"' (p. 34). Frosh reorganizes the social and the psychological as the psychosocial and therefore produces a different reading of psychoanalysis. The psychosocial is the meeting of the breast and the mouth, the cusp of the social and the psychological, where *the psychic* can be discovered: 'The psychic is that space in which unconscious personal elements and unconscious social elements come together, to make us feel possessed and not in control of ourselves. After all, psychoanalysis attests to how the experience of being haunted, of being taken over by something that arrives unexplained from somewhere else, unbidden, often unwelcome, but sometimes consolatory, is the most obvious and routine experience of all' (p. 167). The something from somewhere else is at our doorstep, there is a knock on the door … In that moment there is the eerie experience of the unconscious itself, there is an inside and an outside organized in space and in time (I was already here waiting for you, like Sleeping Beauty) when in fact the subject is constituted as 'knocked up' (Lacan 1998 [1964]: 55) and pregnant with the consciousness of being woken up. Already this is not too far from hearing the door creak open and quiet footsteps come closer. The unconscious is a haunting too.

Notes

1 Syed Ibrahim is attributed the titles of 'Qutbus Sulthan' and 'Shaheed Badusha', denoting his kingly status. According to local legend, he was a king from the region of Madinah who had come with the message of Islam to India and was responsible for bringing Islam to Tamil Nadu. He was martyred in the course of his mission in Ramanathapuram, earning him the sobriquet of 'Shaheed Badusha', the Martyr King.

2 Syed Shah Meeran (1553–1638) is also attributed the titles of Hasani, Hussaini, Quadri and Bagdadi, thus claiming direct descent from Hasan and Hussain, the grandsons of Mohammed who died as holy martyrs in Persia and then in the Quadri *silsilah* (spiritual lineage) from 'Abd ul-Qadir Jilani (1077–1166) whose tomb is in Baghdad' (Rothgery 2008: 151). According to Rothgery, 'it was Mira Husayn Hamawi himself who was one of the first to bring a strong Qadari presence to the court at Golcondo, then under the reign of Ibrahim Quli Shah (r. 1550–1580) and Muhammad Quli (r. 1580–1612)' (2008: 192).

3 The research project was funded by the Indo-Dutch Program for Alternatives in Development (IDPAD) and the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi.

4 Dabholkar was of the firm belief that 'Every Indian citizen is bound to adopt Scientific Outlook as is stipulated in our constitution' (2007). He is referring to 'Article 51 A (h) of the Constitution of India [that] urges every citizen "to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform"' (Venkateswaran 2013).

5 Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code concerns the deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs; in short, hate speech law.

6 This text of the noticeboard was analysed in one of the meetings of the Discourse Unplugged Research Group in the University of Manchester. I must thank Erica Burman, Ian Stronach, Anat Greenstein, Daniel Kerry, Rodrigo Alencar, Sally Schofield and Juup Stelma for trying to think of it along with me.

2

ON METHOD

In the segment of research in Gujarat in July 2013, my helpful hosts at the Altruist were surprised that I did not have an interview schedule and a battery of questions, that I spent a great deal of time in conversation with *mujawars* and *sawwallis* asking a lot of questions that seemed irrelevant from the point-of-view of mental health service delivery. When I travelled along with another researcher to the site in Rajasthan in January 2014, it was pointed out that I was not pushy enough, I was letting conversation with *sankatwallas* happen or not happen at its own pace without regard to the ends of my research project. So many independent observers cannot be wrong. I was timid and hesitant. The lack of an interview schedule was then deliberate, but the lack of any direction in my questioning was not; both had the same reason. I just did not know the questions that needed to be asked, even after several years. The question was a problem. A question already hints at the answer. A question comes out of a certain trajectory. A question can only be situated within a context larger than itself. I could not find the question to ask because I could not imagine where it was coming from, where it was situated in the contemporary, where it would lead. Method was the problem. What is the method to study possession in contexts of faith healing in India? There were, in fact, too many and none at all. Thus, this section on method speaks to every problem this research has faced, since there has never been a moment when the question did not make its mark; the question that has haunted this project is not only *what* possession is but *how* to study it.

One strategy I have used is allowing the terms to proliferate. If, in earlier attempts, possession was preceded by 'spirit' and used as a catch-all phrase, this work opened up the bottle and let them escape. Not only do these terms come from different religious and cultural formations in India, but 'spirit' brings in the weight of its theoretical elucidation in Western philosophy. There is the notion of Spirit as elucidated by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), which is the basis of the received wisdom on the philosophical notion of the Spirit. On the other hand, Spectre as fleshed out by Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (1993) is a materialist analysis in contrast to the idealist position held by Hegel. Derrida brings up the distinction between the Spirit and Spectre, as he moves between the two: 'As soon as one no longer distinguishes spirit from specter, the former assumes a body, it incarnates itself, as spirit, in the specter. Or rather, as Marx himself spells out, […] the specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some "thing" that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the revenant or the return of the specter. There is something disappeared, departed in the apparition itself as reapparition of the departed. The spirit, the specter are not the same thing, and we will have to sharpen this difference' (2003: 4–5). It is not only that a genealogy of these words and their distinction are required in conceptually translating the words of the vernacular in different Indian languages used in this book – *Devi, jinn, péy, bala, churäl, pishacha, preta, sankat* – but that a genealogy of the words in the vernacular is required too and the distinction between them. Are these better understood as spirits or spectres? Or would (an)other concept-word be required?

We would also need to attend to the plurality of faith healers such as the *mahant, mujawar, maulana, bhagat, bhuva, aradhi, jogati, potraj, fakir, baba, sant,* priests to mention a few, who are experiencing and negotiating with the hastening tempo of the quick(er) cure guarantee by medical practitioners and would be torn between fully entering Western modernity of the kind evidenced by the biomedical discourse or defending a seemingly anachronistic system of healing and relating. This book has tried to maintain the distinctiveness of local terms and retained them as semi-translated into English; the English language as global lingua franca needs to make some effort of its own to speak to local argot. The conversation between the global and the local needs to take into consideration how knowledges are bound to geographical, disciplinary and institutional locations and methodologies; methodological

tracks recorded in this book vis-à-vis the site of ghosts, of treating the afflictions caused by certain possessions, and of religious healing in India are:

1. Science
2. Anthropology
3. Freudian psychoanalysis and its cultural variants
4. Post-colonial studies

Science

To define what science is has always been a problem. Is psychoanalysis a science? What about psychology? How about psychiatry? Is it medicine? It must be biology? What makes science scientific? Critiques of science have demonstrated how science operates within larger ideological frameworks – it presents a certain picture of the world, which affects a society that consists of many different actors in varied ways. In post-colonial societies, where societies are marked largely by the discourse of development, is science hegemonic? Even if it is, how does its hegemony work? Asha Achuthan (2010)[1] would caution us to look at the inner operations science more judiciously:

> One needs a proper picture of hegemony before you can talk about state or scientific hegemony. Now I would say that the shift has been, in India, that you need to think about the institutions, the actors and the texts of science, so is there such a thing as 'Big Science'? […] Big or small, there is a definite relationship between the texts of science, the language or the way it is written, the way powerful institutions operate and the way actors are encouraged to operate within that institution. This connection needs to be made in order to understand the hegemony of science.
>
> *(Achuthan, August 31, 2010)*

Thus, the hegemony of science is dispersed through many levels of meaning-making, which is she says that the scientist would be offended by the very idea of it because he is unconscious of it; it is a combination of 'texts', 'language', 'institutional operation' and 'actors', making it impossible to pin down a scientific 'fact' to one scientist, lab or institution, its function or acceptable use in society, or the extent of its responsibility.

In the context of this research, science has constantly been evoked in a variety of ways. The medical professional believes that scientific truth lies at

the neurological level of the human, or at least that it is profoundly biological. The psychologist (an unabashed science aspirant) would locate science at the cognitive level, in the structures of mental representation; if an older scientistic version of psychology, at the level of human behaviour. The psychoanalyst, considered quite suspicious by the psychiatric and psychological cadres, would also claim psychoanalysis a science. All these claimants to science have had different conceptions of the human, even if they are supposed to be universally true, but have been unanimous in denouncing religion as superstitious and unscientific. The stand-off between religion and science is still being argued but it is when science is deployed as an aid to Statehood that the intervention of the State in faith healing becomes necessary and unavoidable, requiring policing and legislation.

At this juncture I would like to point out that not all faith healing sites are seen to be equally unscientific; it is the Islamic shrines of India that have faced the full brunt of the Science–State complex. The State has taken action against several *dargahs* for promoting superstitious and unscientific treatment of mental illness but the plethora of sites of other religious denominations has not faced the ire of the State to the same extent; to my knowledge, there is no *dava-dua* programme based in a Hindu or Dalit temple or a Christian church, nor a demand from the State government to turn over resident devotees to a mental hospital. It would seem to be that some religious practices are less scientific than others. Religious discourse, like scientific discourse, has offered a version of the 'truth' and usually canonical religion is more likely to pronounce the truth and present its knowledge as absolute and binding on all; so some practices are religious, others are superstitious. In India, the religion in the mainstream is a version of Hinduism that started becoming more popular as a statement of resistance to colonial rule; it required to state a pan-Indian identity which was based in a shared glorious past. The canon of religious expression allied itself closer to the ideals of science. Secularism plays well into the State–Science complex in India. Asad in *Formations of the Secular* (2003) likens nationalism to a secularized religion: he asks 'Is nationalism, with its affirmation of collective solidarity, already a religion of the nation-state?' (2003: 187). The dominant idea of science-as-secular or the secular-as-science hence needs to be taken with some suspicion. It is here that Foucault's ghost comes to haunt us: is science a secular theology? These questions complicate our relationship with faith healing sites for they do not allow a simple stratification of the binaries – science/faith and secularism/religion – thus putting to question the method of science. The Science–State complex in India thus sets up a particular relation with states

of possession and its exegesis in the faith healing site, resting on an assumption of having a natural, universal and secular grammar which can write off faith-based healing, which is neither universal nor secular.

Cultural anthropology

The anthropologist Dwyer attempts a phenomenological reading of possession, advancing the thesis of *cultural typification*: 'In the Hindu world, because women are viewed as being particularly vulnerable to possession by capricious spirits or ghosts (*bhut-pret*), the perception itself is likely to influence the frequency with which they are drawn into the orbit of exorcist practice. It is understandable, then, why more women than men interviewed in Mehndipur were said to be afflicted by spirits' (2003: 44). The thesis of cultural typification is almost banal in its simplicity: more Hindu women are predisposed to being possessed because it is typical in their Indian culture to be so. Dwyer puts his point across as, 'The main argument I put forward about affliction is that certain categories of individuals become the prey of capricious spirits and often become victims of sorcery or some other mystical force because they see themselves and are seen by others to be exceptionally at risk from them. In other words, the attribution of illness and misfortune to particular supernatural agents or occult forces is largely connected with perceptions rooted in common sense, taken for granted assumptions and beliefs about susceptibility' (ibid.: 3). This thesis is akin to the hysteria thesis: European women are predisposed to hysteria because it is typical in their Western culture for them to be so predisposed. As Marshall Sahlins, 'the Oceanist' who has studied Polynesian cultures, would say, 'different cultures, different rationalities'. The method at work here is a combination of ethnography and phenomenology: through ethnography, the anthropologist can gather data on a cultural formation and its reasoning, and through phenomenology she can reach the essence of the culture, the pure phenomenon as it were.

Dwyer is also opposed to what he terms the *deprivation hypothesis* deployed by both anthropologists and psychoanalysts that sees possession as an outbreak against an oppressive system. Thus, anthropologists may see agency in the figure of the possessed woman and psychoanalysts may perceive a hysterical formation. Indeed, the *agency thesis* has been deployed well in the study of possessed women: Pfleiderer states 'that the ideology of the tomb [of Mira Datar] defines the boundaries of the women analogously to the Hindu or Muslim world picture in India, while the women overstep the boundary when they enter into trance. And they do this in public. But while they do

this, voices speak from them. Thus, they undermine their social boundaries – "with the techniques of hysteria as it were"' (2006: 221). She finds this breaking of social norms as the woman acquiring agency in the small spaces available to her within the confines of her social reality; *hazri* performed in public is the woman's agency boldly flung in the face of society but yet at the same time made subtle when termed '*hazri*'. She calls it the necessary cunning of women that allows them to survive in a patriarchal society for the 'Indian woman has to be very cunning because she lives in a two-fold patriarchy, the Indian and the colonial' where on one side is 'Indian theory of society (*Dharmashastra)*, which radically restricts woman's space. The other […] was brought to the women of India by the Europeans, above all the 19th century British who came from the Victorian era of bodily alienation'. The agency thesis is not without its appeal; it keeps alive a materialist analysis of the phenomena of possession. Kalpana Ram (2001) in her paper on rural Tamil women's experiences of possession attempts an analysis of consciousness where possession is seen to be symbolic of femininity and where women take recourse to such options to deal with social relations of inequality.

The analysis of possession through the trope of woman's agency explains the conflicted nature of possession, it speaks of inequality but also of its appropriation by the oppressed to voice their dissent.[2] It locates possession within the subject that has been shaped by the global discourses on oppression and resistance. Nonetheless, it does not speak of possession itself and its relation to the religious–cultural context of its operation. There is much specificity in the experience of possession outside of some trauma/suffering/madness that can be universalized to all experiences of possession within a reified culture, which is one of the legacies of the discipline of anthropology.

Anthropologists, on the other hand, defend their disciplinary location as not based in a Western rationality but arising from the rationality of the people and the culture one is studying. 'Anthropologists specialize in human difference. As *merchants of the exotic*, we have confronted the problem of representing the Other since long before that word was spelled with a capital O', says William Sax (2002: 186, italics mine), a cultural anthropologist of South Asia who has studied ritual healing in temples of North India. His critique of Said on Orientalism is that studying what he calls 'the exotic', in this case India, reveals that the rigid distinction between the Self and the Other, or in his words the same and the different, is problematic and untenable; 'the situation is always much more complex than Said implies, with selfhood and

otherness, virtue and vice, subject to ceaseless negotiation and re-interpretation' (ibid: 200). Despite its internal revision, a certain strand of anthropology studies/sells the *exotic other* in the third world in the name of intellectual curiosity and openness to difference. However without a thorough philosophical analysis of its own situatedness in Western scholarship, anthropology does get caught up the culture wars as typified between Sahlins and Obeyesekere.[3] In this milieu, Said has struck at the heart of the anthropological enterprise by gesturing towards its philosophical and psychoanalytic underpinnings, rather than merely arguing about how the Oriental other is represented by the Orientalist scholar. The method of a pre-orientalist or unconsciously orientalist anthropology, that attempted an 'indigenous' explanation of the 'exotic' behaviour depicted in possession by basing its theorization on the cultural coordinates of the site of study but without mapping the cultural and historical coordinates of its disciplinary moorings, is suspect in the study of the site of faith healing in all its complexity.

Freudian psychoanalysis and its cultural variants

In fact the very word 'possession' itself *should* make us pause …. The *Aradhi* of Tuljabhavani characterizes her experience as '*angamadhe dev aahe*', the deity resides in the body. Possession has connotations other than this apparently simple statement. In the clinical context, according to Addlakha (2008), Indian psychiatrists have identified it as a distinctive, culture-specific symptomatic cluster, which they refer to as the possession syndrome. With its entry into the lexicon of the DSM – via the Culture-Bound Syndromes – it has been interpreted as a form of dissociation. This phenomenon has also been called, more specifically, the *Devi* syndrome (Sebastia 2009). The *Devi* syndrome can be observed in 'sacred' spaces of different religious persuasions sprinkled generously throughout India that for the lack of a term have been grouped under 'faith healing'. However this diagnostic and clinical formulation is neither descriptive nor prescriptive; this is the fate of the 'culture-bound syndromes' or in other words those which don't quite fit into the Western nosological system of pathology. These new syndromes, however, still get accommodated into the psychiatric lexicon far too easily as petty variations of more universal conditions. An in-depth analysis of these cultural patterns is required to explore their differences from the model proposed by psychiatric diagnostics … for even in the domain of the abnormal these do not quite fit. On the other hand, being so neglected by the American

Psychological Association may not be entirely a bad thing since the phenomenon does not get immediately and absurdly reduced to a psychological abnormality. Before the setting up of containment of the phenomenon in carefully defended categories of illness and disorder, we can still ask some different questions, which can open up another imagination of psychic health or distress.

The *hysteria thesis* is accepted without much modification by cultural psychoanalysts in India. Possession in women, especially trance, is seen as hysterical outbreak akin to the hysterical behaviour and somatic complaints witnessed by Freud in the late nineteenth century. Psychoanalysis has arguably always seen spirit possession in women as cases of hysterical excess. Ram (2001) has been critical of psychoanalysis for having diminished or bypassed the experience of women while understanding possession for 'psycho-analytic accounts of spirit possession – tempted, no doubt, by the easy transportability between spirit possession and psycho-analytical accounts of hysteria – deliver accounts disappointing in their reductionism'. Sebastia (2007) writes that Stanley Freed and Ruth Freed, Gananath Obeyesekere and Sudhir Kakar, who have all done great ethnographic work on spirit possession in India and Sri Lanka, 'also share the idea that individuals having "hysterical personalities" are predisposed to crises of possession'. The feminist critique of psychoanalysis does not seem to come alongside the cultural argument.

One formulation of possession has been developed within Freudian psychoanalysis, where possession has been understood as an episode of neurotic outbreak. Freud in 'A Seventeenth-Century Demonological Neurosis' (1957a [1923]) is reading the phenomena of possession, indeed all religious experience, as strategies of the neurotic to access some safety and comfort from threat, either internal as in wishes that cannot be owned up to or external as acceptance of a cultural prohibition on seeking out unlawful libidinal satisfaction. He starts with the declaration that the neuroses of earlier times came in 'demonological trappings'. Freud relates the story of one Christoph Haizmann (died 1700), whose case was archived in a library in Vienna but had originally belonged to the shrine of Mariazell. The documents consist of two parts: 'One is a report, written in Latin, by a monastic scribe or compiler; the other is a fragment from the patient's diary, written in German' (1957a [1923]: 3997). On September 5, 1677, Haizmann, a Bavarian painter, had come to avail the good offices of the Fathers of the Church since he had signed a pact in blood with the Devil, which was due to expire that year itself, whereupon he would be constrained to turn over his soul to the Devil. Through the intercession of the Fathers and the intervention of the Virgin

Mary, the pact was returned to him from the Devil. However his relief was short-lived since he had to return on October 11, this time with fresh complaints: 'They consisted in visions and "*absences*", in which he saw and experienced every kind of thing, in convulsive seizures accompanied by the most painful sensations, on one occasion in paralysis of the legs, and so on. This time, however, it was not the Devil who tormented him; it was by sacred figures that he was vexed – by Christ and by the Blessed Virgin herself' (p. 4001). The holy ones were punishing him for not taking up the divine calling himself, but Haizmann realized that their particular torturous attentions were actually the machinations of the Devil again, this time because although he had secured the bond signed in blood, the one that predated it, one written in ink was still in the possession of the Devil. Again the treatment administered to him did the trick and Haizmann did not suffer from severe demonological persecution again (though in the records he was tempted once more by the Devil). In time, he joined the Order of the Brothers Hospitallers. Freud takes recourse to the documents mentioned above and, in the notes by the priest, notices that Haizmann had lost his father and the Devil had made the pact with him promising to stand in for his father for nine years in exchange for his eternal soul. He concludes that Haizmann was suffering from melancholia, the neurotic form of mourning, and the Devil was standing in as a Father-Substitute: 'his father's death had made him lose his spirits and his capacity to work; if he could only obtain a father-substitute he might hope to regain what he had lost' (p. 4006). Freud held this to be true not only in this one case but in the very origin of the idea itself. Thus God and Devil are split off attributes of the omnipotent father in the imagination of the child, which later becomes the ground for religions based on the oppositions of these two figures.

Freud interprets this case summarily as, 'states of possession correspond to our neuroses, for the explanation of which we once more have recourse to psychical powers. In our eyes, the demons are bad and reprehensible wishes, derivatives of instinctual impulses that have been repudiated and repressed. We merely eliminate the projection of these mental entities into the external world which the middle ages carried out; instead, we regard them as having arisen in the patient's internal life, where they have their abode' (Freud, 1957a [1923]: 3996).

For Freud, possession is simply a case of pathological neurosis, the projecting of an inner reality into the world, which was a commonly accepted exposition of the distress experienced by the person in times of yore but has since then been surmounted by scientific explanations (as offered by

psychoanalysis). This book charts the fraught relation Freud has had with religion in many of the turns it takes. The legacy of the father of psychoanalysis has been a distrust of and a distancing from the neurotic obsession of religion and onto the sane science of psychoanalysis. Against such foreclosure, the return to the spiritual in India has been an attempt of cultural psychoanalysis. In the attempt to culturalize psychoanalysis, there has been an attempt to make modifications to existing theory by offering another argument that is hauntingly familiar to the one it replaces: for instance the Ganesha Complex (see Kakar 1989) replaces the Oedipus Complex in India. If Oedipus is the son who kills the father and thus attains the undivided attention and love of his mother, Ganesha is beheaded by his father for usurping the mother and attains his elephant head as the reparation demanded by his mother to his father. 'Kakar extends this myth to suggest that, at his core, the Indian male wishes to remain enmeshed with his mother while splitting off the more "grown-up" sexual, triangular dimension of male–female relations' (Akhtar 2009: 117). This argument falls in danger of essentializing on two accounts: one, it sees Oedipus as a thing, which everyone must have so Indians who are culturally different will have the comparable Ganesha Complex; two, it sees India as a thing too, a pre-given natural reality. Cultural psychology and psychoanalysis usually do not travel through the post-colonial conundrum on the idea of India, on Indian culture and specifically 'our' culture because it believes it *stands for* culture, reifying it in the process. If cultural psychoanalysis with its attempt to theorize spirituality has radical promise, it is in two ways – one is the turn to culture, the other is the turn to religion, both having the ability to problematize psychoanalysis. However when the two seem to coalesce into one, when a certain strand of Hindu religion in India begins to look like Indian culture itself so that the radical possibility of psychoanalysis in a different cultural context is thwarted, because the problem is not that psychoanalysis is more representative of one culture than another, or one religion over the others, but that it can easily be deployed to do so. A cultural argument in India that is not alive to difference but merely reactive to it is always capable of usurping psychoanalysis in the interest of the nationalist project of 'unification' in the times of political and social unrest. It should be asking that even if we take the thing to be culture to be real, what is the thing we take to be India? It should be asking – what could a *swaraj* in psychoanalytic ideas be? The method of a post-colonial cultural psychoanalysis would need the premise of a dual critique, that is, on the critique of both critique and the critique of culture, or to put it differently, the critique of both culture and the culture of critique.

Post-colonial studies

This research is animated by concerns of violence, trauma and anguish, on justice, reparation and renewal, about truth, reality and the uncanny. This study is engaging with faith-based healing traditions in India that require an attention to these concerns just as much as overt political and social violence. At the same time, it is concerned about representation, or the inescapable quandary of the post-colonial condition! The subjects of this research are marked by different historical and mythological narratives, marred by other violent events and societal divisions, married to other utopian visions and scholarly agendas than those that are familiar to the Global North. Nonetheless, this is not to reject and deny the conceptualization produced in the diverse traditions of the 'West', as if that is desirable or even possible! To think what possession and healing means in the context of South-East Asia in general, and India in particular, requires attention on two fronts. In the old approaches, science is represented by the modern clinic and culture by the faith healing site. The bio-medical model that predominates in psychiatry would consider faith healing unscientific and thus to be replaced by psychiatry itself. Thus, the critique of the (recalcitrant) past does not come with a critique of the present. The problem is we 'either accept or repeat the judgments passed on us by Western culture, or we impotently resent them but have hardly any estimates of our own, wrung from an inward perception of the realities of our position' (Bhattacharya 1954 [1931]: 105). It becomes either a kind of 'unthinking conservatism' or 'an imaginary progressiveness merely imitative of the West' (Bhattacharya 1954 [1931]: 104). This project will seek to be premised on a bidirectional or *dual critique* of both the hegemonic Occident and the Occident's hegemonic description of the Orient. It needs to be a critique of both the West's hegemonic principles as well as those principles (emanating from either the West or the East) that hegemonize the East.

One problem that confronts us is the translation of symptom to syndrome here. Addlakha (2008) states that, 'the communicational context of psychiatric practice is characterized by multiple levels of linguistic and cultural translation. Doctors have to engage routinely in conjoining the nuances of local idioms to the theoretical concepts of an alien discourse.' This translation occurring routinely in the clinic also plays another function for as Tejaswini Niranjana (1993: 319) says 'translation in the post-colonial context is not possible without an understanding of how hegemonic modes of representation have worked and continue to work'. Niranjana shows how translation can 'render invisible the violence which creates the Other under colonialism'

(p. 320) such that 'difference is repressed in the coherent and transparent texts created by translation, which participates in the fixing of colonized cultures, to make them static and unchanging rather than historically constructed. Translation functions as a transparent presentation of something that already exists, although what happens is that the "original" is actually brought into being through translation. By implying that representation is adequate to a pre-given reality, that which is historical is made "natural"' (p. 321). The site of the clinic if it draws on 'the theoretical concepts of an alien discourse' will carry out these strategies of hegemonic containment. However, what is the problem of translation, from one language to another, from symptom to syndrome? If we were to employ greater care would we produce translations approximating the original more and more? What if translation is impossible? According to Gayatri Spivak (1999), translation is necessary, unavoidable but impossible for generally it is catachrestic, that is, 'no other word will do, and yet it does not really give you the literal meaning in the history of the language, upon which a correct rather than catachrestic metaphoric use would be based'. Researchers, not confronted by the immediacy of the clinical encounter, would therefore need to carefully attend to the ethics of translation across an epistemic divide that has been borne in the act of speech and that would be one of the tasks of critical psychology in a culturally different context. This is also an ethics of clinical thinking and research that is incumbent on this study.

This ethics is especially important in the post-colonial situation for the spectres of our colonial past come to haunt us in myriad strange ways. India may have gotten independence in 1947, that is, *swaraj* or self-rule in politics, but the task at hand till today is a *swaraj* in ideas, which is proving to be more difficult to attain. Even before India acquired Independence, even before the colonial period was over, before 'India' came into existence, 'Indian' thinkers were sounding the call – attaining national sovereignty cannot be the end of the struggle for *swaraj*, because Independence would only be the beginning of political emancipation and not its end; we need to strive for not only self-regulation but self-determination, a *swaraj* in ideas. Half a century later it would be enshrined as post-colonial thought.

In October 1931 a lecture was delivered by Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya (1875–1949) under the Sir Asutosh Memorial Lectures series at Chandernagore titled '*Swaraj* in Ideas', where he speaks that form of 'cultural subjection when one's traditional cast of ideas and sentiments is superseded without comparison or competition by a new cast representing an alien culture which possesses one like a ghost. This subjection is slavery of the spirit: when a

person can shake himself free from it, he feels as though the scales fell from his eyes. He experiences a rebirth and that is what I call *Swaraj in Ideas'* (1954 [1931]).

For the purposes of this research, there is another significant intervention that Bhattacharya makes; he distinguishes between at least three forms of rationalism (we have witnessed how the Indian rationalist argument has taken shape in the twenty-first century with the Anti-Superstition Bill). There is the form of rationalism that has originated from a foreign country (Western rationalism), which Bhattacharya states is *legitimate* and *ordinary* giving no cause for rejection. At the same time, he gives two other forms that originate from an 'inward perception of the realities of our position'. One is the 'rationalism is here the efflux of reverence, reverence for the traditional institutions through which customary sentiments are deepened into transparent ideals' (ibid.); reverence would be essential to make sense of the world of our ideas since this is a task that requires 'infinite patience and humility'. Thus this form of rationalism is premised on reverence for values and where they originate, rather than facts and their veracity thereof. The other form of rationalism, which is more common, is 'the simplification and generalization of ideals [that] is effected by unregenerate understanding with its mechanical separation of the essential from the inessential' (ibid.); this form of rationalism is a judgement devoid of reverence that is therefore without the creative capacity to draw out from the world of ideas the potentiation of its realization. Bhattacharya feels that this form of rationalism would be likely to be too hasty in its deliverance: 'Customs and institutions bound up with age-long sentiments are brushed aside (in the name of reason) as meaningless and dead without any imaginative effort to realize them in an attitude of humility' (ibid.). The attitude of reverence that Bhattacharya is advocating would require the researcher of healing traditions of India to make the connection between idea and ideal, the thought and its ethico-political place in the world.

'India' itself is such a word, it's a nation established 69 years back after 200 years of colonial rule, it's a culture that encompasses many myths and stories, it's a society that tries to keep together many communities and languages but 'India' is also a concept. It is an idea still trying to find an ideal, the struggle of which animates all the events mentioned in the previous chapter. It is an idea whose potentiation has yet to be realized but it may fall into the abyss of an irreverential rationalism that is based on 'the simplification and generalization of ideals [that] is effected by unregenerate understanding with its mechanical separation of the essential [science, development,

mainstream Hindu religious formations] from the inessential [superstition, backwardness, Dalit or Islamic religious traditions]' (Bhattacharya 1954 [1931]), the history of which is actively being written and rewritten today under the very assumption of its independent existence from time immemorial. Working through this plurality in signification, with reverence, has been very significant in guiding the methodology of this work.

There is an expectation that the modern subject has moved to the global mental health paradigm with its emphasis on scientific, evidence-based medicine. This book presents some disruptions to this script by attending to the practices of faith-based healing in India. Critical Psychology has already questioned the assumptions of global mental health initiatives that universalize psychology and science as disciplinary knowledges but also in the process reify subjective experience into objective chunks of reality (see De Vos 2012; Mills 2013; Madsen 2014). Critical Psychology has begun the dialogue with religion, which promises to overturn the modern understanding of religion on its head (see Carrette 2007). This book proposes that human beings demonstrate a dual loyalty: to science as faith and faith as science, both of which get reconfigured in the process. In the local context, science and faith get deployed in ways that are not only different but at times contrary to mainstream discourses of Science and Religion (see Werbner and Basu 1998). Thus 'faith healing' is posited here as a moment when the discourses of science and religion come head-to-head in negotiating cultural values and practices.

The book travels through different locations in Western India (Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra) that have extant traditions of religious practices (Hindu, Islamic and Dalit) and looks at how these traditions respond to the reporting of being possessed. Possession in itself is an area of study that has been analysed from different disciplinary locations, psychology and anthropology being the two most significant ones in this context; in this book, it is looked at through the lens of faith-based practices in interlocution with critical psychology. Here possession, like faith healing, is an opening for an alternative understanding of distress and healing in critical psychology.

Situated between scientific discourse and religious practices, this project draws insights from critical psychology and post-colonial theory. Important interlocutors in this project are located within interdisciplinary knowledge clusters such as South Asian studies, translation studies and the sociology of religion. The work itself is located on the cusp of these disciplinary boundaries and is bringing contemporary questions to the site of faith healing as well as

the phenomenon of possession. This has not been the easy route to take but the path to *swaraj* is replete with dead-ends and detours, potholes and pitfalls, but feet are meant for walking and hands are meant for writing.

Notes

1 This interview was part of a set of unpublished interviews on science by leading Indian scholars by the Integrated Science Education Initiative of the Higher Education Cell, Centre for the Study of Culture and Society, Bangalore.
2 See Aihwa Ong, 'The Production of Possession: Spirits and the Multinational Corporation in Malaysia' (1988) for an analysis of the outbreak of possession or 'epidemic hysteria' in the young female migrant workers of the Malay industrial taskforce in the 1970s and 1980s (which continues to the present day).
3 For an account of this anthropological crisis of the 1990s that started from the question of the supposed apotheosis of Captain Cook by the Hawaiians in 1779, see Clifford Geertz on 'Culture War' (1995).

3

GHOSTS FROM THE PAST

I remember my first visit in 2010 to Mehandipur, Rajasthan that houses the Balaji Mandir. This temple is reputed to be between a hundred and ten years old and a thousand and a hundred years old; clearly we are entering the realm of the mythical! According to local legend, Graham Dwyer records in *The Divine and the Demonic: Supernatural Affliction and its Treatment in North India* (2003), at a time in the past which is difficult to date today, that Mehandipur was a holy forest where even the wild animals would worship an idol of Balaji. Much later, a man called Gosaiji Maharaj dreamt of this sacred forest which contained three small temples, each with an idol inside. He kept ignoring the visions he was receiving till Hanuman came to him directly (in a dream) and instructed him to find Him at this spot, which he finally did. 'The next day Gosaiji Maharaj approached the idol of Balaji in the place where he had received the vision. He heard the sound of drums and trumpets, but no one could be seen. He gathered the people of the area and informed them about what had taken place. They decided to build a small house for Gosaiji and prepared food for him. Gosaiji performed many miracles' (2003: 15). The visionary experience of Gosaiji was taken seriously by the people of the village and the strength and size of the village grew with the fame of the religious tradition evolving here. The facts according to Dwyer are quite different. The various spots in Mehandipur may have been local sites for religious expression for some time in the past but the religious practices centred around the temples are of much more recent

date: 'Its popularity seems to have developed particularly since the 1930s. There were no lodging houses before 1930, and the local inhabitants claim that there were only one or two *prasad valas* (sellers of offerings made to deities) operating in Mehndipur before this date, whereas today there are more than fifty. Furthermore, Balaji temple itself is less than a hundred years old. I was told by the shrine functionaries that it was constructed when Ganesh Puri was alive' (2003: 13).

However Balaji Mandir is not the only stop for pilgrims coming to Mehandipur. Another must-visit is the Samadhi where lie the mortal remnants of Ganesh Puri – the *mahant* (head priest) who was responsible for the construction and expansion of the Balaji Mandir of Mehandipur. According to his nephew, Ramjilal, Ganesh was born in 1899 and expired in 1979 (Dwyer 2003: 13). This stop consists of a very large field in the middle of which is the *samadhi* of Puri that is tended to by the priests from the temple. However in the large open grounds, one can find many a healer not affiliated to the priestly class of the temple, a *bhagat* from a neighbouring town, a passing *fakir*. There will be musicians for hire who come ready to drum up the tempo of the treatment process called *sankat-mochan*. And shop-keepers right outside sell books and devotional material and serve as sources of excellent information about the mythic origins of Mehandipur's burgeoning fame. Dwyer reports on '*Bara Hanuman Upasana* ('The Great Worship of Hanuman'), a book sold in the local bazaar, which contains information about the principal healing shrine as well as over 700 different *bhajans* (hymns) or *mantras* (magical formulae), states that Balaji temple was founded 5,000 years ago' (2003: 14). I had acquired another such book titled *Bara Balaji Upasna Sangraha*, which has minor variations of the same claim; it does not give a date or an author but is copyrighted to Laksmi Prakashan of Ballimaran, Delhi 110006. Dwyer does some keen historical investigative work here as well. The largest temple on the peak of the third hill was constructed in 1959: 'A small plaque on one of the inner walls of the temple bears the names Punam Chand Jain and Hanuman Das Jain, the two men who donated money for this in 1959 (2016 Vikrama Era). Previously, as I was informed by the priests at the temple, there was only a small building on the site in which the principal *murti* (image of the deity) stood, the other important idols being left unsheltered outside. This temple was said to have been built during the period when Ganga-Nath (1877–1978), a senior contemporary of Ganesh Puri, was the incumbent [*mahant* of the Teen Pahādi Mandir]' (ibid.). It is apparent that the myth of the *mandir* does not favour the historical telling of the story but why must one have to choose?

A third necessary stop for pilgrims is the Teen Pahādi Mandir, the Temple of Three Hills; pilgrims are required to pass hundreds of small temples of various deities on the way to the Teen Pahādi Mandir which lies at the peak of the highest of the three hills. There are shops selling religious paraphernalia all the way up, as well as some tourist options for the light-hearted pilgrim, such as costumes to take on-the-spot photographs. In my first visit while making the ascent to the Teen Pahādi Mandir, I had thought that the thousands of constructed mounds of rocks and stones that dotted the flanks of our path upwards were mini-temples to the lakhs of deities in India. Each consisted of flattish stones stacked one on top of another, not more than a foot tall. I was informed later that these were the shrines to the ancestors, '*Pitristhān*', that the pilgrims had roughly built to ensure that the spirits of their fore-fathers could move on in the journey of the soul; the transmigration of the soul being an important facet of several traditions of Hindu philosophy. Dwyer reports a slightly different version, which is that 'a *pitristhan* is made here when a deceased member of a particular family communicates his or her wish to reside in this sacred place. But it is also said that one may be set up after an ancestor spirit (*pitri devata*) takes rebirth (*punarjanm*) in memory and honour of it. None of these simple stone monuments seems to have been built before 1940, with the vast majority of them appearing since the late 1960s' (2003: 14).

It is believed that the deities in the Mehandipur Balaji Mandir – Balaji, Bhairav, Pretraj – have divine powers to cure a person possessed with evil spirits. Balaji and Bhairav are both incarnations of Shiva, appearing at different epochs in Hindu mythology and in different texts.[1] Pretraj, on the other hand, is a local deity who used to be a terrible spirit of these parts and had the temerity of pitting his own power against that of Balaji, but has since then reformed: 'During the conflict, he [Pretraj] also became aware that his actions were sinful (*papi*) and that they would have negative karmic effects. So he not only capitulated; he pleaded for forgiveness (*kshama*) and beseeched Balaji to include him amongst those who fight for the cause of righteousness (*dharm-parayanta*). This is how Pretraj came to serve Balaji and why he now tortures (*yatna dete hai*) malevolent spirits rather than the innocent villagers upon whom he had previously preyed' (2003: 18). The local deity thus gets reformed, subordinated and incorporated into the larger corpus of mainstream Hindu deities. Together these three principal deities come together to fight on the behalf of their devotees who come to them with crises of supernatural origin. There are also helper spirits that assist the main deities of the temple, such as Divan Sarkar and Kundivale Baba, whose function has been defined by Dwyer

as 'two other minor deities are said to operate under his control or command: Divan Sarkar, his chief minister, and Kundivale Baba, Lord of the tank in which many spirit-afflicted pilgrims are instructed to bathe. Furthermore, according to some temple functionaries, there is also a third *devata* who acts as a messenger and servant of Pretraj. This deity is known as Bhangivara' (ibid.).

Those afflicted by spirits exhibit behaviours that have specific local names: in the Balaji Mandir, Rajasthan it is called *peshi*, in the Mira Datar Dargah, Gujarat it has been called *hajri* (Pfleiderer 2006) and in the Shrine of St Anthony, Tamil Nadu it is *pēy āttam* (Sebastia 2007). An equivalent word in English could be 'trance', albeit with grave reservation and doubt if one English word can stand for all three. In Mehandipur, the treatment of *peshi* is carried out through the divine intervention of the deities and the saints through the mediumship of priests and mystics, usually accompanied by the full-hearted participation of the family of the possessed person as well as all those who gather to witness and *participate* in the event that demonstrates the power of this process that is called *sankat-mochan*. The agreed upon equivalent in English is 'faith healing'; however this is not just 'healing by faith', there is an element of crisis-intervention, and a kind of surgical extraction of the spirit from an assumed inside, a kind of necessary 'dispossession' of the one who is 'possessed', which is not captured perhaps by the descriptor 'faith healing'. To preserve the specificity of the words as used in the vernacular, I will refer to the words that were used locally. The ones in Mehandipur who are experiencing *peshi* are referred to as *sankatwallas* or people with *sankat*. Literally '*sankat*' means crisis/danger/distress but here it signifies a person who has been possessed by a spirit. The difference marked on the one hand by 'crisis/danger/distress' and on the other by 'being possessed by an evil spirit' is somewhat stark and cannot be wished away since it determines how women respond to the healing tradition and how we as researchers respond to the women's response to the healing tradition. Ram (2013) reflects on this use of terminology in the context of Tamil Nadu:

> In Tamil Nadu, the Christian powers shared certain characteristics of the demonic world. […] I learned, from the literature on this subject, to call this phenomenon spirit possession. But locally the phenomenon was not easy to capture in a single word. Among the Hindus in the agricultural community of Tamil Nadu, the meanings associated with spirit possession were fluid and ambiguous. The same goddess could both heal and afflict. Disease itself could be as much a sign of

> possession as could the cure from disease. Local terminology reflected this *fluidity*.
>
> *(Ram 2013: 1–2, italics mine)*

In Mehandipur, during *sankat-mochan* that occurs in front of a fully participative audience in the temple (*darbar*), containing several members of the *sankatwalli*'s family, the woman is urged and incited deeper and deeper into *peshi* so that the *sankat* will present and 'name' itself to the full *darbar,* where the public-ness of the process is in sharp contrast to the medical clinic. On being named, the *sankat* who is now in full view of the audience can be asked to do various things as demanded by the healer, mystic or anyone from the *darbar*. The tougher the hold of the *sankat* over the *sankatwalli*, the harsher the punishment accorded to the *sankat/sankatwalli*. The recalcitrance of the *sankat* to leave the *sankatwalli* under the force of the cajoling and threats of those set out to evict it only makes the treatment so much fiercer. The *sankatwalli* goes through strenuous acts of mounting daring, from circling the Samadhi clockwise (*parikrama*) under a hot desert sun, to immersing herself in the water that collects from the drains of the Samadhi in one corner of the field, similar to Mira Datar Dargah in this aspect (see Chapter 5).

It is interesting to note that what becomes apparent at the Mehandipur Balaji Mandir is the *sankat* that possess one can be one of several types as well as have different reasons for latching on to the hapless *sankatwalli*. There is the *bhuta, preta, pishacha*, as well as the beings of the Islamic cosmology such as *jinn* or *shaitan* (Devil). Sometimes it is a god or goddess that has become displeased and must be appeased or has become too attached. Sometimes it is spirits of the animal world, such as snakes, and even the spirits of nature, such as the peepal tree. To assume that every *sankat* is the same, that this diversity of preternatural beings signifies the same danger to the life of the bearer, that any *sankat*-affliction requires the same treatment, would be to eliminate the specificity of what these beings and their special powers to intervene in the world of man symbolize. The *sankats* of the Hindu cosmology[2] begin to appear less random if categorized according to the kind of relation they have with the *sankatwalli,* rather than the kind of effect they have on the person (malevolent or benevolent). There are, at least, three groups of *sankat*:

1. Divine beings: The divine realm of the Hindu cosmology is populated with around 33 lakh deities as well as *yakshas* (demons of the netherworld) and *apsaras* (nymphs of the heavens). Divine beings have an

incontrovertible existence within Hinduism (they usually do in most religions) and Indian myths have great stories to narrate of the kinds of relations they can have with human beings. The myths are a tremendous resource in reaching the foundational premises on which a civilization is based, on tapping into the cultural unconscious.

2. Familial hosts: The ghosts that are related by kinship bonds; these can be related by blood or by marriage and may consist of ancestors that go back many generations. The *preta* and *pishacha* are family spirits and the subject matter of this chapter. Family spirits are familiar because of the genetic history they share with the bearer but are usually quite burdensome to be carrying around.
3. Non-familial sprites: *Bhutas* or wandering ghosts that come to possess someone unrelated to them or the animistic sprites of nature, which are non-human, such as *nagin* (female snake) whose home/spouse has been destroyed or the spirits of old trees that have been cut down. Non-familial sprites contribute significantly to the trope of horror in folk stories or horror movies, since anyone can without warning or awareness disturb the animistic spirit and thus call upon themselves a *sankat*. In that way the non-familial sprite is also the non-familiar sprite.

Return of the deceased as symptom of the diseased

In my first observations of the Mehandipur Balaji Mandir, I was astonished to see how many people were afflicted by possession in this day and age. Mehandipur was a town that was built around the shrine and its activities. There are several faith healing sites not located in the metropolitan centres but in small villages that develop around a shrine, which survives on the revenue generated from the flow of pilgrims and tourists to the shrine. It would be interesting to study how these sites sustain themselves, and what are the economic dynamics of religious institutions that survive on the donations and offerings of not only the very rich but also the very poor. While on the one hand, these shrines sometimes provide spaces for the lowest socio-economic sections of society, with the offer of food and a place to stay on the premises (Ervadi *dargah* was an example of one such space that ended in a tragedy), the question would be on the other hand of the political economy that allows the maintenance of sites where the blessing of the powers of the shrine is very often conditional on the largesse of the offering by the devotee. These considerations filled up my imagination at that time.

It was in my second visit that I started noticing that among the various *sankats* a person could be afflicted by, there were many instances of being afflicted by the spirits of deceased *ancestors*. This was certainly not completely unknown to me; folklore has several stories of family members coming back from the dead to haunt the living. But this is another type of haunting, different from the *bhuta*s who are malignant spirits with no relation to the person they come to possess and terrorize. The *pitri* or *pitra* are kin who have died but not departed … enough. They linger, shoring up the past with all the memories of grudges and grievances that even death could not put an end to. I started attending to the sociology of the spirit world.

The spirits of ancestors who are trying to harm the once-dear intimates they possess are called *pretas* according to Gananath Obeyesekere, who has studied at great length the Sinhalese female ascetic/ecstatic in the Sri Lankan context, which houses strands of Buddhism and Hinduism. He says, '[the] term *preta* meant departed in the Sanskrit Vedic tradition. In the Rig Vedas the soul of the dead person ultimately joins his ancestors, the *pitaras* [*sic*], who have pre-deceased him. The Vedic ideas of the *preta* and the *pitara* [*sic*] were fused and ethicized in Buddhism (Gombrich 1971, p. 163). […] The term *preta* (or a derivative of it), in the sense of a suffering ancestral spirit, is not unique to Buddhism, but is found in the folk religions of many parts of India and South and Southeast Asia. We do not know whether the Rig Vedas adopted a popular idea or whether the popular traditions took over the Vedic term to designate a class of indigenous evil spirits' (Obeyesekere 1981: 116). The *preta* designate that set of spirits that already have a relation to the ones possessed: they share a genetic history with the afflicted as well as the connection of memory.

Within modern science, the experience of *preta* possession will be understood as mental disorder; the return of the deceased as the symptom of the diseased, when it isn't completely dismissed as superstitious nonsense. But is it so strange as to constitute a symptom of a disordered mind? After all symbolically our forefathers live on in us, both through a shared heritage and through psychic dispositions, this being one of the ways in which Robert Lifton speaks about a sense of immortality: 'In the biological mode, we have the sense of living on, psychologically speaking, in our sons and daughters and their sons and daughters. This mode is perhaps given its most intense expression in traditional Chinese culture, in the Chinese family system as articulated in Confucianism with the mystical stress – even part religion – of filial piety. Thus, Mencius, Confucias's greatest disciple, speaks of several forms of unfilial acts, and says that among these, lack of posterity is the greatest' (Lifton 1987: 14).

Filial piety also plays a big role in Brahmanical Hindu practices, the production of a male heir (*putra*) being very important to ensure not only the continuation of the family lineage but the succour of the deceased forefathers. The birth of a son is an assurance that the rites and rituals can be performed to expedite the journey after death to its ultimate destination – *moksha*. As the male child is much prayed for before his birth, he must return the favour on the death of his father in the way of funeral rites, the *śrādha* ceremony performed one year later as well as a life-long commitment to offering *tarpanam* (yearly rituals). The unfortunate soul who has not received proper farewell from the hands of the kinsmen becomes a *pishacha,* a wandering and malignant spirit, but one who has been fed and prayed over becomes *pitri*, a venerable ancestor who is no longer tied to the earth and can meet up with his or her ancestors in *pitrilok* (heavenly abode of the *pitri*). To free the soul of his father is only the proper duty of the son. The filial duty also involves getting married and in turn producing a son, since the soul requires constant prayers for at least three generations of sons to make the difficult journey comfortable. This brings in the dimension of ancestor worship (and son worship) into Hindu cosmology and makes for a chain of 'symbolic immortality'. Ancestor worship is one of the ways Hindu culture has tried to attend to the inevitable cycle of life and death through time.

The very presence of a *preta* or a *pishacha* is an indication that a person's progeny have not fulfilled their filial duty towards him or her; in other words, the person has been forgotten in death, since death is not the end of the spiritual journey. These spectres have returned to exact revenge for being forgotten when the time came for filial piety in remembering the departed and all they had done for their children. This remembrance on the part of the descendant is not only supposed to happen at the time of the funeral and the year after but throughout life, by accruing virtue through leading a good life as ordained in the scripture as well as the continuation of the family line in the future through the male heir. The person who does not live his or her life in this manner has forgotten that the *pitri* still require assistance and now only his or her acquired good *karma* can give succour to the spirit of the ancestor. The return of the deceased ancestor in the *preta* and the possession of the kin of the deceased is an acknowledgement that the one possessed has been living in a way that does not honour the memory of the dead; more importantly, it does not ensure the survival of the connection between the generations – present and past.

Karunavati Maniyo – 'pissu' or 'preta'?

Obeyesekere in *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience* (1981) gives the case analyses of several female ascetic-ecstatics in Sri Lanka who begin their spiritual journey after being possessed by ancestral spirits, one of them being Karunavati Maniyo who was possessed by her dead mother. Maniyo was 52 years old in 1981 and had been estranged from her mother at the time of marriage. Her husband had initially wanted to marry her younger sister but Maniyo protested. In a dramatic scene in front of the family, she objected to her sister marrying that 'loafer'. She felt that to take revenge on her, he got a love charm from a sorcerer and put her under its spell. Madly in love and unmindful of what this would do to her family, she eloped with him. 'This, says Karunavati, is why her mother hated her. Apparently her mother was distraught by the incident and "cried and cried", she said' (Obeyesekere 1981: 23). Although they were somewhat reconciled later, her siblings did not inform her of her mother's death many years later. By this time, Maniyo was the mother of two children and stuck in an unhappy marriage with a man she found she could not respect. Her mother's prophecy that her marriage would not succeed had proven to be true but it would seem that her mother's spirit was not satisfied solely by her daughter's suffering. 'Her initial possession while Karunavati was living with her husband and children in a village near Navagamura, site of the central shrine of Pattini, the ideal chaste and devoted mother and wife of Sinhala religion. "This was three months after my mother's death. The time was twelve noon [a demonic hour in Sinhala belief]. There was a noon ritual for the demon Mahasona [the great demon of the graveyard]. I heard the sounds of drums: then I became possessed." It was her mother who had come after her' (Obeyesekere 1981: 24). At first Maniyo's family tried to heal her of her *preta* possession through the help of the temple priests but when that did not work, she was considered mad (*pissu*) and left to wander by herself. It was then the *preta* revealed that she had come to guide Maniyo. This was a turning point in her narrative; cast out by family and society, she was beginning to find another voice: 'She offered lamps and prayers for the Buddha and for the deity Huniyan, who is her personal guardian and protector. The latter also told her not to attempt to break the power (exorcise the spirit), but to use it for her own good and the welfare of others. Her family stopped the exorcisms and instead had a ritual for her of blessing by the goddess Pattini' (Obeyesekere 1981: 24). Eventually she was possessed by both her mother and grandmother, whom she honoured

by the daily lighting of a lamp for them as well as the gods. Her uttered prophecies (*śastra*) were found to be holding good: it would seem that she had been endowed with the '*muka varam*' (mouth boon) or '*baśa varam*' (language boon). Her gift was verified in the temple of the god Skanda in Kataragama and as well as in other pilgrimages. She became a priestess and, after getting a divine message in a vision bestowed on her by the deity Huniyan, convinced her husband to give up sexual relations with her, thus freeing herself from at least some of the duties of the good wife and instead living the life of an ascetic in direct communion with the gods and the *pitri*.

Maniyo was estranged from her mother (and her sister) for the greater period of her life. Her marital home was not satisfying her needs since her relation with her husband was neither secure nor pleasurable … exactly as her mother had warned her. She wasn't even able to attend the last rites on her mother's death. Within the Hindu-Buddhist framework of South-East Asia, she had been unable to discharge her filial duty. She had shirked her duty when she had broken away from her natal family and forgotten what she owed to her ancestors, both in life and in death. The angry *preta* of her mother's soul came to haunt her in her marital home, and Maniyo faced several trials and tribulations (she said that her mother tested her resolve by denying her food and clothing in this period) till she was even considered mad by her family. It was only after her mother and then her grandmother came to her in spirit form and their connection was finally established that she was able to turn her life around, this time by renouncing worldly life in the way of a wife and mother so as to live as an ascetic priestess working for the good of mankind. But her asceticism, while giving up bodily desire, did not break away from the human world as she remained deeply connected to the *pitri* and thus the clan that she comes from. It makes me wonder, who tamed whom? Did Maniyo turn the malignant forces bent on revenge and torture into benevolent and nurturing guides or did the spirits bring Maniyo back to a way of living that was deeply connected to the gods and the ancestors?

It seems to me that what is at work here is a 'horror of *forgetting*', which is different from the 'fear of *remembering*' that is normally spoken about in psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytically we remember in displaced or condensed forms, we remember through symbolic reconstruction, we remember through dreams or through narratives. Just as psychoanalysis is not speaking on the fact of remembering, but the trauma in remembering, I am hypothesizing here the horror of forgetting: *What if* we forget? *What if* we are forgotten? *What if* we forget that we forget? In the context of the case of

Karunavati Maniyo, it is not that her kin are forgotten; their familial ties are damaged but not severed. Her possession experience begins after realizing that with her mother's passing away, she cannot repair the damage and she has lost the chance of winning back not only the approval of her mother but of living in and through the grace of the ancestors, something she had neglected and whose import she had forgotten. Her ancestors come back to haunt her and trouble her. What does the return of the deceased indicate? As Gordon would say in *Ghostly Matters*, 'The way of the ghost is haunting and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening' (Gordon 2008: 8). Thus the return of the spirits of Maniyo's mother and grandmother is not a haunting produced to remind her of their presence because the spirits are not the subject of the psychoanalytic inquiry. This is a horror of forgetting as experienced by Maniyo, a psychoanalytic process that is typified by the uncanny experience of possession in the context of Asia.

Hiroshima and the psychoanalysis of forgetting

Forgetting as the end of memory gestures to the irrevocable fact of death, one's own death. However, we get the first intimation of what happens to us after we witness the death of others. For example, the story of Prince Gautama's initiation into Bodhisattva is seeing suffering, disease and death outside of his palace walls. The relation that gets set up with death as a life event comes after coming across it in the case of somebody else. I believe that here is tied the horror of forgetting. The question of forgetting is born with facing the pain of loss that may over time fade and be replaced in the future with the pressing preoccupations of the present moment. The experience of forgetting can not only inflict psychic pain for the recognition that someone's death/loss can be overcome in time but also that one's own death/loss may be similarly forgotten. Is there any existing psychoanalytic work to base such a hypothetical construction on? However I believe that if we look into Lifton's later work on Hiroshima, this begins emerging.

In the *Future of Immortality: And Other Essays for a Nuclear Age* (1987), Lifton has collated a set of his essays that engages with the question of what hope there is for the future of humankind given the human potential for evil and violence. Lifton, even in the midst of looking at death and destruction such as those observed at Hiroshima, at Auschwitz, in Vietnam, is optimistic. As we can observe in the title of the book, here is no doomsday herald.

However, the challenge of striving for positivity in such a position is difficult but it can be exercised; Lifton describes this effort as, 'in opening oneself to these destructive forces and their human consequences, one takes on a survivor's imperative to bear witness. I do so not as an actual survivor but as an investigator struggling toward a level of psychological (or psychohistorical) penetration that might inform the moral imagination. In the way, the investigator and the activist in me are never completely separate' (Lifton 1987: 4). Considering that he was speaking about some of the worst violences of the twentieth century, where does Lifton derive 'immortality' from? Since he is concerned with the threat to human continuity, Lifton is looking for 'psychological and social possibilities for renewing that sense of continuity' (p. 8) and thus he is looking at ways of symbolizing 'larger human connectedness'. Experiencing human continuity is what he calls the sense of immortality.

Lifton gives us three positions psychoanalysis has taken regarding the issue of death and the hereafter. He calls the rationalist-iconoclastic the first position articulated by Freud. He says, 'Freud thought that death itself was unimaginable, psychically unavailable. He thought that modern man, at great cost, had held to a denial of the annihilation that death really signifies; and in that sense all talk of immortality or of the immortal soul was an expression of denial of death' (p. 12). Needless to say, the founder of psychoanalysis was staunchly rationalist and secular in his approach to the human and believed the death of the individual is the end. Lifton gives as the second position the mythic-hygienic as characterized by Jung. Jung's analytic psychology is redolent with references to an undeniable mythological substratum to the human psyche that connects us with all of existence and held that the individual's search for meaning is in 'religious teaching of a life hereafter consonant with the standpoint of psychic hygiene' (p. 13). Finally Lifton gives the position he is developing in his work – the formative-symbolizing. His position is trying to bridge the psychological with the historical. Lifton has done a great deal of work on the psychohistorical method. The formative-symbolizing position is based on 'the constant re-creation of all experience [as] the essence of human mentation. From this standpoint, I would focus on the symbolizing process in the experience of collective life continuity. We require symbolization of that continuity, imaginative forms of transcending death, in order to be able to confront the fact that we die. The sense of immortality is by no means mere denial of death, although there is lots of that around. But it is a corollary of the knowledge of death itself. It is our need for a symbolic relationship toward

that which has gone on before, and that which we know will go on after, what we realize to be our own finite individual lives' (ibid.). Lifton is saying that the human ability to transform the natural fact into cultural artefact over time is the process of symbolization and therefore the human should be conceived in the conjunction of the biological, the cultural and the historical. In this position, the sense of immortality is a feature of a civilization that connects biology, culture and history: in other terms, being and time.

In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with the dropping of the atomic bomb, all the usual features of a civilization's methods of approaching being and time were interrupted in one brief flash of radioactive heat. Therefore, the aftermath of the war and the dropping of the bomb starkly demonstrated how people cope with great loss and wanton destruction, having to start up from the scorched ground and re-build the city and its cultural values from scratch. Lifton's first visit to Hiroshima in 1962 was as a participant-observer over six months that he published as *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (1967). He was able to discern how the people of Hiroshima had over a couple of decades moved through four stages in coping with the trauma of the bomb. According to him there was an initial brief stage of an 'immersion in death' just after the nuclear weapon had dropped; the normal course of life and death had been grotesquely overturned and the survivors of the bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the *hibakusha*, were left with the feeling that everyone around them had died, that perhaps they had also died themselves. It was experienced as the end of the world. Lifton is careful to distinguish it from symptoms of mental disorder since it was 'a more or less appropriate response to an extraordinary external event' (1987: 33). With days or weeks of the bomb falling, Lifton perceived the next stage: 'invisible contamination'. Even as the *hibakusha* were beginning to come to terms with the fact that they had not died that fateful day, the deleterious effects of radiation were making themselves visible in the body. To add to this burden, this was the first nuclear holocaust our world had seen, and therefore the physiological effects of radiation were not well understood. In the absence of the explanations, rumours abounded about why the people of Hiroshima were experiencing strange physiological symptoms, but these rumours inevitably exceeded the actual capacity of the bomb to wreak havoc. The image of being contaminated by death and disease had taken root in the soil/psyche of Hiroshima. The third stage took time to make itself present; in the years that followed 1947 the long-term effects of nuclear radiation came to be recognized in the *hibakusha,* which took many forms such as leukaemia and cancer amongst several others and was loosely

referred to as A-bomb disease. The auxiliary anxiety of either developing or knowing someone with A-bomb disease was passing on into future generations. This makes the future progeny of the *hibakusha* also at risk; the threat of the disease was at that moment not anything but a 'nagging doubt', since only time would tell … even if the individuals present at this site would be no longer alive. Thus only in the historical context of a civilization could this anxiety be assuaged. Lifton lists the fourth stage as the 'lifelong identification with the dead' where the *hibakusha* feel othered from the living people of the outside world, tainted by A-bomb disease (or the possibility of it forever more) and crushed under a feeling of 'survivor guilt' for having lived through an event where many of their close ones died and in fact having been unable to save them; their very living while others died.

In 1985, thirteen years after his first visit to Hiroshima, Lifton notices how the city has coped with tragedy. Hiroshima has busily tried to re-invent itself by developing rapidly into a glittering modern capitalist city of the future. Lifton tries to make sense of the new Hiroshima in this way, 'All this may not be the "real Hiroshima", but when one looks at it together with its business-industrial underpinnings, one can begin to understand how the atomic-bomb experience (and for many in the city has) come to be viewed as an embarrassment, best ignored. As for the survivors themselves, they are, as a group, aging, dying off, becoming an increasingly small minority (90,000 in a city of 500,000), whose special history must begin to fade even where it is not actively swept away' (p. 41). New Hiroshima is ready to forget so that the way can be paved for less painful memory. Here Lifton speaks of 'the Hiroshima connection' that the *hibakusha* want to retain, even as they are pulled towards participating in the incoming surge of renewing life. He calls this connection the need to leave a 'trace' as a universal human aspiration. For the *hibakusha* the memories of the past are both painful and yet cannot be abandoned without abandoning what makes them who they are. Lifton documents this as 'for Hiroshima survivors the trace one seeks to leave behind – the means of achieving what I am calling the Hiroshima connection – becomes mostly the story of one's exposure to nuclear annihilation. That story, or rendition, of the human actuality of the atomic-bomb experience is precisely the rare commodity they possess. They and others sense the universal value of that commodity they possess, but for the *hibakusha* its potential for human connectedness (even recognition) is inseparable from something close to ultimate pain' (p. 43). This seems to be the fifth stage that his work is gesturing towards – the horror of forgetting. The *hibakusha,* trying to not remember 1945, slip into a stray utterance of how their pain,

and thus their identity, is being forgotten. However, Hiroshima will not be forgotten any time soon; it has left indelible marks on the psyche of the world, such that a French film-maker can catch the horror for a few moments on screen in *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959).

Hiroshima, my love, my forgetting

There are those that are haunted by the past in the way of memory … as is apparent with the French woman from Nevers, let's call her 'Nevers'. Nevers is struggling to actively remember the death of her German lover in the war when she was eighteen. And yet she comes to Hiroshima to participate in a movie for peace-building efforts. This city will certainly bring back her memories of war and loss; while her actions bespeak a move towards recapturing her repressed memories, she is plainly terrified by this possibility. On the other hand, there are those who are haunted by the future in the way of forgetting … as I would like to develop through the part played by the Japanese man from Hiroshima, we will call him 'Hiroshima'. Hiroshima is struggling not to forget the violence and the pain of the war. It is, as if to forget and be forgotten, even in the future, is not to have a future at all. Psychoanalysts have spoken much about the fear of remembering but less on the fear of forgetting. This is a forgetting that brings up the spectre of the future as nothingness and Hiroshima knows this, having already experienced nothingness before.

In the opening lines of the movie, Hiroshima tells her that she saw nothing in Hiroshima. And Nevers responds that she saw everything, she saw the hospital and so it must be true. The camera shows us a pristine hospital, where the people in their hospital beds turn away from the gaze of the camera. The first lines by both characters are the crux of the difference between them. Hiroshima is trying to tell her that nobody sees what is there and what used to be there. Nevers believes that it can be, it can be recorded, reconstructed and remembered, even if it is terrifying to remember. But Hiroshima repeats that she saw nothing at all, not even the hospital. How could she? She had not been there when the bomb fell on Hiroshima. Her 'memory' is not her own, it is a memory of a memory. But she is certain that not only does she know, she understands Hiroshima because she shares his experience. Here is their exchange:

> Like you, I know what it is to forget.
> *No, you don't know what it is to forget.*

> Like you, I am endowed with memory. I know what it is to forget.
> *No, you are not endowed with memory.*
> Like you, I too have struggled with all my might not to forget. Like you, I forgot. Like you, I longed for a memory beyond consolation, a memory of shadows and stone. For my part I struggled every day with all my might against the horror of no longer understanding the reason to remember.
>
> (Hiroshima, mon amour *(1959), 00:10:48–00:11:31)*

Her insistence on knowing as well as sharing experience is quite revealing in itself; Marguerite Duras writes in the screenplay, 'their initial exchange is allegorical. In short, an operatic exchange. Impossible to talk about Hiroshima. One can only speak about the impossibility of speaking about Hiroshima. The knowledge of Hiroshima being presented a priori as an exemplary delusion of the mind' (Duras 1961: 9). Nevers is sure that she sees Hiroshima but she is also certain that she understands forgetting, as 'the horror of no longer understanding the reason to remember'. This claim of Nevers, no stranger to war but a stranger to Japan, is tested in the course of the story.

Hiroshima persuades her to share the story of how it all began, when she started becoming the woman she is at present. Their ensuing dialogue imitates the analytic process. He plays the part of not only a listener but an interlocutor – sometimes standing in for someone not present – as he takes her back to where it all started … in Nevers, the place in France she was born and raised. It was during the war her lover, a soldier for the enemy side, was killed and she was incarcerated in the cellar for betraying in love her countrymen and reason. She could either preserve his memory or her place in society and her sanity. For two years she lived with his memory alone and then one day she decided that she wanted to return to the world above-stairs. She escaped Nevers and the day she started her life in Paris is coincidentally the same day the horrible events at Hiroshima began. She got married, had children, locked away the memory of the German man and never spoke of it again, not even to her husband, till Hiroshima draws it out of her.

That night after she had finally remembered and recounted her story, she was struck by horror … revealing her memory to her Japanese lover is betrayal and infidelity to her German lover. She panics because this is the beginning of her forgetting; this is worse than not remembering! She tries to escape Hiroshima but he relentlessly follows her, seeking her out, pushing her to look at him. She finally gives in. Nevers even concedes to stay back,

postpone her departure to keep him happy, till her anguish pours out at the end to admit, 'I'll forget you. I'm forgetting you already! Look how I'm forgetting you! Look at me!' (1:25:11–1:25:15). It seems that after the psychoanalytic enterprise of remembering, with its attendant fears and anxieties, its knots and tangles, comes yet another complex … forgetting the memory that was so painfully retrieved.

The trauma in remembering vs the horror of forgetting

Remembering signifies the past, what has already occurred and is psychoanalytically too traumatic to be actively remembered in the present and excluded from the future. I would like to make a distinction between not-remembering and forgetting, which is evident in the writing of Sigmund Freud. The amnesia that follows a trauma is a not-remembering, a sign of the unconscious at work. Freud's paper on 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through' (2003b [1914]) tries to distinguish between the psychic processes of remembering, forgetting and not-remembering:

> The forgetting of impressions, scenes, experiences comes down in most cases to a process of 'shutting out' such things. When the patient speaks of these 'forgotten' things, he rarely fails to add 'I've always known that really I've just never thought about it'. He not uncommonly expresses disappointment that so few things seem to want to come to mind that he can acknowledge as 'forgotten', things that he has never thought about again since the time they happened. […] The term 'forgetting' becomes even less relevant once there is due appreciation of the extremely widespread phenomenon of screen-memories. In quite a few cases of childhood amnesia I have gained the impression that the amnesia is exactly counterbalanced by the patient's screen memories
>
> *(Freud 2003b [1914]: 34)*

Freud is indicating that the subject of analysis neither remembers nor forgets wholly. Instead the memory that is causing pain is 'shut out' producing an amnesia, which nevertheless instead makes its way into the conscious register through other means: through screen memories or dreams, repetition and transference. The focus of Freudian psychoanalysis has not been on whether the subject can remember perfectly or not; it is not a cognitive or scientific exposition on the limits of remembering. Neither is it on knowing, who knows and under what circumstances. Psychoanalysis rather takes up the

experience of what cannot be forgotten and yet cannot be remembered, because the trauma that the memory brings with it at the moment of its origin mounts every time it is remembered but not 'worked through'.

It seems to me that forgetting gestures to the *future*. The moment when forgetting becomes a fact is before it has already happened, before the loss of memory has been sustained.[3] Similar to the psychoanalytic exposition of remembering, what is being referred to here is not 'what does it mean to forget?' or 'can something be fully forgotten?'. It is to ask what it means to be confronted with the feeling of forgetting, the experience of losing one's grasp over a memory. What I have tried to show earlier through the case of Karunavati Maniyo as well as the film *Hiroshima, mon amour* is not a verdict on forgetting, which is to say, the (f)act of forgetting, but rather of the horror that it may happen in the future and thereby sever the link between the past and the present. The horror comes back as a haunting or a possession, a blurring of past, present and future for, as Gordon says, 'haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done. Indeed, haunting was precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, that moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done' (2008: xvi). Haunting has socio-political and psychological implications for *what is to come, l'avenir*, but only because of what came before and never departed.

Through the trope of *preta* possession to be found within Brahmanical Hindu culture, in the dread of the dead, in the many rituals and rites surrounding death and mourning, in the invocation of filial piety and transgenerational continuity, I would like to introduce a thinking around forgetting, more specifically the horror of forgetting as a psychoanalytic mechanism. However this brings up the question of what happens to psychoanalytic thinking once it is premised on forgetting and not-forgetting, and not on just the dialectic of remembering and non-remembering. How would psychoanalysis deal with the inner workings of the psychic relation to forgetting as separate from amnesia? What relation to death does a psychoanalysis of forgetting shore up? While much of Freudian psychoanalysis has been premised on remembering, amnesia and screen memories, what can forgetting do to psychoanalysis? Will forgetting and the horror of forgetting help us make sense of the psychic vicissitudes, the inner worlds of non-Western worlds, of affective positions and subject-positions incumbent on faith healing sites?

Notes

1 See Dwyer 2003 for the origin myths of these very important deities in the Hindu cosmology.
2 According to Dwyer, there are three indigenously distinguished categories that link the type of affliction to a particular event preceding the onset of disease at the faith healing site: 1) possession by capricious spirits; 2) sorcery, which may or may not result in spirit possession; and 3) possession or affliction by ancestor spirits (2003: 31). Despite the attempt at phenomenological bracketing, a connection between spirit possession and illness/disease seems to develop in this work.
3 However, Frosh would consider forgetting as within the ambit of psychoanalysis *propre* through the death drive: 'Even the future, with all its fright-inducing messages, is a mode of repetition: it is what I become given what I have always and already been. Lacan identified the tense of psychoanalysis as "future anterior": whatever happens "will have been"' (2012: 29).

4

WOMAN OR GODDESS?[1]

There is Religion with the capital letter but also religions, especially in a society like India. There are the big ones, the major religions followed in India, which can be arranged according to percentage of followers in the census data but this arrangement tells us nothing about how they are situated vis-à-vis each other. That is one question. By being juxtaposed against each other, they appear internally coherent. But within each there are breakaway sects and reform movements which are trying to redefine 'religion'. Thus, already the concept is decentred. And that is another question. Then there are the religious practices that evolve in their own ways, away from the religious canon, the codified texts and the priestly class. These are subaltern practices that can neither be categorized, nor codified. It is difficult to label them as scientific or religious. They fall somewhere, in common parlance, under superstition. And yet how many of us really follow the canonical form of religion, of living by the book and dying by the doctrine? Religion becomes personalized as faith. However in its subaltern form, religion undergoes yet another transformation since it does not wish to frame a politics or develop a science. It is a religiosity, a way of living, of becoming; in short, subaltern religions are *asketic* practices, which I will come to presently.

How will psychoanalysis set up a relation with these forms of religiosity? What happens when psychoanalysis and religion come face to face? When and where do they come face to face? The usual assumption today is that they come face to face in the primitive third world; in India for example.

This 'usual assumption' is marked by a deeper level assumption: that psychoanalysis is secular/scientific. This is set up by Sigmund Freud in *The Future of an Illusion* (2008 [1927]) in which he discusses the psychical genesis of religious ideas. While he concedes that religion is a deep-seated need of all cultures to safeguard themselves, the primacy of intelligence and the god of reason must hold sway over psychoanalysis. Nonetheless, Freud is struck by deep doubt as evidenced by his preserving within the text his other voice that protests this rejection of the value of religion in culture. Thus when he maintains that religion is an illusion but science need not be – 'our science is not an illusion' he says at the end of the paper – this should be read with at least as much caution as Freud himself has used. However, the analyses of the Judeo-Christian roots of both psychoanalysis and Freud have been done very comprehensively (see Chapter 1 for Frosh's analysis of psychoanalysis' hidden Jewish roots). Then what do we mean by religion *and* psychoanalysis? Why would psychoanalysis encounter religion, as if here, in the cultural context of India? Are we talking about a religion other than the one(s) dominant in the census data in the context of Europe? Or are we talking about another form of praxis, of faith and of healing that does not accrue either what is conventionally understood as religion or science?

A contemporary psychoanalytic reading of religious belief seems to suggest that when psychoanalysis – now secular and scientific – travelled to the colony it was faced once again with religion/superstition. This chapter re-examines these assumptions in light of the phenomenon of possession, specifically being possessed by a deity, which is a common occurrence in certain religious cultures of India. It asks in the process: What if psychoanalysis came face to face with something else, an algebraic 'x', irreducible to either what is conventionally understood as religion or science?

God does not go to everyone

Bapu Trust for Mind and Discourse, Pune (see Chapter 1) was engaged in a research project on the role of traditional healing centres in mental health service delivery during 2003–2006 in Western Maharashtra. In a later segment of their research in this field, called 'Mental Health and Development: Knowledge Capture and Modelling Services',[2] they had looked at the phenomenon of women being possessed by *Devi* (goddess). I had approached Bhargavi Davar, Founder-Director, for access to their archive and I was offered the chance to peruse a set of interviews and

participate in the process of its analysis. This chapter discusses some of the ideas that were exchanged between Davar and me over several months.

An interview guide had been prepared by the Bapu Trust research team beforehand, which took into consideration the profile of the respondents from basic demographics to a more nuanced inquiry into the respondents' social network. The interview guide focused on the journey the respondent underwent in her experience of getting possessed, in terms of the personal (bodily and emotional), the familial and the communitarian. The attempt was to understand how the experience of possession interrupted and intervened in the life of the respondent, its positive and/or negative consequences as well as the ordinary and/or extraordinary aspects of being possessed by a being considered superior to the self. There was also a preliminary attempt to tease out the legends and myths that surround such beings and the part they play in human affairs.

The interviews were conducted between August and September 2011 by Deepali Deshmukh, Swati Shinde and Dharma Padalkar. For the purpose of this chapter I will be taking recourse to interviews with two respondents – Shivani Salve and Manasi Ghule,[3] both residents of Lohiyanagar, a low-income area in Pune. Salve and Ghule narrated experiences of being possessed by goddesses and therefore identified themselves as Aradhis. An Aradhi is a female medium dedicated to Bhavani *Devi* of Tuljapur, or Mahalakshmi *Devi* of Kolhapur. The particulars of the interviews have been written separately for both the respondents to underscore how possession appears and is experienced differently by each person. The sections on each respondent will give a brief sketch of their lives, including their journeys to possession and the effects it had on their relation with themselves and others as well as the bodily experience of possession.

Interview with Shivani Salve

Shivani Salve was married when she was in the first standard to her father's sister's son. At puberty (12 years), she went to live with her husband's family in the village. By the time she was 14, she had one child – a son who lives with her to the present day. The following year there was drought in the village and the family was suffering, when her husband was advised to marry another girl who could bring money into the family. Salve left her husband and returned to her parents' house in Kashewadi. Her description of her married life in the village was bleak and full of strife and when her mother died a few years later, even after being pressurized by her father, she

refused to return to her *sasural* (father-in-law's house). When her brother got married, her father threw her out. She was supported for a brief period by relatives and friends, before it was suggested to her that she buy her own house. Borrowing from her employers in 1984, Salve bought the house she was residing in for Rs. 2500. In that house she raised her son, educated him till the 10th–11th standard and at the age of 20 was got him married to a cousin's daughter. She had a grandson who was 17 years old (in 2011). Her son had been unemployed for three years now and was given to drinking in excess. She described their relationship as very difficult (*chatees ka akda*) since he was uncooperative and demanding. For all that time, Salve was the sole wage earner in the family, although more recently her daughter-in-law had begun working as a domestic helper to earn a little money. Her relationship with her daughter-in-law seemed to be more supportive. Salve was over 50 years old and concerned about aging and the effect it would have on her ability to work. For the last 20 years, she has been working in the *anganwadi* (State-run crèche for children of working class parents) in the morning. In the evening, she was also engaged with nursing patients.

Salve was from the Matang caste of Maharasthra. She brought the goddess into her house and her life 17 years back after a series of fortuitous events. She had also been handed for safekeeping a bronze idol of Tuljabhavani her Muslim neighbour had found on the ground. So she started to worship the idol since Tuljabhavani was also her parents' clan goddess. However, she had not believed in the gods very much at this time, although or perhaps since times were very hard on her at this point. Her daughter-in-law had been undergoing a very difficult pregnancy around this time as well. Salve was being supported by Datta-bhau, a *Jogati* who recommended that they at least visit the Mira Datar Dargah in Ravivar Peth. Some days after her daughter-in-law lost the child, an Aradhi who had come for *Jogwa,* under the direction of Datta-bhau, indicated that Salve had also had the favour of Tuljabhavani for four years although she did not 'believe'. To understand this better, Salve had gone for the pilgrimage to Tuljapur. As she heard others saying, she also wanted to offer flowers to the goddess in the temple there. The event (that sounds almost mythic) that turned her belief in the goddess would best be recounted in her own words (albeit translated from the Marathi):

> There was 10 minutes left for 8 p.m. and at that time the temple gets closed. The person over there said that everybody should go out as this is the time of closing the temple. I said to God, *I don't bend* [namaskar]

in front of you. I make fasts for you and worship you. Now I am going from your place, but once I go from here, I will not turn back to you. If you are true then the priests should take me inside the temple. Saying this I went outside the temple but the priests announced that those who wanted to put flowers for the Gods could come inside. So two other women and I went inside. The priest took two frangipani flowers – one yellow and one white and he said that whatever you want to ask, think about any one colour flower and keep that wish in mind. So I selected the white colour flower and I said (to the Goddess), *since last year I am not able to prepare one cup tea in my home, I have not called you in my home, I have not urged you to my help. But somebody else has given you to me so I took it, placed it in my home and started worshipping you, but you put me in trouble. If you really want me to be happy and content and you want to come to my house then you should say it clearly, here and now. And within 40 days you will have to show the result to me. Then only will I really establish you in my house and I will perform a big function for you.* I put my wish on the white flower and the priest said that keep your hand below the statue of Goddess and stand here. I did that and the priest put both the flowers on the Goddess … two times and both the times the flowers rolled down from the sari of the Goddess. How it will stay on the Goddess? It is bound to come down. So the priest said that you have not wished from your heart, you should say it from the heart. So I put my head on the feet of the goddess, and I rubbed my nose on it and again made the wish. The priest put the two flowers on the goddess and I kept my hand below the statue. The yellow flower fell into my hand and the white flower remained on the sari of the goddess. So the priest said that whatever you have wished for will come true.

With this, Salve had decided to bring the goddess home and in the procession back from the temple she had her first experience of possession by the goddess. While singing the *aarti* (ritualized worship consisting of devotional songs to a deity), her legs had started shaking: 'that time I was trying to control myself very much and pressing my leg hard that it should not shake but I felt it was like fever and my legs were shaking continuously. How you shiver with the cold in the fever of Malaria? I felt like that. Then there I got possessed for the first time.' However the celebration for this was carried out in her brother's place in Indapur, rather than her own home some months later. In doing so, she had neglected the resident goddess of Indapur – 'Shiva-chi Aai' or Mahalaxmi. Being possessed by two goddesses was hard work:

> While I was getting possessed by Bhavani-Aai, the *malas* around my neck would get thrown around. Not a single *mala* used to remain on my neck. Once I had an episode of possession that I could not even sit or stand for eight days. All my muscles from head to toe used to get stiff. I couldn't even move my neck an inch from here to there. I used to suffer a lot. That time my *Guru-Aai* said that as she is suffering so much, which other goddess does she have now? Then she observed me closely, she saw the *mala* and said that I also have the goddess of Shiva-chi Mahalaxmi, 'As you hadn't offered her anything that time she followed you'. I was not ready to accept the Shiva-chi Mahalaxmi and fell sick for four months due to cold and fever. I used to take Crocin tablet every day and then used to go for work.

It would seem that possession by gods/goddesses can be both a boon (*var*) and a punishment. Salve says in the interview, 'God doesn't go to anybody like this. The God goes to them whom he/she likes. Those people who want (God) to possess them surely do not get that. [But also God goes to] those who don't believe in the God, who criticize the God, those who became angry at the name of the God, those who deny the God … God definitely follows such people.' She herself is an example of someone who did not believe but came to be possessed by not one but three goddesses in time, although she is most dedicated to Bhavani-mata. While the gods choose their mediums, the Aradhis also choose the god they wish to institute in their houses, based on whether or not they believe as well as more practical concerns about if they can provide for the needs of the god. Thus, Salve carries the *mala* (garland) and *pardi* (personal oath of dedication) for Tuljabhavani but not for Mahalaxmi of Kolhapur or Shiva-chi Aai.

Interview with Manasi Ghule

Manasi Ghule was a 28-year-old woman (in 2011), belonging to the Matang caste. She lives in a house in Lohiyanagar with her husband and three children (two daughters were studying in the eighth standard and the sixth standard, and a son who was in the fifth standard), which is nonetheless next to her *maher,* her mother's house. About five years prior to this, she was living with her marital family in a slum in Dharavi, Mumbai but it was demolished for the purpose of redevelopment and they were then offered a flat in a new building. However since they had financial difficulties (especially her brother-in-law), they sold the flat and moved back to Pune.

Her husband was able to buy their present house from that money, which was a great relief for Ghule since she reports that not having their own house, having to worry about rent, etc. used to be a source of great tension (*traas*) for her. Since then her husband's job has stabilized as well and things have been proceeding more smoothly for them. Her sister-in-law was also participating in the interview and would speak for Ghule, often embellishing the details. They seemed to share a cordial and supportive relationship.

Sometime after moving into their current house, during an *aarti* in a neighbour's house in the honour of a son in that family who was also undergoing possession, Ghule experienced possession for the first time. However she was not unaware of these matters since her mother is a medium herself to whom people come for answers to their problems. Her older brother used to be a *Potraj* (male medium dedicated to Mari Devi or Kadalaxmi Devi), the tradition being carried on after his death by his son. Some months after her brother's death, Ghule fell ill and even the doctors could not diagnose what had gone wrong; she felt that the treatment was ineffective and no improvement had been made. They began to consider other possibilities, outside of those offered by medicine. She says, 'after his death we did not look after the goddess. Even my mother didn't. At that time I didn't cry at all … I was swollen so they took me to hospital but there was no relief so we went to a woman who looks into matters of the goddess (*bai baghate devache*), and she said "she has the goddess, it will come and then only she will be fine" so we promptly submitted to her (*patkarun dile devache*). Meaning we said that let the goddess come, we will accept it and do it properly … we will worship the goddess.' Nonetheless, when asked directly she does not connect the loss of her brother to her first intimation of the approach of the goddess in the way of her inexplicable sickness.

As a medium to the goddess, Ghule seems to be happy and confident. She is respected by those around her. When she is menstruating, all the work is done by other members of the house. When the other women are menstruating, they maintain her sanctity by voluntarily not coming close to her. Her husband will also not beat/kick her (as she casually claimed happens in marriage) since he has to consider that the goddess resides within her (*angamadhe dev aahe*). Nor does he demand sexual intercourse of her too frequently or impudently. As a young woman, Ghule is content that the gods are looking after her and her family. When she acquires a *Guru*, she will gain more knowledge (*vidya*) and will become somebody, like her mother, to whom others may come for help.

Home and the world

The languages of expression in the interviews were Marathi with a spattering of Hindi. Translated into English, the terms may appear deceptively similar to regular English, however attention to language is all the more important in a culturally different text. One instance of vernacular terms not being easily translatable is the term *hijra*. Salve, speaking of Datta-bhau, says, 'No, he is *Jogati*. You know those *hijras*? So he is of that kind. Those are different. They belong to Yallamma *Devi* … *hijras* are of Yallamma *Devi*. They break their bangles and become widow every year. They follow different science all together.' The *hijras do* follow a different science or logic, even of gendering, being neither male nor female.

Within the set of interviews presented here, Aradhis or the women possessed by the *Devi* experienced possession in time as a benevolent relation with their resident 'spirits'; the reactions of family members and neighbours around them were different, which affected and altered their own experience of possession. They identified themselves as belonging to the Matang *jati,* identified by the State of India as a Scheduled Caste. According to Dr Machhindra Dnyanu Sakate in his unpublished doctoral thesis 'A Sociological Study of Matang Community in Maharashtra' (2010), 'The real meaning of the term Matang, according to the researcher [Machhindra Dnyanu Sakate] is the son of the earth – the one who is brave and powerful. However, with the passage of time the meaning is degraded and Mang is taken to be the one who indulges into unfair deeds and the one who asks for food' (Sakate 2010). 'Matang' is considered to be etymologically related to 'Mang'.[4] Its Sanskritic root and the Matang people are supposed to be of either Koli or Chandal origin. He states that 'the Mangs who were adivasis earlier and who lived a tribal life quite for sometime and who were settled at the outskirts of the villages were incorporated in the list of Scheduled Castes in 1961' (Sakate 2010). Matang religious practices seem to contain several indications of their *adivasi* origin: 'various practices and beliefs in deities, Bhagat, impact of magic, method of sacrifice, method of last rites [*sic*] after the death, all this goes very close to adivasi life style' (ibid.). Indeed the Matang women have a sizeable number of Aradhis amongst them and the festival honouring Tuljabahavani in the month of April will see huge numbers of pilgrims from this community making their way to Tuljapur.

Salve and Ghule found social support and encouragement in their journeys as mediums to the goddess Tuljabhavani. In some ways, they were prepared culturally for the experience of possession, especially since trance takes a toll

on the body of the medium. At the end of trance or possession, the body has been put through some stress and there is a feeling of both lightness and fatigue. During and after possession, the warmth of a helping hand is required and the Aradhi receives it from the women around them. For instance, when Ghule is under the throes of possession, her sister-in-law will straighten her *saree* and open her hair to ease her movement and see that she does not come to harm.

There is also the need for a *Guru* in becoming a medium fit for the gods. The *Guru* is one, in Ghule's words, 'who is good, who has knowledge, and one who teaches well'. In the case of Salve it is the presence of her *Guru-Aai*, a spiritual guide who is usually an older woman and more experienced in the matters of possession herself. The *Guru-Aai* directs her disciple in the matters of the gods as well as *vidya* (knowledge or science), and the disciple responds with reverence as well as *dakshina* (material offerings). When Salve was undergoing a particularly stressful episode of possession, lasting for more than a week, it was her *Guru-Aai* who diagnosed the nature of the affliction; it was another goddess inhabiting and dominating Salve in order to receive her due homage. In other circumstances that do not have recourse to such explanations, Salve could well have been referred to a doctor – a general physician or even a psychiatrist. The presence of a second mother, in the absence of her own mother, stood Salve in good stead. Similarly Ghule, who had not yet found her *Guru*, had her own mother who was already knowledgeable about the ways of possession. When Ghule fell ill, although they travelled through the medical route, they could look for other explanations for the disease and accept that it was being caused because of the ways of the goddess.

In this manner, a social organization occurs inside the community around the one possessed. It is a kind of sisterhood within the women of the community, which also takes into consideration the Indian concern of wisdom's relation to age and thus the importance given to the *Guru-Aai*. The *Guru-Aai* and the other women in the community are there to support the one possessed during the moments when the goddess descends and takes control of the body of the medium. Thus, possession creates around it a new network of social support and local knowledge.

In the case of Salve and Ghule, being possessed provided them with something valuable in another way. Their resident spirits are venerable female goddesses and thus do not come into conflict with their husbands (or the patriarchal world that the signifier 'husband' stands for). Salve had in fact left her husband more than 30 years previous to this and had fended for

herself and her family on her own all this time. Her status as an Aradhi allowed her to exist in society as a *savashani,* as a married woman whose spouse is still alive (since she is married to the god, albeit *Devi*), especially since Tuljabhavani and Mahalaxmi are both symbolic representations of women who are married and performing their household responsibilities. It facilitated her movement in a society that privileges married women. Salve says that she does not usually attend big functions because people say a lot of things … unless she is invited as *savashani*. In this way, being the medium for the gods increased her social capital, just as Ghule being possessed by the goddess ameliorated her position in the family and the community.

This draws our attention to the relation of the self of the one possessed and the larger community and is important in understanding two processes. One, the position of the possessed one in society, which includes how the vicissitudes of gendering are negotiated. More important is the question of how the experience of possession increases or decreases the social capital of the medium (this is something we have been analysing in the narratives of the women up to this point). Two, the ways in which a community organizes the experience of distress and the management of crisis. How does a community deal with individual eccentricity or social calamity? We must also turn our attention to the function the one possessed plays in the community.

The ones possessed by gods are positioned in society as a connecting point between the human world of ignorance that is full of suffering and the divine world of omniscience where there is an erasure of suffering. The mediums or the 'Awakened Ones' (to borrow a term used by Gananath Obeyesekere [2012]) serve as a lightning rod or the safe channel between the divine world above and the human world below. Ghule speaks of the way in which the goddess's shrine in her mother's house becomes the meeting place for many women who come with different wishes, 'Mother's colleagues come here and pray like, "may this happen with me or that happen". Then after they pray and when they go from here, it (the wish) gets fulfilled. Then they come of their own will and tell me, "I said this to the goddess and it came true". [And] so on their own, they bring coconuts and all as offerings for the goddess.'

Thus, while there are differences in individual experiences of possession, there is also the shared experience of being the one marked, even specially chosen, by the Other World where beings of preternatural status reside. This is also something that needs to be taken on board to understand the phenomenon of possession; what we are referring to here is a human search for the esoteric and extraordinary, and to bring it into the fold of everyday

and ordinary experience. A hyper-separation of the human and the divine is absolutely rejected in these narratives of possession. Faith *is* healing in itself, and *Devi* possession is one moment in the practice of faith-based healing. Faith healing, in turn, is part of the corpus of the indigenous traditions in India geared towards understanding and responding to pain, distress and crisis.

Technologies of the self

What connects the narratives of the Aradhis – Salve and Ghule – is that being possessed allows them to feel that there is someone who accompanies them wherever they go and can support them in whatever challenges of life they face. Their resident spirit is a buffer between them and the misfortunes of life and the spite of people around them. To find an inner source of strength while battling disadvantaged economic conditions and debilitating social forces is no small thing, not to mention the tragic exigencies of life, like the death of a loved one or wanting but not receiving acceptance and love. Salve, as usual, expresses it very well,

> I feel that I have somebody for me. What I can't talk or share with anybody, I can share in front of god. Sitting in front of you I can't talk to you but I can talk over there (in front of god), the thoughts I can share with her (god). Every word of mine doesn't become into reality, out of ten times it may be true only for once. If I am suffering a lot and if I say ten words, then out of that one word will come true. Or if I say something spontaneously to somebody, then it might come true. [But] it is not the case that every utterance of mine will come true. God has to look after the whole world, we are not the only ones.

It is particularly interesting to note that each of these women is more than one *in herself* … through her experience of possession. That is to say that her experience of her own selfhood is manifestly plural; Davar (in personal conversation) puts this as that the Aradhi is a kind of 'virtual society of one person'. The medium is hosting one or more spirit/deity and the relation of her conscious self to each inhabitant spirit/deity is different. In fact, many mediums really do host more than one spirit or deity within. This was clear from Salve's story; she hosted three goddesses inside her body but had dedicated herself to the service of Bhavani-Aai first and was less likely to perform all the rituals of worship (*puja)* for Lakshmi-Aai and Shiva-chi Aai who had come to her later. Thus, she would exert herself more for

Tuljabhavani but her expectations of this goddess were also more demanding. From this we can imagine that the multiple selves of the one possessed are also constantly in flux or are in transition depending on which stage she has reached in realizing and expressing her relation to the Self. There have been several theories proposed to discuss the relation of one to the Self; what it amounts to is, in Michel Foucault's words, a 'Technology of the Self'.

Greek askesis

Foucault calls the technology of the self that which permits' individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (Foucault 1997). In his later work, he would distinguish between two different Greek principles in late antiquity that bled into each other: *epimelesthai sautou* or 'to take care of yourself', 'the concern with self', and *gnothi sauton* or 'know yourself'.

Over time these two principles were sundered and the second stricture of *gnothi sauton* or 'know the self' passed on into philosophy through the Christian elucidation of it as exomologesis or 'a ritual of recognizing oneself as a sinner and a penitent' and thus the condition of knowledge was asceticism. This is one route, while Foucault would like us to consider one more that travels through *gnothi sauton* (care of the self). He says,

> In Christianity asceticism always refers to a certain renunciation of the self and of reality because most of the time your self is a part of that reality you have to renounce in order to get access to another level of reality. This move to attain the renunciation of the self distinguishes Christian asceticism.
>
> In the philosophical tradition dominated by Stoicism, askesis means not renunciation but the progressive consideration of self, or mastery over oneself, obtained not through the renunciation of reality but through the acquisition and assimilation of truth. It has as its final aim not preparation for another reality but access to the reality of this world.
>
> *(Foucault 1997)*

Foucault is inviting us to consider askesis as it comes to us from the Stoics, as the philosophical burden of the subject, rather than the Delphic

pronouncement of 'Know thyself' that becomes the theological burden under Christianity. Askesis does not necessarily mean the practice of self-denial. The technology of the self that came to be almost exclusively practised as self-renunciation was the development of Christian asceticism. However, in its other Greek context, the word simply meant exercise, as in training, practice or development. Foucault points out that exercising meant perfecting oneself, developing one's capacities, becoming who one is.

Buddhist askesis

Obeyesekere develops the notion of the Buddhist askesis as a way to both enrich and challenge Western thought … not because Western thought can be overthrown in the social sciences to usher in the era of Asia by a simple turn to culture but because it can be revised and ameliorated. The Buddhist ideal, mirrored in the Buddha myth, he says, is a renunciatory one in which deep meditative asceses[5] open the way to salvation (2002: 150). But what would social science do with salvation? Here Obeyesekere uses Freudian psychoanalysis and Buddhist religion to open up conceptuality, which is the very *stuff* of the social sciences.

The Buddha gave 'primacy to knowledge acquired through concentration which requires the abandonment and emptying of the mind of discursive knowledge and its re-adoption after the experience is over when he has to describe his experiences to his disciples or congregation' (Obeyesekere 2006: 20). The Buddha is a perfected being who willingly chooses to live in the lower realm of the humans so as to impart his knowledge revealed in visions, first when he observed the reality of the world and its suffering through his own eyes in the foray outside the royal palace and then as a mendicant who is meditating under the Bodhi tree. These events are two awakenings – one to the external reality and the other to an internal reality, both of which come through the experience of visions. Obeyesekere is conceptualizing that in the visionary experience of the Buddha there is a move from 'I-thinking' to 'it-thinking'. He turns to Nietzsche (1956: 24) to conceptualize this move:

> A thought comes when 'it' wishes and not when 'I' wish, so that it is a falsification of the facts of the case to say that the subject 'I' is the condition of the predicate 'think'. It thinks: but that this 'it' is precisely the famous old 'ego' is, to put it mildly, only a supposition, an assertion, and assuredly not an immediate certainty.
>
> *(Obeyesekere 2006: 21)*

The assumption that 'the I' thinks already posits an ego as the agent that performs this function (of thinking). According to Obeyesekere, a mistake that psychoanalysts seem to make is that conscious thinking is already a found object and what is required is an exposition of the unconscious. This is not an inherited mistake from the founder of psychoanalysis since Freud's model of the mind has a special moment in it that has been there right from the beginning; Obeyesekere posits it-thinking as a decisive moment within the *Interpretation of Dreams* by Freud. He says,

> It seems that the dream book introduces a radical model of the mind which eliminates the ego, or self or I and yet, paradoxically, introduces a form of 'agency' (if one can call it that) that is totally impersonal. Thus the Freudian model (sometimes labelled as the 'first topography') which I have extrapolated from the dream book is not the structuralist one which eliminates agency but one that entails a special form of agency.
>
> *(Obeyesekere 2006: 22)*

It-thinking would gesture towards the thought preceding the subject, like in a dream or in a visionary experience, and the subject only later coming to occupy the thought, the dream, the vision as her own and qualify it with 'my'. 'The Buddhist meditative trances or *jhana* by contrast are extreme examples of the development of "It-thinking" and no wonder one must suspend discursive though ("I-thinking") as a prerequisite and this in turn entails the false notion of I, according to Buddhism' (Obeyesekere 2012: p. 43). A Buddhist askesis will lead one to inhabit this illusion, as a necessary move between the two kinds of thinking. Is this why the Buddha insisted against deification? As if it was not he who was thinking, but the one speaking, and making the move around this feedback process, between it-thinking to I-thinking, makes him the Buddha? Here is a conceptualization of the subject that speaks, while thinking happens outside. When the nature of the split between the thought and the thinker, 'it' and 'I', is left unrealized, the subject is barred.

It-thinking is characteristic of only certain vital moments, like dreams and visions, hallucinations even. In moments, it-thinking appears to me like a function of the unconscious but not in the way 'I' comes to the unconscious, since it-thinking deals with the conceptuality of thinking itself, the thought of the thought. This subject is constituted between thinking and speaking; 'this between-the-two that opens up for us the apprehension of the unconscious is of concern to us only in as much as it is designated for

us, through the instructions Freud left us, as that of which the subject has to take possession' (Lacan 1977: 72). So what is 'it'? Neither a being or entity, nor a location or structure; it is a function that happens … it happens … thinking happens outside of the subject's agency, or rather that agency isn't the discourse of the subject. At the least, moments of it-thinking interrupt the (Cartesian) subject of its certainty of 'being', a being that is premised on the condition of cogitation or conscious thinking.

Obeyesekere's intervention in this field, through the example of the Buddha, thus displaces the conscious subject of the Enlightenment but also the unconscious subject of Psychoanalysis. He writes that the 'reemergence of the thinking "I" does not imply the certitude of the ego or the notion of a stable "self", a notion rejected in Buddhist doctrinal orthodoxy. Buddhism might posit the "I-think" but it is impossible for Buddhism to posit the co-joint "I-am"' (2012: p. 43). Buddhist askesis is a discussion between psychoanalysis, culture and religion in intimate dialogue since it places itself on the very conceptuality of thought.

Subaltern askesis

Yet another move will need to be made to speak about subaltern religious practices that do not conform to the canon of major religions. Obeyesekere, building on Mircea Eliade's work on shamanism, makes a distinction between enstasis, ecstasis and spirit possession, which shows the need for a separate theorization for subaltern askesis. He distinguishes them as, 'first, ecstasis, in which the soul leaves the body, as in Eliade's idealized vision of shamanism; second, enstasis (or enstasy), in which one engages in inward contemplation of the "soul"; and third, spirit possession, in which the body is possessed by an outside agency or spirit' (2002: 164). Obeyesekere characterizes the Buddhist askesis as favouring enstasis in meditative contemplation. He hypothesizes that in Buddhist scripture like Janavasabha Sutta the distinction between enstasis and ecstasis collapses, with ecstasy becoming absorbed into enstasy, while spirit possession, characterized by the unruliness of its presentation, remains in dialectical opposition to Buddhism (p. 168). Accepting that spirit possession may be the older form in South Asia, he speculates that 'contemplative trance of the mask exists in schismogenetic relation with possession trance of the spirit medium, the practice of the one form heightening the sense of contrast with the other. Could it be that the meditative response was a soteriological reaction by a speculative priesthood against the seeming "irrationality" of possession trance?' (ibid.).

Subaltern cultural practices like possession and faith healing do not lend themselves to either conventional ideas of religion, or to conventional ideas of the political. As I mentioned before there is an assumption that psychoanalysis is secular and that it faces religion and spirituality when it comes to India. Here I argue that when psychoanalysis comes to India it confronts something that does not conform to the canonical versions of religion, which psychoanalysis has always left out of its analyses. It claims that psychoanalysis comes face-to-face with not Spirit but Self; not the transcendental Spirit but the care of the self; not asceticism in the Christian tradition but subaltern askesis. This is perhaps an opening to chart a relation between psychoanalysis and religion in the cultural context of India, marked by a sensibility that cuts across the usual ways of looking at *religion* and *science*, which have become as if the prerogative of the *East* and *West* respectively. Foucault tried to read psychoanalysis as a care of the self. I have tried to read *Devi* possession as a form of subaltern askesis. Subaltern, in the words of Spivak, is a position without identity, or where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action (2012: 431). She warns against a quick classification of the subaltern, and the construction of subaltern politics: 'Subaltern content takes on identity, names itself "people". People becomes a slogan too quickly' (pp. 432–3). I heed this warning as that subalternity cannot be just made into a political call for action, or not the political in any conventional sense. To trace one route to it, we will need to travel through the historical staging of a new Nation-State in the middle of the twentieth century – India.

In the decades preceding Independence, Indian thinkers were engaged in trying to conceptualize 'India', the idea that would become the ground for the country-to-be, in which Bhattacharya's 'Swaraj in Ideas' is only one node. As explored by Milind Wakankar in *Subalternity and Religion: The Prehistory of Dalit Empowerment in South Asia* (2010), it was in the writing of the 'History of the Popular' that the idea of India started germinating in a particular way, organized as it was by notions of culture and religion. He characterizes the *history of the popular* as:

> a whole genre of elite writing that, beginning in the late nineteenth century, drew both scholar and dilettante to the dense archive of popular practice in ritual, religion and belief extending as far back as antiquity. This archive was available to those among the colonial bureaucracy who practiced a kind of ethnography by classifying for the purposes of the census the vast array of castes and religions. And it was also of

> interest to two groups who played a central role in helping shape colonial policy with regard to language and education in the late colonial period. These comprised of amateur scholars among colonial bureaucrats and European Orientalists on the one hand and nationalist writers, critics and indigenous Orientalists, on the other. Both sets of scholars had begun to lay great store by the idea that a nation's distinctive traits could be discerned in the lived, everyday practices of the mass, as opposed to the often more eclectic and esoteric cultural practices of the elite. The notion of the popular implicit in their work was that of a complex 'life-world' comprised of ritual, custom and practice that could serve as a valuable index of the deep roots and extraordinary diversity of an authentically 'Indian' culture.
>
> *(Wakankar 2010: 40)*

Wakankar is pointing out how a notion of the popular was being developed and deployed as everyday practices rooted in tradition that would inaugurate the nation to come; this was not only the writing of the history of the popular, it was also 'the idea of historicity, which is the coming into being of history' (p. 52). In the attempt of creating a unified people rooted in a common culture, the 'popular' being enunciated was de-politicized with the aim of binding diverse groups of not-yet-Indians, or rather Indians-to-be, together. That which seemingly resisted the nationalist project of unification, such as the Dalit movements, had to be reframed and what was retrieved were the traditional aspects of religiosity rather than the radical questions it posed to the social … as if religious practice had no political aim, no claim on the world. Depoliticizing religion in this way also removes its radical appeal and its vision for the future, a watered down version that can fit in with more canonical versions of religion, albeit the religion not of the popular but of the mainstream. This religion is promoted, again through the Science–State complex which interprets Brahmanical versions of religion as closer to the scientific ideal, while the other is neutered, stripped of its emancipatory promise when not labelled as superstition and backwardness. Here social reformism colludes with religious evangelism to tie national religion to the rational principles of science. We see this again in twenty-first-century India, by now a seemingly established idea, in addition to a prospering Nation-State, but not without its doubts and its excesses; the process of bringing back into being the old, authentic India still continues.

With the founding of one unified Nation-State, new questions of citizenship were being articulated but also new forms of subjectivity were coming

into being. However no community has only the conflict with the outside or the other; within are conflicts, individual and collective, that require focused and sustained work. The Aradhi's possession of/by the *Devi* does not take recourse to renunciation of desires and other 'earthly' considerations but must negotiate with them; rather than casting away her human bonds to other people, she becomes a vital force in the community. The woman turns goddess, becomes Aradhi, which is publically revealed in trance. The Buddha who moves between it-thinking and I-thinking is indeed very far from the narratives of the ones discussed above, since the Self of the Aradhi turns outward to the community, rather than inward towards soul-contemplation. At the same time, in the case of the narratives of Salve and Ghule, (*Devi*) possession is caught up in the discourses of mental health and illness. Juxtaposed on the tropes of the 'mad' and the 'divine', how can we understand possession?

Sudhir Kakar invokes the transcendental and mystical aspects of 'the spiritual' in *Mad and Divine: Spirit and Psyche in the Modern World* (2008). Transcendence has been traditionally ascribed to the 'Awakened Ones' like the Buddha or Osho. Kakar positions the psychic as against the spiritual, which 'incorporates the transformative possibilities of the human psyche: total love without a trace of hate, selflessness carved out of the psyche's normal self-centredness, a fearlessness that is not counter-phobic reaction to the fear that is innate part of the human psyche. Yet spiritual transformation is not a once and forever achievement, even in case of enlightened spiritual masters and saints. It remains constantly under threat of the darker forces of the psyche. One is never *not* human' (2008: 5, italics in original). In the narratives of the Aradhis, one could trace the negotiation between the sacred and the profane being enacted, which is also the move between spiritual striving for transcendence and the human condition of being bogged down by the 'darker forces of the psyche'. In the case of Salve and Ghule, they would casually refer to the devotional work of an Aradhi; mediums to the goddess must devote a great deal of time and labour to the care of the goddess, from dressing her to feeding her, sometimes for several hours every day. The realm of the sacred demands exact care and promptitude. Furthermore the *pujas* and rituals may require financial resources that are already scarce within the family. There are also other prohibitions and restrictions the devotee must adhere to; the medium may not remarry, and during holy times of the year not indulge in sex with husbands. Menstruation in women can cause a great deal of disturbance in their lives. Ghule tells us what happens if she inadvertently touches another woman who is menstruating:

> if suppose someone is menstruating and touches me, then what happens is that my body starts itching, my head will ache, I will behave like mad, I will fight again and again, will not talk properly to anyone till they bathe me with rose water, *gomutra* [cow's urine], neem leaves, *haldi-kumkum* [turmeric, vermillion]. Then I feel very light, relieved that everything is gone.

Even the shadow of the woman menstruating must not fall on the idol of the goddess, for the sake of maintaining her purity and sanctity; the menstruating body lies in the realm of the profane. The Aradhi shifts between moments of transcendence (the experience of possession by the goddess) and moments of immanence (menstruation as defiling). Her transcendence is never complete since the monthly cycle of menstruation will bring back to the mundane matters of this world; 'one is never *not* human'. Nevertheless, her attempt at transcendence is so valuable to herself and the community that the women around her will voluntarily not intrude upon her when they are menstruating.

Kakar brings the psychic battle within the subject to the spiritual quest of the human. He distinguishes between 'unitive imagination' and 'connective imagination'; unitive imagination succeeds at uniting the knower and the known and constitutes 'an end point of a spectrum, accessible only to individuals with extraordinary spiritual gifts' (Kakar 2008: 154), but it is connective imagination that is the attraction of religious practices in which '[an] imaginative world is created [that] is both shared and public in that it is based upon, guided and formed by the symbolic, iconic network of […] religious culture' (p. 155). Thus connective imagination can be linked to the phenomenon of possession that is an integral part of everyday occurrences of India, reminding us that there exists 'a god of small things' as well as subaltern practices of possession in a slum in Pune.

Kakar sees spirituality as a possible expression of creativity and wonder. However, for the practice to be *asketic*, transformation of the self is meant not only as the result of the quest but the *ethical* condition for the subject-medium of possession. What if the experiencing of possession of the Aradhi is their relation to the question of 'Self' and not 'Spirit'? Within the West, there are two trajectories as Foucault has shown, one that goes the route of asceticism and will contend with the concept of the Spirit, the other that follows the route of askesis and will deal with the concept of the Self. I would like to suggest that these cultural and religious practices still living in one corner of the East are one form of askesis that is geared towards transformation of the Self of the medium-subject to access the 'truth' of her being in the world. If

askesis is transformatory work on the Self, the Aradhi is performing this exercise by hosting more than one Self and speaking in other voices, in becoming more than singular, which also means to host the differences and contradictions multiplicity brings. The Self of the Aradhi is as chaotic as the body politic of the nation.

Does the subaltern practice of *Devi* possession come within the fold of religion? This is a religion without a canon or the text: the Aradhi herself speaks to the community in the voice of the goddess. In this woman-to-woman relation, Aradhi–Guru-Aai–Devi, the priestly class, cannot intervene. The power dynamics between Aradhis and their husbands are reconfigured. There is another relation to the Other and the Self. At once, the practice sets up a religion without Religion as it has been understood, as well as a politics of relating that will not become the politics of the University, Science or the State. It will require perhaps the birthing of a psychoanalysis that can respond to the woman's work on the Self, the care of the Self she is evolving. This is a psychoanalysis that will need to orient itself to technologies of the Self hitherto overlooked. How does psychoanalysis make sense of subaltern askesis in India? What are the conceptual detours psychoanalysis itself requires to make sense of such subaltern askesis? What psychoanalysis does subaltern askesis give birth to?

Notes

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the First Annual Psychoanalytic Conference 'Psychoanalysis, Culture and Religion' on December 19, 2013, and will be appearing in the conference proceedings titled *Psychoanalysis from the Indian Terroir* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming in 2016). The present chapter has benefited from the discussions during the conference as well as the feedback from reviewers to the paper submitted for the edited volume.
2 The project was supported by the Navajbhai Tata Trust.
3 Names changed to protect identity.
4 Sakate (2010) recounts the origin myth of the Matang people: 'A myth goes like this, when the lord Brahma started creating the universe, his work was hampered by the winged horses. Consequently the making of universe was impeded. By that time the Lord Mahadeo created the first "Mang". He was "Madhya" [medium] after which the whole universe was created. In short, the Mangs have contributed in the creation of universe and he was created by the Lord Mahadeo himself.' This myth needs to be fleshed out, the task of another research project in the future.
5 Obeyeskere has styled the spelling as '*ascesis*'. However I will be using 'askesis', from the Foucauldian tradition, hoping that they meant the same concept, even if they have understood it differently. This is also to differentiate conceptually askesicism and asceticism. Nonetheless, the Buddhist askesis is ascetic and renunciatory according to Obeyeskere. Asceses thus seems to combine askesicism and asceticism.

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PRAYERS, PILLS AND POLITICS

Michael Dols in his dense and final work *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (1992: 10) writes on the subject of insanity in the historical context of Islamic thought as well as its treatment and care, right from the birth of Islam with Muhammad's prophetic relaying of the Qur'an; he studies the medical, religious and magical methods of healing offered at that period and since. Dols reports that '"One possessed" *(majnūn)* and "one possessed by *jinn*" *(bihi jinnatun* or *min jinnatin)* are mentioned sixteen times in the Qur'an. The term *majnūn* occurs eleven times and refers directly to Muhammad in seven instances and indirectly to him in four places that refer to God's prophets' (Dols 1992: 217). 'Muhammad was accused by his opponents of being *majnūn,* which God repeatedly denied [in the Qur'an]. Although *majnūn* is not defined in the Qur'an, the controversy about Muhammad's character indicates the possible meanings of the word for early Muslims: the *jinn*-possessed could be a poet or diviner, a sorcerer or a madman. Thus, from the inception of Islam, *majnūn* was a familiar but ambiguous term' (ibid.: 10). It could mean mad but it could mean possessed: according to Dols, '*Majnūn* is the passive participle of the verb *janna,* "to cover or to conceal". The passive verb means "to be possessed, mad or insane"' (1992: 3). As if madness could be a result of being possessed by the dark forces of God's creation and to walk the path of Islam was the way out of this hazard – to follow the teaching of the Qur'an, to approximate as much as possible the *Sunnah* (example) of the Prophet available through the

compilation of the *Had'ith* (speech acts of Muhammad) and incorporate into one's life the *Shari'ah* (law and ethics) through an unfolding of the *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence).

As Dols distinguishes between the medical, religious and magical methods of healing, he points out that the medical method that we are most familiar with in this age follows the tradition of Greek medicine (Galen) and its Arabic offspring (Ibn Sina) by locating illness in the body and therefore takes recourse to physical treatment. The religious method attributed illness to divine machinations and well-being lay in following tenets of religion in a prescriptive fashion. Lastly, the magical method lay in the occult practices of summoning divine or demonic intervention to bring forth or do away with ill-health or ill-fortune. In his treatise Dols also covers the way insanity and mental illness was perceived and dealt with in the Judaic and Christian traditions, since he believes it comes down to the Islamic tradition. Typically the work only makes a passing mention of pagan religious formations that dwelled in the region at the same time.

The convention of perceiving the Islamic tradition to be a weak imitation of Christianity, which is itself a powerful offshoot of Judaism, is strong indeed. Dols is in the good company of, amongst others, Freud who mentions in passing, 'From my limited information I may perhaps add that the case of the founding of the Mahommedan religion seems to me like an abbreviated repetition of the Jewish one, of which it emerged as an imitation. It appears, indeed, that the Prophet intended originally to accept Judaism completely for himself and his people. The recapture of the single great primal father brought the Arabs an extraordinary exaltation of their self-confidence, which led to great worldly successes but exhausted itself in them' (1957b [1939]: 4915). Freud gives more of his formidable analytic powers to the differences between Judaism and Christianity (which he nevertheless characterizes as emerging from a 'barbarous polytheism' [p. 4914]) of the time but which has found new forms of expression such as 'it reestablished the great mother-goddess [in the form of the Virgin Mary] and found room to introduce many of the divine figures of polytheism only lightly veiled' (p. 4912).

One can question Dols' assessment of the medical model being a uniform practice since Galen of the second century with the same notion of the body and the death of the body. Foucault in the *Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception* (1973 [1963]) shows how the history of Western medicine has been anything but a uniform practice and philosophy of the body, and of life and death; medical perception was once again

revised with the birth of the modern clinic, which should be dated at the end of the eighteenth century: 'At the beginning of the nineteenth century, doctors described what for centuries had remained below the threshold of the visible and the expressible, but this did not mean that, after over-indulging in speculation, they had begun to perceive once again, or that they listened to reason rather than to imagination; it meant that the relation between the visible and invisible – which is necessary to all concrete knowledge – changed its structure, revealing through gaze and language what had previously been below and beyond their domain. A new alliance was forged between words and things, enabling one *to see* and *to say'* (1973 [1963]: xii). What was not available to the doctor in the second century of Galen or the eleventh century of Ibn Sina was the perception of the body in its *intact* interiority, while the eighteenth-century doctor had an anatomical body on his dissecting table with a depth that his eye could now plunge into and render into medical knowledge. However medical knowledge is not as mundane as restricted only to the practice of medicine, but a philosophy of rationality, a language of expression and a technology of vision. Thus, Foucault believes that 'the clinic appears – in terms of the doctor's experience – as a new outline of the perceptible and statable: a new distribution of the discrete elements of corporal space, a reorganization of the elements that make up the pathological phenomenon, a definition of the linear series of morbid events, a welding of the disease onto the organism. The appearance of the clinic as a historical fact must be identified with the system of these reorganizations' (ibid.: xviii). For the purposes of the present study, this critical history of Western medicine only throws doubt onto Dols' thesis of the medical model that is grafted onto medieval Islamic medicine.

The notion of Muhammad being *majnūn,* either through being possessed by *jinn* or through being struck by epilepsy,[1] would have cast into doubt for early Muslims his authority to relay the word of God in the form of the Qur'an. It may have been that madness was vehemently denied on the part of Muhammad and his followers. The stigma of being insane or being considered to be insane is a social phenomenon that has been well documented in many cultures. That the charge of being *majnūn* was cast on Muhammad as a way to undercut his prophetic message and that it is refuted in the Qur'an is an indication that the problem of stigma existed even in pagan Arab cultures in the sixth and seventh centuries. However, once Islam became an organized religious formation and Muhammad became the exemplar of how a human being should comport oneself, merely because of the example of Muhammad as divinely inspired to interpret the words of

God, it seems that Muslim communities would have had to reconfigure their relation with madness: 'Madness was also perceived by some people in Islamic society as a condition that did not need to be treated, healed, or exorcised. Paradoxically, it could be excessive love in the otherwise sane, the wisdom of the fool, or the divine love of the mystic' (Dols 1992: 12). Thus, to be possessed by love for the beloved became a trope for Islamic mysticism. Mystical schools of thought began developing almost within decades of Muhammad's death, wherein the mystic would be engaged solely in love of the beloved. But who is the beloved? In Sunni mysticism the Beloved was God … to be approached through approximating ever closer and closer the wisdom of the *Had'ith* and the *Shar'iah*. In Shi'i mysticism, it was the love of the Prophet or the Imam (spiritual leader of the Muslims after the death of Muhammad) who was the only way to reach God, since only he was the only way to divine the true meaning of the word of God as enshrined in the Qur'an. Hamid Dabashi summarizes the Shi'ite tradition as:

> Almighty Providence, in His infinite wisdom and justice, has sent periodic emissaries – from Adam through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, down to the Last and Most Noble of them all (their Seal) Prophet Muhammad – so that mankind can be led to the Right Path. And yet (and there is the Shi'i rub), the death of the last Prophet, Shi'is believe (unlike all other Muslims, and with that belief they part ways with their Sunni brothers and sisters), left the prophetic seal vacant. Thus with His cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, began the cycle of Twelve (or Five or Seven according to other Shi'is) infallible imams, or leaders, who have brought the prophetic cycle to a culminating conclusion. These imams are in possession of the true meaning of the Qur'an, having learned it, chest to chest [*sineh beh sineh*], from one heart to another, from the Prophet Muhammad himself.
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> *(Dabashi 2011: xiii)*

To go back a few steps, Dols follows the way from how Muhammad in the Qur'an is a prophet with no miraculous powers or deeds of his own ('the Qur'an was his only miracle' [p. 223]) but in the centuries to come gets consecrated with beatitude and mystical powers, thus becoming the sublime object of veneration. Is Dols pointing to a need, man's need for the sublime to be made flesh? Are the deification of deities and the sanctification of saints (seen in more than one religious tradition) performed to obtain a measure of control over the object once the founding father (it has usually been a

man) is dead or has been killed? *Moses and Monotheism* is one of Freud's grand cultural commentaries in which he states that Judaism is 'a religion of the father' (1957b [1939]: 4911) that has relegated the primal parricide or the killing of the primal father (here Moses) into the depth of its cultural unconscious by deifying the father-figure after his demise and is wracked with guilt due to this displacement, while Christianity is 'a religion of the son' (ibid.) that not only admits to but glories in the primal parricide, as the son (here Jesus) takes over the authority of the harsh and punishing father; that is who a hero is: 'A hero is someone who has had the courage to rebel against his father and has in the end victoriously overcome him. Our myth traces this struggle back as far as the individual's prehistory, for it represents him as being born against his father's will and rescued despite his father's evil intention' (p. 4843). In both cases, the founding-figures, both Moses and Jesus, are killed; it would seem that according to Freud the move to deify/sanctify is in itself a murder; it keeps close the venerable figure, but buries the prophetic message with its ethico-political implications. In other words, man made object to control the object of man. Scientific psychoanalysis would tend to agree; Freud cites Otto Rank's analysis of the origin myths of religious traditions where 'almost all the prominent civilized nations … began at an early stage to glorify their heroes, legendary kings and princes, founders of religions, dynasties, empires or cities, in brief their national heroes, in a number of poetic tales and legends' (p. 4841). According to Dols, Islam, following in the wake of the Judeo-Christian tradition, invariably turns itself into a likeness of the older traditions by making the figure of Muhammad and the Imams who followed him into men with supernatural powers, who could heal the sick and exorcise the demonically possessed; he says, 'Shi'ism […] witnessed a precocious development of reported miracles of the imams, or Shi'i religious leaders. In Sunni Islam, the urge to glorify the founding-father was irresistible, and he gradually emerged in the Middle Ages as a miracle-worker – as a paradigmatic saint' (pp. 224–5).

There is in the words of Dols a disappointment that the Muslim was not being true to her creed, that if the first 'word' (*kalima*) of God was '*lā ilāha illā l-Lāh wa Muḥammadan rasūlu l-Lāh*', i.e. there is no God but One and Muhammad is the Prophet of the Divine, this was soon enough lost in the clamour for more icons, more objects. However it was this move, instead of making Islam concrete, loaded with iconography and idol-worship, that turned it esoteric; it gave the mystical turn to Islam, to a philosophy of being madly in love with the Beloved, to a poetics that was written as the gateway to the

Divine, to Irfan[2] in Shi'i philosophy, to Sufism in all its forms. Islamic mysticism rejuvenates the possibility within all religions of intervening in the affairs of the world without losing out on the claim to the other world.

'Once Muhammad was accepted as a prophet who performed miracles – those acts that "break the natural order of things" – like the earlier biblical prophets, the saints could march in with their lesser deeds. […] Moreover, a saint was known in Arabic as a *wali* (pl. *awliyd');* it conveys the sense of nearness to God, so that the *wali* was the "ally" or "friend" of God. The holy man both actively worshipped and obeyed God and passively was guided by God. Aside from his ability to work wonders, he was supposed to have influence with God like the prophets. Sainthood, *wilāya,* was the very foundation of Sufism' (Dols 1992: 225). The rise of Sufism coincides with the spread of Islam, usually through conversion and conquest; while the conquest of territories expanded under Muslim kings was underway (the Islam of the sword), the Sufis sang of love and submission (the Islam of the song). The Sufi tradition, while maintaining its Islamic roots, absorbed the poetic aesthetics of those it encountered; its enamour lay in its ability to include people of varying genders, classes and cultures. While orthodox Islam, in the Salafist movement that would like to 'return' Islam to its 'original' puritanical ideal, closed ranks by closely defining '*who is a Muslim'* (Qur'an+Sunnah+Shar'iah) and what is expected of the true believer, Sufism has been known to have opened the doors. Alongside Islamic doctrine, it placed the poetry of its new adherents, as well as their healing traditions. Thus the practice of *Ziyarat* or the visiting of the grave of Muhammad, the Imams, Sufi saints or martyrs, and sometimes participation in a *Sama*, a spiritual concert or ceremony consisting of *Zikr* (the recitation of the names of God and/or prayers) performed in a format stylized by each *tariqah*, is promulgated.

In South-East Asia, the presence of the Sufi orders or *tariqah* of Chishtiyya, Naqshbandiyya, Qadiriyya and Suhrawardiyya has been felt since the eleventh century, not solely due to their spiritual tradition, but also since they offer another system of treatment and healing. This exchange between Middle East and South-East Asia was mutual for, as Dols says, when the first Islamic hospital was being built, it was incorporating the ideas found in the Indian medical system: 'Indo-Persian medicine made a substantial contribution to Islamic *materia medica*, but its greatest contribution may have been its connection with the creation of the first Islamic hospital. We know that Harun ar-Rashid (d. 193/809) and his vizier Yahya ibn Barmak, were strong supporters of eastern culture and that the vizier promoted the

translation of Indian medical works in the hospital that he founded in Baghdad in the late eighth century' (1992: 45).

In the Indian subcontinent, the places associated with the Sufi masters of these orders, which are usually the *dargahs*, their final resting spots in this world, have received patronage and pilgrimage from princes to paupers, from Hindus and Muslims. Moreover, the traditions at the *dargah* have the taste of several local flavours; rituals are performed that show a synthesis of different customs and practices than the ones strictly Arab; the *walli* starts speaking to his admirer in the vernacular … Divinity is transformed in the process of worship (as we shall see below).

Dols is at a loss to explain this shift occurring within the fold of Islam; it would have to be the effect of Christianity: 'This development of a belief in a miracle-working Muhammad and Muslim saints is extraordinary from a strictly Sunni point of view. It seems to have been primarily the result of the influence that Christian beliefs and practices exerted on early Muslims in the conquered territories. It is quite natural that pious Muslims and especially mystics should have reinterpreted Muhammad in this manner and paved the way toward saint worship' (1992: 10). It presents a nosological problem to Dols' system of Islamic treatment methods – does the healing offered at Sufi shrines fall within the religious method or the magical method? This is a question following in the wake of the other question that has troubled Islamic jurists since the medieval age – who is a Muslim? Islam has an ambivalent position on magic; there is a general agreement that magic is real but Muslim scholars are divided if it is Islamic practice and can be condoned by the Shar'iah or not. Dols is wavering on this question too although he puts it down as holy healing (p. 223–43); indeed even Prophetic medicine, the whiff of what we get in the healing traditions at Indian *dargahs*, seems suspect ('Related to Prophetic medicine was the widespread practice of magic, especially exorcism of the possessed' [1992: 11]).

It seems to me that Dols' perception of Islam being a latter-day version of the Judeo-Christian tradition, an imitation without self-awareness, is part of the hegemonic narrative that either classifies Islam of the Middle East and the South-East of Asia as within the intelligibility of the Western world or sees it as completely rigid and inflexible, or without intelligence at all (see Said, *Freud and the Non-European*, 2003; *Orientalism*, 1978). Either way, Islam is seen as uncompromising, and when there have been instances of compromise it does not appease because it does not fit the narrative. Dols' work requires further analysis; after all, the Orientalist mode is always unconscious.

Situating the *dargah*

The myth of Mira Datar

The rituals and rites of the *dargah* are suspended in a cosmology of faith, to understand which we would need to see the tradition at the *dargah* transmitted down the generations for the past 500 years within the historical and spiritual lineage of Sufism. However this was not at all clear from speaking to the *mujawars* at the *dargah*. There are, though, a few clues here and there. According to the website maintained by the Dargah Management Trust, Sayyed Ali's grandfather, Sayyed Ilmuddin's father, was 'Mohammed Daur-ain' and paternal uncle was 'Kutbe Alam' from Bukhara, Uzbekistan, first arriving in Lucknow before making their way to Ahmedabad. 'Kutbe' sounds like the Sufi title '*Qutub*', highest in the spiritual hierarchy of Sufi masters, he-who-sees-everything. Thus we could re-spell the name Kutbe Alam as Qutb-e-Alam, a title attributed to a Sufi saint of the highest stature.

According to local legend, more than five hundred years ago the people pleaded in the court of Sikander Lodi of Delhi[3] (he is referred to as Mohammed Lodi in Unava) to rid the kingdom of Mandavgad[4] (Dhar District of present-day Madhya Pradesh) of its tyrannical and evil ruler, who was a user of black magic and had fierce sorcerers in his pay. Sikander Lodi forwarded the request to Mahmud Shah of Ahmedabad, commonly known as Mahmud Begadha. Mahmud Begadha launched his attack on Mandavgad but the evil king could not be defeated for several years. Sayyed Ali was still a child at this time and away from the scene of battle while his father (known by the sobriquet of Mohammed Dost) was engaged in Mahmud Begadha's battle with the Mandavgad king. Mohammed Dost and his son Sayyed Ali were descendants from the lineage of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammed through his grandson Imam Hossein. At a young age, Sayyed Ali was known for his spiritual and gentle nature. Mahmud Beghada received the message in a dream that Sayyed Ali would be the only one who would defeat the evil king and thus the message was passed on to Sayyed Ali, an 18-year-old boy who had only a few days left for his marriage ceremony. With the *mehendi* still drying on his hands and against the wishes of his mother, he hastened for battle since this was now a matter of holy duty. Facing the black magic king alone in the Lohani Caves of Dhar, he was able to single-handedly defeat the king and thus restore God's will, however he was also martyred in the cause (attained *shahadat*) but not before slaying the Mandavgad king and cutting off his long braid of hair. Sayyed Ali came in the dream of his

grandfather Syed Ilmuddin to give the good news and let his family know where his body could be found. Syed Ilmuddin and Mahmud Begadha were led by his red horse (or she-camel in other accounts) to a location where they found flowers blooming over the still-preserved body of Sayyed Ali, still clutching the braid of hair. They proceeded to take his body back for a proper burial at Ahmedabad. His mount however brought the body to Unava and refused to leave the spot, and so it was decided that it was where his remains should be buried. The people began to know him as Mira Datar – the large-hearted saviour and lord of the downtrodden. They come to him till the present day with afflictions ranging from the physical to the psychological and from the worldly matters of estate and money disputes to afflictions of the occult nature. The holiest time when wishes are granted is the time the *loban* (incense) is lit after the morning and evening salutations (*salaami*) every day and its heady fragrance suffuses the premises.

The dargah *of Mira Datar*

My hosts at the Altruist introduced me to the *dargah*, its premises, its rituals, and even to several *mujawars* and *sawwallis*. For all their assistance I am indebted to them. Chandrakant Parmar, senior clinical psychologist, took me from the Altruist office located in the middle of the town to the *dargah* for the first time. The path leading to the *dargah* has small shops selling religious items to be offered at the *mazhār* (tomb of Sayyed Ali), the most prominent of which are the *chāddar* or highly embellished cloth to cover the graves, the red thread to be tied in the lattices of the shrine, small four-legged but headless cloth dolls meant to be horses, fresh fragrant flowers, incense sticks and blocks of *loban*, vials of *ittar* or local perfume, and food offerings, usually sweetmeats. On one side is a *masjid* for men to offer *namaz* (ritual prayers of Muslims) and a *gusulkhana* (washing room for ablutions) for devotees to make the customary ablutions before offering prayers – it is a large square water tank where several large fish swim at ease, unafraid of the throngs of people dipping their hands into the cool dark waters. Then comes a large cobbled opening, shaded by trees and surrounded by the personal spaces – offices – of individual *mujawar* families who proffer their services as *vakeel* (intercessors/lawyers) to the devotees who come to supplicate at the *dargah* of Mira Datar. This leads us to the central shrine at the *dargah* – the richly decorated *mazhār* of Sayyed Ali in the central hall. It allows just enough space for devotees to circumambulate the *mazhār*. The hall is open on all four sides; on three of its flanks – the front and sides – there is space for

devotees to sit and meditate, the one to the left reserved specifically for women. On the fourth side, in the open are the graves of family members of the holy family of Sayyed Ali covered by *chāddars* of dazzling colours. Mounted close to the central shrine (the *mazhār*) is a display of a branch of what used to be the Miswak tree from which Sayyed Ali had plucked twigs to clean his teeth on the way to war in Mandavgad. Just outside is another tree, in an advanced stage of decay, that has nails hammered into it; this is where devotees stick lemons, which have traditionally been used to tap the *buri nazar* (evil eye) surrounding a person and trap it in an object. Close by underneath the ground is buried the braid of hair of the evil king defeated by Sayyed Ali. Behind the central enclosure on three sides are living quarters of *mujawars* and *sawwallis,* amounting to around 70 single-room apartments. Uneven steps lead upstairs to another shrine – the *dadima ki chakki* where people circle a dome of concrete supposedly enclosing the personal effects of Sayyed Ali's paternal grandmother (*Dadima*). From Dadima's tower one can survey the village to one side of the *dargah* and on the other side the *nalla* (gutter) where dirty water collects, in which several devotees can be found bathing. Inside the premises, *sawwallis* find their own place, where you are sure to find them the next day. It is usually close to the *mujawar* under whose guidance they are seeking treatment. Apart from the grave of Mira Datar and Dadima ki chakki there are several other smaller stops for the pilgrim, both within the premises as well as close by inside the village, like the grave of Sayyed Ali's uncle a short fifteen-minute walk away.

The barakah *of Mira Datar*

Barakah is the blessing or grace of God that is channelled through a Sufi saint down the *silsilah* on to a *sawwalli*, a seeker of knowledge or healing. Mira Datar Dargah does not belong to any particular Sufi *silsilah*, though it is definitely supported by Sufi imaginations of healing. According to Samira Sheikh, 'the shrines of ghazis, holy warriors invading Muslim armies who died in battle often became sites of healing and attracted a wide range of pilgrims of all denominations. […] Perhaps the most prominent of these is the shrine of Mira Datar Pir in Unava in north Gujarat. The tomb of one of Muzaffar Shah's generals who dies in the fifteenth century, this soon became a site for healing of mental illness and infertility' (2010: 157–8). Thus the blessing of the shrine does not come from a mystic saint, who lived in the praise of Islam, but the blessed martyr, who died in the holy cause of Islam. This is also a phenomenon in other *dargahs* in the Indian

subcontinent. Beatrix Pfleiderer, whose ethnographic work at the Mira Datar Dargah for two decades in the 1980s and 1990s is recorded in the *Red Thread: Healing Possession at a Muslim Shrine in North India* (2006), writes in an earlier work that the 'mujawars who own the shrine refer to their affiliation with Suhrawardi, but they would rather call their Saint a *shahid* (a martyr) than a Sufi Saint' (1988: 424). She did not find evidence of the shrine belonging to a Suhrawardi *silsilah* in British sources or the shrine's archives. This can be attributed to the Indianization of the Sufi Islamic tradition with its Arab roots; practices become diversified, localized and less likely to be recorded.

The *barakah* of Mira Datar is channelled through his *khādims*, the descendants of his brother's lineage. Anybody can come to Mira Datar with a wish, and they can approach his *mazhār* directly, but those who send their wishes through the *mujawars* have chosen the express line! There are several actions the *mujawars* will recommend, the most basic of which is tying a red thread called *chilla* (that has your wish blown onto it) on the lattices of the tomb. It can be strengthened by sending your wish heavenwards on a cavalcade of horses using little green horses made of cloth and stuffing, by donating a *chāddar* in the honour of Sarkar (Lord) or lighting some *loban* at *loban*-time that will perfume the air around Sarkar's resting place. Even magnificent crowns (made of plastic and plaster) can be handed over to the *mujawar* to be placed inside the *māzhar*. Like most Muslim sites in India, women may not step inside the central enclosure. The *mujawar* will make you a special drink, which has lines from the Qur'an dissolved in it … with golden ink made of saffron the *mujawar* will write the words in Arabic on a piece of paper which is then kept in a bottle of water; soon the water has turned yellow and this is to be drunk by the *sawwalli*. There are prayer mats and the Qur'an in the women's section as well as the mosque to pray directly to God, only the direction is changed: it does not point to the West where the Kiblah lies in Medina but it points to the *māzhar* of Mira Datar. Do not forget to leave your troubles behind by sticking a lemon in the tree next to the central enclosure. Feed a poor person from the scores of beggars waiting at the gate of the *dargah*.

For those who have come with more serious complaints, a grave illness, a strong demonic possession, the treatment to access the *barakah* of the saint is considerably more intense and may require an indefinite amount of time. Some *sawwallis* have lived on in Unava for decades, claiming that they steadily got better but are not completely cured yet. One woman told me that she had been cured by the grace of Mira Datar to the extent of 12

annas of the rupee and only four *annas* remained. This is a monetary system that is so outmoded that I found it difficult to understand at first; 16 *annas* made a rupee till this system was given up when the Indian rupee was decimalized in 1957. Some afflicted persons from the states of Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat are left behind by family members at the *dargah* on a payment of less than a thousand rupees a month. Some who are deemed to be violent are restrained with chains. The chains and padlocks purportedly act as a talisman to prevent evil demons from entering their bodies or from escaping the possessed body at will. Of course, there are notices bearing strict warnings not to violate human rights and the *mujawars* interviewed said it was not they who tie, beat and chain the *sawwallis*. The family members who do so ask me that if they need to go out somewhere, the *sawwalli* may run away, get lost or get hurt. Will you take care of them, they ask.

Sawwallis must look towards their hygiene and diet, as well as follow the instructions of the *mujawars*, which will be custom-made for their purpose. The treatment is working if the person starts behaving most oddly at *loban*-time; the demon inside is disturbed because it can feel the presence of Sarkar. It is called *hazri*; the demon is being made to present itself (*hazir hona*) by having taken inside the fumes of the *loban* as well as the saffron water, and outside is the presence of the Sarkar. Pfleiderer translates *hazri* as trance and *sawwalli* as victim as she reasons, 'During the victim's trance the demon, which is holding the body under its control, divulges information on its origins, on its identity, its role and its intentions. Consequently the trance is part of the "cure" of the tomb. Without trance it would be impossible to identify and fight the demon' (2006: 154). While I would hesitate to translate the words in these terms, *hazri* is an outer presentation of supernatural affliction, which presents itself as ripe for spiritual intervention, and the violence of its appearance is signalling that the healing has begun.

Pfleiderer described the punishment of the demons at the Mira Datar Dargah as *Chauz, Mori* and *Sulli*. *Chauz* is to be directed to lie in the water tank demarcated for this purpose 'until a snatch of dream text or a snatch of trance text advises her whether or not the *chural* will soon be able to leave her body in peace' (p. 154). *Mori* is used for the dirtiest of *bala* (malicious and aggressive demon), usually one of a low 'caste' where '[the bala is] exorcised by sitting, among other things in sewage from the latrines or by drinking filthy water' (p. 155). *Sulli* is deemed the hardest punishment, which involves circling the tower [Dadima ki chakki], both clockwise and anti-clockwise. The punishments prescribed and meted out by the *mujawars*

according to the 'rank' of the demon possessing the woman are willingly endured by the *sawwalli* to be free of her affliction. Things have changed in the years since, and *mori* is not openly advocated by the *mujawars* anymore. When I questioned them about it, they responded (in a practised manner) that they do not recommend it to the *sawwallis*, who out of their own pressing needs as well as faith in the *barakah* of the saint take a bath in the open pool of water a little way from the *dargah* where the sewage collects.

Pfleiderer has mentioned that the *sawwalli* is waiting for a dream text to appear. Dreams are an important conduit of messages here. Sarkar or anyone from that family, right up to Muhammad, may appear in a dream and direct the *sawwalli* as to what to do next. It is usually interpreted by the *mujawar* as the good news they all have been waiting for – the person is getting close to the time of leave-taking. Many a *sawwalli* is informed of her full cure in a dream and that the time to return to the outside world has come.

Esoterica

One of the *mujawars* I spoke to was openly hostile after I was introduced by Chandrakant-bhai (of the Altruist) as a psychologist researching the area. The *mujawar* demanded to know why did I need to conduct research since faith and medicine go hand-in-hand? Of course, he is right. The simple addition of 'faith' before 'healing' is damning. Are there some forms of healing that do not require the adherent to have faith in them? Can the affliction in the body be healed without recourse to an investment in the treatment? That I am researching this area demonstrates my lack of faith and is therefore offensive. Then our discussion took another path, which was both easier and tougher to follow. The *mujawar* was able to perceive the shadow of a strong evil demon hovering around me, and thus he predicted that I would surely return to Unava but as a *sawwalli* next time with an inner faith in the powers of the shrine. He remembered an instance when another girl (*ladki*) like me had come to study this place with a big group from her university, but soon started displaying the characteristic movements of *hazri,* when the *jinn* inside her was being made to present itself in the presence of the saint in the *dargah*. He recounted how her friends whisked her away when they found her behaviour too alarming, and they packed up and left town soon after. He felt it would have been wiser for them to let her remain here and seek treatment for her affliction. Then he proceeded to furnish me with the directions to a pond behind the *dargah* where the sweetest smell, he promised, would make me feel refreshed. Just as I was all ready to go looking

for this miraculous pond, an onlooker laughed nervously and informed me that this pond was actually the dirty sewage water of the village where only evil demons can endure the stench. This was not a private discussion, it was in the open with a crowd of *sawwallis* constantly adding their stories or reaffirming what the *mujawar* was saying. So this mediation from the woman was surprising but also welcome to me. The *mujawar* looked quite furious at both my confidante and me, while I smiled (perhaps to infuriate him further). After some time, feeling quite incapable of continuing the dialogue I moved out of his space in the *dargah,* but promised him that I would return to speak to him.

When I was able to overcome my feeling of being threatened (and it took months), I started wondering if our conversation had more to it than an indictment or sentence pronounced by a 'local' healer who feels threatened by the gaze of the 'western' scholar, although we are both Indian and speak the same language. Evidently this site has experience of researchers affiliated to universities making their way here, with questions that have cast doubt on the *mujawar*'s methods of healing. In my early analysis, I felt that my presence was seen as the insertion of the secular scientific perspective into a site sustained and elaborated by faith. It was as if his knowledge was being questioned and his authority breached by a younger woman who could invade this space and with equal ease flit away because she had the authority of the false god of Western science. It was 'only' a study for me, something exotic, but a living for him, an everyday experience. His overt hostility said he had already faced such a situation before, after all, the Mira Datar Dargah has had a great deal of ethnographic work on it, its rituals, its traditions. Ethnography for me was an engagement with the site, an interest in the local people and their customs, but is that all there is to it? Talal Asad in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (1993) speaking on ethnography writes, '[since] anthropologists now generally claim that their distinctiveness rests on a method (fieldwork) rather than an object (non-European cultures), this sense recommends itself to them: fieldwork defines privileged access to the local. Yet not everyone who is local in this sense has the same opportunity for movement, or the same practical *reach:* national politicians in the Sudanese capital and nomads and peasants in the provinces; corporation directors in an Australian metropolis and mineworkers in the New Guinean Highlands; generals in the Pentagon and front-line soldiers in the gulf, and so on. They are all locatable, but not equally so by each other' (1993: 9, italics in the original). The Muslim healer in a small town in India is local, his system of healing is a local

tradition that works because its adherents ascribe the indifferent exigency of change to it. Thus the hostility in his speech flows, as if from his thin awareness and thick rage that he is a small fish, not in a big pond, but in a small bowl on my desk; I am not local *enough*.

However the psychoanalytic moment I was caught in with the *mujawar* gave me pause. There is one analysis that his response was projection, pure and simple: I was made to feel threatened because he was feeling threatened. He was projecting his feeling of rage and insecurity into me and I did feel them. Nonetheless there was a wild sexual tinge to his angry words … only he could perceive something about me that ordinary people could not … he could lead me to a sweet fragrance that would energize me … he knew that I would but return to him one day. To have his directions elucidated and the malevolence of their meaning made clear did not take away from the promise of secret knowledge his words held. It made me anxious, but it also made me think about him and how erotic his words were. The erotic here is a play of possibilities that draws in the subject, none of them apparent or fixed. Why is the erotic so esoteric? The erotic and the esoteric, it seems to me, have in common a turning of the subject. Both call out to the subject to turn towards a secret knowledge that is encrypted inside its phenomenology; not only does the subject turn but is screwed by it, and it is in the turn itself wherein lies the constitution of subjectivity. The erotic turns the subject to the realm of (sexual) fantasy, of phantasmagoric perversity. The esoteric turns the subject to the realm of (religious) passion, of passionate devotion. One is the domain of psychoanalysis; the other is that of religion.

Sufism has been in the peculiar position of appearing 'immoderate' in its expression and inward-looking in its aim. As mentioned above, within Islam the passionate relation with the divine advocated by the Sufi mystic appears to be in excess of what is sane or normal. Also while it is inward-looking, where the Sufi mystic is lost in contemplation of the divine, she is not always alone but several times in a commune; for instance, the *sama* is a group ceremony, like the less-controlled excess of *loban*-time at Mira Datar Dargah. Islam has been theorized as 'a two-levelled tradition characterized by the coexistence of a *zāhir* and a *bātin*, an outer form and an inner essence' (Laude 2010: 31). *Zāhir* is the exoteric, the shell of Islam as denoted by its laws and strictures and at its core is *bātin*, the kernel, the esoteric knowledge of the divine. According to Patrick Laude, there has been a tendency to view Sunni Islam as the exoteric dimension of Islam and Shi'i Islam as its esoteric core but the French Orientalist Henri Corbin could reverse this imagination: 'While Shi'ism can be "exotericized" by those,

within the Shi'a, who do not perceive, or even deny, the esoteric essence of their tradition, Sunni Islam, for its part, can be practiced as a de facto esoterism, or to use Corbin's term, as an "*incognito* representative" of Shi'ism within Sunnism' (p. 41). However this flipping one with the other – Shi'ism is exoteric and Sunnism is esoteric – does not change the relationship set up with Islam. It only tries to keep separate the esoteric or inner Islam from an exoteric or outer Islam, which is denounced as being religious without being sublimely transcendental, since it is about the Shar'iah, the religion of the *polis*: as if religion is the domain of the sacred, of the transcendental, of the divine, of unity in the divine, and this position maintains that politics should not dirty the sanctity of transcendental religion.

In *Genealogies of Religion* (1993), Asad looking at Kant's 1784 piece on *What is Enlightenment*, which serves as a political barometer of its time, says that it reflects that the division between the public and the private in the liberal tradition had been well under way; religion had been relegated to the private realm and criticism to the public sphere; religion would not intrude in the public sphere because criticism was a matter of the world of man and not that of god. However this was also the time when the modern State needed to assert its sovereignty, which was in the past the right of religious authority: 'Historians of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe have begun to recount how the constitution of the modern state required the forcible redefinition of religion as belief, and of religious belief, sentiment, and identity as personal matters that belong to the newly emerging space of private (as opposed to public) life. In the eyes of those who wanted a strong, centralized state, the disorders of the Reformation proved that religious belief was the source of uncontrollable passions within the individual and of dangerous strife within the commonwealth' (1993: 85). Public criticism at the time only bolstered the emergence of the State, rather than undercut its authority, and the separation between religion and politics also made possible the claims of the modern State over the citizen-subject. State power today cannot easily be challenged by any group or polity in the public, while simultaneously extending ever further in its citizens' affairs

At present, Islam for all appearances violates the stricture of separation between public and private. It is perceived to have no room for public criticism, but Asad suggests that Islam had a moral-political public criticism available in *nasīha* or advice within the formation of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (in itself an instance when religion colludes with politics; Wahhab, who first enunciated Wahhabism, aligned his orthodoxy with the imperial aspirations of Muhammad ibn Saud to consolidate the kingdom of Saudi

Arabia in 1744; Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab offered Al Saud a clearly defined religious mission upon which they might base their political authority), which derives its authority from the Shar'iah, to which the rulers of the kingdom are *prima facie* bound, i.e. 'there is an interesting double sense to the adjective *shar'iyya* here. For while it connotes the general modern sense of "legitimate", it derives from the specific Islamic concept of "the divinely sanctioned law-and-morality" *(ash-sharī'a),* which does not simply legitimize the ruler but binds him. The Saudi government explicitly claims to be based on the *sharī'a.* Thus, what the critics offer is "advice" *(nasīha),* something called for by the *sharī'a* as a precondition of moral rectitude *(istiqāma),* not "criticism" (*naqd*), with its adversarial overtones' (p. 88). The combination of Wahhabism with its puritanical zeal and the house of Saud with its militant governance had undoubtedly spawned a combination of religious orthodoxy that aligns with Empire.

However today when the Arab empire is seen through the lens of terrorism, it is political Islam that is seen as terroristic, as the scourge of the modern liberal West. The Kantian injunction that religion should not intrude in the public-political sphere caricatures political Islam as violent and intrusive. Following the events of 9/11 and the fall of the twin towers in Manhattan, a report for the Congress of the United States of America by Christopher Blanchard summarizes the *Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya* (2006) as 'Wahhabism has been a focus of congressional hearings, which have examined the relationship between this religious belief and terrorist financing, as well as its alleged ties to the spread of intolerance. Several bills in the 108th Congress criticized Saudi-funded religious institutions and alleged that they provide ideological support for anti-Western terrorism.' Terrorism is another word for religion-out-of-place. While this is no defence of terrorism, I would like to point out that strict secularism like that of French laïcité and the fascist possibilities of Statehood can be as violent and discriminatory as religious orthodoxy.

Circling back to the psychoanalytic moment in the exchange with the *mujawar* at the *dargah,* which I present here as allegorical. What was the *mujawar* trying to say to me? What if the offer made by him was not to see to my (wit's) end? Was it to do away with me? It was he who was promising my return, a revisit motivated by an inner reason. What if his *nasīha* was to see a beginning instead of an end? The *barakah* of Mira Datar would become available to me once the filth of existence was also made visible to me, both belonging to the same world. I could resist its allure, like the other poor girl, who almost submitted before being whisked away. The

awareness residing here would not follow me, it would wait for me; it necessitates my return, a re-turn, this time without the baggage of my science, my method, the method of science, a humble *sawwalli* like every other seeker at the *dargah*. He was signifying the need to look outside – to find the pool of unbearable fragrance – with an attitude of *reverence,* a reverent rationalism that seeks the inside on the condition of the outside; the move outward is to the world of man, with its disreputable sexuality and its steaming polis, wherein you find *barakah*, the divine grace of god suggested by Sufism, and when you inhale it, ingest it, you are only taking the outside inside.

I would like to suggest that the double movement in Sufism – outward and inward – requires the topological peculiarity of the Mobius strip (as Lacan shows in Seminar XI) if one is not to get caught into the argument of whether Islam is esoteric or exoteric, whether Sunni Islam is law-bound and therefore exoteric while Shi'i Islam is mystical and therefore esoteric, whether Sufism is a transcendent *gnosis* and therefore barely Islam at all but a universal, perennial source of illumination. All three require close examination but the expression of theology must be viewed together with the discourse in which it is emerging, which is, after all, a form of public criticism that is within the Islamic tradition. The healing shrines produced through this tradition, despite the polemics surrounding it within Islam and without, are the moral-political enunciations of this worldview.

A fragment of a case of *jinn* possession

I have looked at the premise(s) of an Indian Islamic shrine vis-à-vis the Mira Datar Dargah above. What is missing in it is an exposition of *jinn* possession and the way it unfolds in the life of the one possessed and her family and community. Here I will give a brief description of *jinn* possession by a woman in Pune, Maharashtra, who initially sought treatment from faith-based healers (*maulana*) as well as doctors (psychiatrist) before rejecting all the treatments they had to offer; she has been living with her *jinn* ever since. This interview was conducted by the research team of the Bapu Trust for Mind and Discourse, Pune.

Interview with Arshiya Kanan

Arshiya Kanan was a 46-year-old Muslim woman (at the time of the interview in 2011), living in Lohiyanagar, Pune for thirty years with her husband, two sons, their wives and four grandchildren. Her parents were residing in

Mominpura, where her shop was located too. Kanan had almost single-handedly built up a business of making bags seventeen years back. She had started as a tailor, then started a workshop (*karkhana*) and employed other people to work in it. In 2011, her family was engaged in managing the wholesale business, operating from two shops, and had hired 10–12 workers in the workshop. Nonetheless, Kanan still kept herself engaged in it, despite her sons' assurance that she could rest and leave it to them to handle the business. The family was doing well but Kanan would still attend the weekly meetings of a women's microfinance group, more out of a sense of responsibility and duty than out of need, as well as to meet the other women of the locality (*mohalla).* Before she had set up the business, she had been restricted to her house, her husband being her only contact with the world outside. She reports that there was a time when she did not have much of a say in their lives together, with his solicitous attention being lavished on his many sisters. Initially he had not been supportive of her business venture, but she had persisted since occupying herself provided her with an outlet where he was not intervening. She reported, 'he said, "okay, so I have my work in the bakery, you handle this". So in my life this was the reason which let me step out'.

Her success at the workplace had earned her the envy of her neighbour, Sitabai, who would visit a person in Pulgate to perform black magic (*karni*) and send bad wishes towards Kanan. Kanan's home and work life were suffering as a result and she was constantly ill. She would also have recurring dreams of a man with a terrible visage. One day at the instigation of her son, she followed the directions she had received in the dream, found herself at Pulgate and realized that the person she saw in her dreams was this man who performed *karni*. Kanan consulted *maulanas* who gave her conflicting advice but matters were becoming worse. About ten years previous to the interview, one day a passing *fakir,* on her request, blew *loban* over her while she was minding the shop and she experienced possession for the first time. She recounts the experience as:

> So that incense went into my nose and as it happened, I got fits (*jhatke*) in the sitting position and my hands and legs were shaking, as if he came inside my body that time for the first time. So when he came, I got a fit (*jhatka)* and my hands and legs were becoming twisted (*vakade ho gaye*) and I fell down. My husband said, 'what happened to you?' but I couldn't say anything, my face and everything was like that [twisted] so I was not able to say anything. The fit came for a while

> and left. He asked, 'what were you doing like that for?', and I said, 'I don't know what happened suddenly'.

Possession was initially frightening for Kanan as well as those around her, especially her husband who likened it to a *tamasha* (show) in front of the customers. When the many *maulana*s he brought could not solve the problem, she felt shame and, in the face of the silent accusations coming at her, decided to go for a psychiatric evaluation at Sassoon:

> My husband thought that it was tension about the business because it was not running smoothly. When the many *maulanas* saw me, they said that she has no tension but this entity is dominating her (*inpe ye havi ho gaye hai*), that is why she is feeling like that. [But] since he was saying it again and again, I thought of getting a mental check-up done … because he is saying so … I was ashamed that they were calling me 'mental'.

Apparently the doctors at Sassoon Hospital were unable to find anything wrong with her. However Kanan's *jinn* turned out to be a caring demon that had attached himself to her many years before her first experience of possession and was coming out now to protect her from the evil wishes of the people around her by turning the bad wish on its maker (*jo unhone kiya usko paltao*), thus the ones trying to hurt her would be hurt instead. Sitabai's son as well as another neighbour's husband died mysterious deaths, which could have been the work of the *jinn,* while Kanan's business flourished.

There seems to be a question bothering Kanan of whether the boon she has received is meant to be shared with others or not. The *jinn* singled her out to be his lover and is showering her with his knowledge and protection. She can call upon the *jinn* to respond to the questions and problems of those who seek her out but she has also felt that it comes at the cost of her own health and happiness. She shared:

> A *maulana* told them, 'see, whenever he says something, it is not for others, it is for you! People are benefiting but you are suffering … because you are taking their problems on you and so their things are fine'. So from that time I stopped it. I work only for myself and my work gets done with God's grace. It is like the nature (*kudrat*) has sent a bodyguard only for me.

In this way, she reasoned that she was not called upon to share her good fortune with anybody else, and was rebelling against the role of the sacrificing woman figure prescribed for her by the narrative of Indian femininity, be it daughter, sister, wife or mother. Thus, she had managed to carve out an autonomous place for herself both at home and at work.

Kanan's narrative reveals several splits that are reminiscent of modern binary-thinking, despite the overall presentation of possession by a seemingly non-modern being – a *jinn*. There was the separation of the private and public spheres in her husband's attitude to her 'fits' (*jatke*), that she should not put on a 'show' (*tamasha*) in front of the customers or the community. Kanan herself oscillated between believing the cause of her affliction being supernatural/religious and natural/mental, and had sought counsel from *maulanas* and psychiatrists. Though she spoke in Hindi and Marathi, the word 'mental' was enunciated in the English, it having travelled intact into the vernacular. She had clearly felt the stigma of her position of being the out-of-control woman when taken over by the *jinn*. She claims to not socialize to a great extent because of this reason. Thus, she shouldered the burden alone, without the community to support her, which in turn spurred her to keep the goodness of what she believed is her god-given grace to herself. Her story of a woman's struggle alone without anyone to turn to but her own self is at variance with the stories of the Aradhis mentioned in the earlier chapter. However, they all live in the same highly-congested slum, and perhaps have passed each other on the way in and out of the *basti* (settlement). Is Kanan's social isolation, her anxiety around madness, her lack of companionship within the family or outside a personal idiosyncrasy? On the other hand, this is also a familiar narrative within modern society – being different, twisted or mad, creating social isolation. How does this familiar-sounding strain come into a supposedly non-modern space? Is it the colonial piper playing this modern tune into Kanan's ear? Or is this tune familiar for other reasons? Could Islam have in-built categories that respond to what we term 'modern'? After all, as Dols pointed out, even Mohammed was called *majnūn* in the seventh century and there was an effort to remove that 'stain' from his persona. Thus, this vignette on *jinn* possession brings us to the question of whether Islam has a relation to modernity, despite looming anachronistically – veiled in turbans, strapped with bombs and stained by oil – over the modern world today. If it does have a relation with the modern, what would it be? Would it be essentially similar to Western modernity? Or would it be modernity of a different kind?

Notes

1 Ibid., p. 220, n. 46 and 47
2 According to Dabashi, Irfan is 'gnostic Shi'ism, based on Mulla Sadra's philosophies. Mulla Sadra [died 1640] single-handedly synthesized the Peripatetic, Neoplatonist, gnostic and Illuminationist traditions of Islamic philosophy and then moved them toward a corresponding conversation with Shi'i doctrinal principles, basing them on an existential (rather than essential) reading of reality' (2011: 340).
3 Sikandar Lodi (d. 1517), born Nizam Khan, was the Sultan of Delhi between 1489 and 1517.
4 Mandu is a ruined city in the present-day Mandav area of the Dhar district, Madhya Pradesh. It gained prominence in the tenth and eleventh century under the Parmars, who called it Mandavgad or Mandavgarh.

6

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

This (non)conclusion – this somewhat inconclusive conclusion – which takes the form of an open-ended dialogue on religion and psychoanalysis, on questions critical and clinical – between Sabah Siddiqui, located now in the metropolis (Manchester, United Kingdom), and Anup Dhar, located in what could be called 'back home' (Delhi, India) – is premised on a final reflection, a retrospective look on the question: what then is faith healing? How has one made sense of faith healing; how does one make sense of faith healing? What then is religion in South-East Asia? What is its relationship to, on the one hand, theology, and paganism, on the other? What form does or can psychoanalysis take in South-East Asia? Is there psychoanalysis in India (see Dhar 2015: 426–7)? What could be the relationship between religion, experienced as largely paganism, and psychoanalysis?

Sabah Siddiqui (SS): I now feel, as a somewhat retrospective reflection, there is – in a strict sense – no such thing as faith healing. No one comes to the sites, in that sense, *for* 'faith healing'. They come with unspecific and ambiguous problems and questions, and the demands they are making on the powers of the shrine or the largely pagan godhead is unclear. To use the cases specified in the earlier chapters, a person troubled by a *preta* wishes to be freed from the burden of carrying around a dead ancestor, and the temple priests would suggest that the way to keep the *preta* away is to keep the *pitri* very close, with regular remembrance rituals (see Chapter 3). On the other hand, Salve (see Chapter 4) goes to the temple to ask what the

goddess desires of her; her demand is a sign from the goddess before which she will not make the decision of bringing the goddess into her house or not. It is the priest who deciphers the sign and the work of becoming Aradhi begins for Salve. However, in the case of Kanan (see Chapter 5) possessed by the benevolent *jinn*, in negotiating with the others' demands of her, she consults the *maulana* who mediates by advising her to keep her powers for herself. This book has traced a few of the routes the medium-subject may take to the site. Doubtless there are many, many others. However, the demand of the devotee is less specific than 'faith healing' and yet highly specific in its embodied elucidation at the shrine.

Anup Dhar (AD): I find this proposition, there is no such thing as faith healing, reminiscent of Lacan's assertion 'there is no such thing as a sexual relationship' (Lacan 1998 [1973): 58). Lacan speaks of relationship. This work speaks of healing. Lacan speaks of the sexual of the relationship. This work speaks of the aspect of faith in healing – healing rendered largely secular in modernity. Lacan speaks of the relational in the sexual. This work speaks of the healing attributes of faith, if at all, there are any. Lacan could not bring the sexual and the relational to a kind of Aristotelian 'hypothesis of mastery' of the Two, into a Union, to an Imaginary One or a 'whole'. This work also fails to bring faith and healing – given their respective genealogies in South East Asia – to an easy union, to an Imaginary One; and that I think is one of the learnings generated, at least for me, by this work. However, this work has had to nevertheless show why faith and healing do not come to an easy One-ness and continue to disrupt each other as an uneasy Two; does it not come to an easier union under modern conditions? Does modernism – as an ideology – and modernity as a condition or location or situatedness institute a wedge between traditions of faith and practices of healing? Was their appositeness easier under pre-modern or non-modern conditions? Do we need a more historical understanding of the question of faith healing?

SS: This work has had to contend with the questions of faith becoming a pre-fix to healing and healing becoming a post-fix to faith. If we were to posit that faith comes from what could be called the religious/spiritual tradition; and healing comes from the 'medical' tradition. How would the two come to speak to each other and when would they manage to speak to each other?

AD: In that sense, this work, premised on an exploratory quest through three western Indian states, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat, has, I feel, tried to bring to difficult deconstructive dialogue 'science/medicine/clinic'

and 'theology/religion/spirituality'. In fact, in a kind of turntable, the work has brought science and religion to dialogue in the context of a somewhat novel site and placeholder, a shorthand of sorts, provisionally called 'faith healing' but also what could be provisionally called Hindu, Muslim and Dalit questions in the Indian context. In fact, the very idea of 'Hindu', 'Muslim' and 'Dalit' as also 'religion in South East Asia' comes up for critical interrogation through this exploration of faith healing sites and practices. It has thus attempted to rethink what religion is in the Indian or South East Asian context; i.e. what meaning does religion come to take 'here' or in 'our' context; how and why it comes to develop an appositional relationship to healing traditions/exegeses.

SS: In the process, the work has also attempted to rethink what one could possibly mean by 'India' or the 'idea of India'.

AD: Yes, the idea of India is tied to the dual and ambivalent nature of Indian modernity – marked by at times a defence of science and a critique of faith and at other times by a critique of science and a defence of faith. This science–faith dialectic has been shored up for exploration in this work, by looking at or by placing on the same stage the rationalist movement in India as well as the religio-fundamentalist counter-movement in India.

SS: Actually, an engagement with current debates in the Indian mental health sector around secular modernist propositions and obscurantist misogynist Hindu and Muslim traditionalist camps requires a balancing act of neither collapsing/equating secularism and scientism, nor conflating the fundamentalist/metaphysical face of religion with subaltern faith based practices.

AD: Yes, and the suggestion is that the question of mental health cannot be understood without an engagement with questions of faith, non-modern forms of healing, as also the somewhat rabid battle between scientism and traditionalism in the subcontinent – a battle equally engaged with by both the right wing and the left wing – a battle in which both right and left are equally intolerant, equally virulent. The work, I think, also suggests in the process how a hyper-secularized gaze – typical of the left (perhaps the right-wing ideologue is also secular: either it is a modern secular theology or a theological secularism) is antithetical to sound or grounded social science or mental health related theorizing in India and perhaps much of the global South. It appears, to engender social theory in India and much of the global South, one will have to engage with questions of faith and religion. What however would be the methodology of such an exploration would be a question?

SS: With respect to methodology – i.e. with respect to the question of *how* one researches faith healing – I have explored the trialogue between textual, part-archival, and largely ethnographic material in a kind of experimental mix that required a contingent suspension of the standard anthropological and psychoanalytic methods usually adopted for studying faith healing. So in a way, I felt the need to take a few steps back methodologically.

AD: One step forward, two steps back?

SS: In 1904, as Vladimir Lenin wrote *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (The Crisis in our Party)* on the difficulty faced by the Communist Party in coming to a unanimous decision about the outcome of the communist project and the functioning of the Party after being split by inner schisms, he was bemoaning that the one step forward led by the communist campaign had been undone by the unprincipled actions of a certain 'minority' faction that was setting back the Party by two steps. Thus, the communist agenda was one step behind. As we come to this conclusion, I look back at my work and realize not without some horror that all the doubt-mongering and obsessive rewriting has put me one step behind.

AD: Isn't it strange that you arrive at religion and psychoanalysis or psychoanalysis and religion, whichever way one puts it, only at the end? You end where other researchers and scholars would have begun!

SS: If a psychoanalytic exegesis of possession is one of the directions this interrogation of faith healing should take, I could have started on it already! There is a voice in my head that compares me to others and finds me lacking, slacking and slow. Perhaps I should have been building on psychoanalytic knowledge. Instead this work has striven 'to proceed from the bottom upwards' and that also required me to take two steps back. The first step was to look at faith healing and the women dancing/trancing at the temple, which is frightening not only to the superstitious but also the scientistic. Instead of giving in to the terror of the ghost, the ghost in the woman, it needs us to look for words, theory, philosophical systems to understand the scene in front of us. Soon, too quickly, I found that there were a surfeit of explanations; a great deal of work had been done on the problem in different disciplinary formations and there were several conclusions … but somehow they looked quite similar to me. Was I seeing doubles everywhere? So it made me think that I was too close, so take another step back. This time it was to turn around to look at the words in their specificity, the theories in their cultural embeddedness, the systems of thoughts with their ontological premises. The analyses started proliferating, like phantasmagoric dream

images. My next move could only be of shifting the question from *what it is* to *how to study or understand it*. Admittedly this has slowed the pace of the work, but this has also been because the problem at hand requires our attention to both psychoanalysis and religion, which have not always gone together. So the question became how to be clinical at a site that resists the conventional clinic? How to be clinical at a site that pretends to be religious? Or that question can be reversed. How to be religious at a site that pretends to be clinical? How to be religious at a site that resists the conventions of religion? The absence of obvious somatic lesions in the 'hysteric's symptomatology' gave birth to a new method called 'psychoanalysis' in late nineteenth-century Europe. What method will clinical thinking in Indian faith healing sites give birth to?

AD: Yes, that is indeed the opening (in social and clinical theory) this work creates. Rather than attempting to *explain* the experience and the praxis of faith healing from the vantage point of (psychoanalytic or post-colonial or feminist or …) theory, this work, I feel, has instead attempted to *write* theory from the experience of experience and of praxis. While this work (and this Conclusion) had begun with the 'what' question (*what* is faith healing?) and then the 'how' question (how does one re-search faith healing), I see in the work, also, a move to a more Heideggerian question: *what it is to be* in faith healing – where the what is it to *be* question can be understood in two ways: one, what it is to be a woman in *peshi* – which could be provisionally called the perspective of the 'participant' and two, what it is to be immersed in a faith healing context – which could be provisionally called the perspective of the 'observer' – including more Freudian or Lacanian (I have in mind Seminar VII: *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*) questions like transference/counter-transference in contexts of faith healing; questions like: what form does transference/counter-transference take in locations outside the clinic. Your location within contexts of faith healing for a sustained phase perhaps offered you a sense of what it is to be in contexts of faith healing; however, there is no denying of the fact that you were not in any sense a woman in *hazri*.

SS: Yes, at times I would have liked to claim to being a *sawwalli* or a *sankatwalli* my-self; but I think, my location or situatedness as a researcher only offered me what Sarukkai (2012: 33–7) calls 'experience'.

AD: But for the woman in *hazri* it was 'lived experience'. Sarukkai's distinction between experience (which according to him has three characteristics: 'one, the *freedom* to be a part of an experience; two, the freedom to *leave* …; and three, to modify the experience' [2012: 35]) and lived

experience (lived experience on the other hand, for Sarukkai, is '*not about freedom of experience but about the lack of freedom in an experience*' [2012: 36]) – though problematic from a psychoanalytic perspective (where experience is largely unconscious) – can be deployed in a provisional sense to render explicit a researcher's dilemma.

SS: Yes. In other words, as a researcher I had an experience of faith healing that I could exit from …

AD: While the woman in *hazri* was indeed the embodiment of lived experience. It was an experience she could not have freed herself from, or exited, or modified at (simple) will.

SS: This work originated in the project on the Experience of Gendered Violence in 2009 at CSCS, Bangalore, where we were probing this distinction between experience and lived experience (as also the distinction between the 'experience of colonialism' and the 'lived experience of colonialism' and the question of who or how can one engender cultural-critical [psychoanalytic] theory in a post-colonial context) but it has continued to trouble this work all through – in terms of what Sarrukkai (2012: 29–45) calls the troubled relationship between experience and theory.

AD: In fact, it is not about the simple connection between experience and theory; it is not about whether the theory of faith healing 'should' (is the register of the should marked by the epistemological or is it marked by the ethical? Most philosophers see it as an epistemological question. Gopal Guru [2012: 9–28], however, sees it as an ethical question or the question of ethics in the context of the question of 'social theory' emanating or not emanating from the 'lived experience' of the untouchable) flow *only* from the experience of the woman in *hazri*, i.e. whether theory should be born out of lived experience or whether theory can be born outside of direct immediate immanent experience; does theory born out of lived experience offer depth? Does theory born out of experience offer width and span (the span of the oppressor and not just the oppressed; the span of the priest/healer and not just the woman in *hazri*), critical reflection, as also institute contradiction? It is in fact not about the simple connection between lived experience and theory and the obvious flow of theory from lived experience but about the difficult relationship between (i) lived experience, (ii) experience, (iii) theory (including not just the theory of [lived] experience but the experience of theory as well) and (iv) the ethics of theory production (as against production of ethical theories). I would add to Guru and Sarukkai's (2012) legitimate concerns, the question of subtle power; in other words, the question of hegemony in the very (f)act of experiencing – lived or otherwise.

SS: Yes. Sarrukai's intervention as to the question of *who* can theorize, who has the *right* to theorize (is theory the sole prerogative of the one who has the privilege – both the privilege of pain and pleasure – of lived experience? Or can the one who doesn't have the privilege of lived experience also theorize?), what makes a theoretical exposition *ethical* (and not just epistemologically valid) has haunted this work.

AD: It makes me wonder: what makes the theorization of faith healing ethical (and not just epistemologically valid)? What is the relation between lived experience and theorization? How does one not limit oneself to 'experience *by* the subject' and 'experience *about* the subject'? How does one move to the 'experience of *being* the subject'? Can one? What is the role of theorization? Is theorization to also have a *say* on experience? To *question* experience? Or should *lived* experience – the lived experience of being a woman in *hazri* – be the sole justification for 'an ethical principle to do theory' (as Guru [2012: 9–28] suggests).

SS: Which is also to question the subject itself. Foucault tries to do this through experience, he sees experience as 'trying to reach a certain point in life that is as close as possible to the "unlivable", to that which can't be lived through' (2001: 241). It is, as if, Foucault sees experience as lived between the 'maximum of intensity' and the 'maximum of impossibility', at the same time. This is not the experience of the subject but the subject of experience. For Foucault 'experience has the function of wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution This is a project of desubjectivation' (2001: 247). It's an impossible project he is suggesting!

AD: While this work has also remained menaced by questions of the impossible, the unknowable and the inassimilable (questions reminiscent of a particular understanding of the Lacanian Real – the Real as *remainder* – the Real as *the limits of love and knowledge* [we have in mind Lacan's Seminar XX]) in contexts of faith healing, the work, I think, has also asked why the site of faith healing remains obdurate to understanding? Is it obdurate to understanding because of some elusive 'x' in faith healing? Or is it obdurate to understanding because of our (western/European) education? Is it obdurate to understanding because (i) our current understanding of experience has largely been colonized by European/Eurocentric concepts (the problem is less of concepts being European; the problem is more of concepts being Eurocentric) and more so because (ii) our theories of experience are largely Eurocentric (Guru and Sarukka, 2012: 4).

SS: Your question about the relationship between experience, lived experience, theory and ethics as also the Eurocentric nature of concepts takes the form of a much larger canvas when we bring in the 'culture question' in the context of the question of critique (Siddiqui, Lacroix and Dhar 2014); all the more because critique itself assumes a critique of culture as well as a critique of Eurocentrism, which in turn, is a turn to culture …

AD: This has also taken you to questions of translation …

SS: The 'woman in *peshi/hazri*' or the 'woman with Devi' in faith healing sites – wrongly translated as 'possession' in much of the existing literature and in this work – was in need of exploration from a critico-cultural lens. This work has tried to attempt that task by taking to critical examination the very category 'possession' by citing it different ways. However, *citing the site dredges up the question of siting the practice of citation*. Niranjana in *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism and the Colonial Context* (1992) has analysed the problematic of knowledge, language and history in the (post) colonial enterprise, where she cites translation as the site for both hegemonic containment as well as site for resisting containment by disrupting the fixity of meaning.

AD: We come face-to-face with this problematic throughout this work, which is riddled with questions of representation and translation.

SS: Yes. Because, citing sites can inaugurate 'a practice of translation as speculative, provisional and interventionist' (Niranjana 1992: 173). *There is no such thing as faith healing* and therefore to cite faith healing as the site of the research is to construct an area of study, to intervene in the rhetoric of development which requires a neoliberal State that can claim both science and secularism, despite violent religious fundamentalism that is also bringing a certain (and not too original) nation into prominence.

AD: Yes. This nation, a part of the so called Third World – a geopolitical category, leaves out of its analyses the *lived* world of the third (see Dhar 2014) …

SS: We have written how, in the post-colonial context, the problem of knowledge production and representation will require the perspective of a 'dual critique'. The lens of the dual critique has a double focus; it is directed both at the West – however disaggregated the West is – and at India – however divided a perspective India is (see Dhar and Siddiqui 2013). It was your writing on the 'World of the Third' that opened up this analysis for me (Also see Chakrabarti, Dhar and Cullenberg 2012). The West or the so-called First World has produced principles that hegemonize the production of knowledge and keep them tied to the 'World of the First'. The

'World of the First' and the 'World of the Third' inaugurates, for me, the move from the somewhat spatial category of 'First World' or 'Third World' to the consideration of those who get left out of both of these. 'World of the third as produced out of a Marxian theorization of (global) capitalism, where world of the third is that which is *outside* the 'circuits of (global) capital'; whereas third world as produced out of an orientalist understanding of the South is that which is the *lacking underside* of Western modern industrial capitalism. One is the *outside*; the other is the *lacking underside*' (Chakrabarti and Dhar 2010: 6), I look to the simple example of (psychiatric/psychotropic) medicine in the hands of the white male scientist. In India, known as the Third World and so desperately trying to climb out of it, the production of knowledge has been constrained by not only its colonial past and its active participation today in the discourse of Global Capital, Development and Global Mental Health but also by internal principles arising from our own history of the subjugation and suppression of the 'World of the Third' – which is not just the world of the poor, the woman, Dalit, the tribal, and more recently the Muslim to mention a few instances – but also a world of *différance* from the World of the First.

AD: Third world is the world of *lack* or the 'lacking other of the First World'; World of the Third is the world of *différance*. Spivak in her preface to her translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976) into English) speaks of it as the Freudian moment in Derrida: 'I have spoken of the radically other, which is always different, nonidentical. Add to this the structure of the perennial postponement of that which is constituted only through postponement. The two together – "difference" and "deferment" – both senses present in the French verb "différer", and both "properties" of the sign under erasure – Derrida calls "différance"' (Spivak 1976: xliii). Derrida is using the irreducible mutlivalence of the neographism '*différance*' to 'problematize the possibility of the objective description' (Spivak 1976: lvii), in this case, of World of the Third, of which faith healing is one moment. Hence the question: what is faith healing then with respect to global mental health … or for that matter, psychoanalysis … lack or *différance*?

SS: Yes. This work is not about finding the origin or the original of indigenous healing in India. It is not about rendering or representing that origin or the original of indigenous healing as the *prehistory* of the modern, or as the *lacking other* of modern forms of mental health cure.

AD: Instead it is perhaps about abOriginalizing faith healing within a field of discourses; discourses albeit … The abOriginalizing impulse, I think, has

in it two related moves – one is to ab-Originalize, i.e. put 'under erasure' the origin, or render 'genealogical'/'archaeological' that which presences itself as the origin(al); in other words, it is a post-structuralizing impulse; and this work will have to be located within this (kind of Foucauldian and Derridean) impulse … The other is to aboriginal-ize – that is to put to question – perhaps from a (post)colonial context – the archi-texture or the architectonics of Western (mental health, psychological, psychoanalytic) concepts; and to produce in the process – once again perhaps from the Global South – an archi-texture and an architectonics of concepts that are relevant not just to the global South but to the North/West as well; aboriginalization for example could give birth to an Indian logic of the psyche (as against the usual cultural relativist plot: the logic of the Indian psyche). One can ask, isn't ab-Originalizing a kind of aboriginalizing too?: yes and no. Isn't aboriginalizing a kind of ab-Originalizing?: yes and no. Yes and no, because one is the necessary condition of the other, but not the sufficient condition. Post-structuralizing (i.e. ab-Originalizing) is a kind of possible culturalizing, and culturalizing (i.e. aboriginalizing) could be a kind of post-structuralizing. However, there is no guarantee that one would lead to the other. One hence needs to keep the work of culturalizing alive in post-structuralism and the work of post-structuralizing alive in the cultural turn. The somewhat limited review of the rather complex field and work of critical psychology in Asia – albeit never One kind of work – albeit intensely disaggregated and decentred in their work-character – albeit immensely variegated – seems to be torn, productively torn, nevertheless, between a culturalizing of the post-structuralist turn in psychology, inclusive of a turn to 'political psychology' (including critical-emancipatory social science) and a post-structuralizing of the cultural turn in Asian psychology; and I would like to place this work at the *cusp* (as an *in-between*; not a midpoint) of these two intertwined turns … Our work on psychology, psychoanalysis and mental health in India – work done in the CUSP collective and the journal CUSP (see www.cuspthejournal.com) – is increasingly locating itself at the cusp of these two overdetermined impulses …

SS: What according to you could be the fundamentals, in the broad sense of the term, of critical psychology work in Asia? 'Which amounts to saying – what grounds it as praxis' (Lacan 1998: 6)?

AD: Lacan asks in Seminar XI: 'what conceptual status must we give to four of the terms introduced by Freud as *fundamental* concepts, namely, the unconscious, repetition, the transference and the drive' (1998: 12). In a somewhat similar vein, one can ask: what then could be the four fundamental

concepts of critical psychology in Asia (Dhar, 2015)? Critical psychology in Asia, I think, would need to attend to

1. Decolonizing, Indigenizing and Defamiliarizing (Kumar and Mills 2013: 549–76) psychology in Asia, which also entails a provincializing of Anglo-American psychology; where 'decolonization is to be sought side-by-side with the constructive work of proposing indigenous psychology as alternative to Western Psychology' (Paredes-Canilao and Babaran-Diaz 2013: 774)
2. Limit thinking, where limit thinking is both about the thinking of limits and the limits of thinking, somewhat like the limits of love (or transference) and the limits of knowledge (or Consciousness) in Seminar XX (Lacan 1998)
3. Dual Critique (critique of both modernism and tradition) and
4. Post-methodological perspectives, as Wai (2013) suggests. I would like to quote Wai (2013: 278) here on how methodology has constrained our thinking:

> APA formatting is not only an editorial style. It's a limit, it's a curse, it's a way of thinking, and it's a worldview. The linear flow of introduction → literature review → methodology → major arguments → evidence → discussions → conclusions allure critical psychologists to fall into the trap of hypothetical-deductive positivistic hegemonic psychology.

The question before us: have we in this work managed to move to a post-methodological perspective?

SS: The question hence is work by locating itself at the cusp of *critical* approaches to culture and *cultural* approaches to critique tries to engender another perspective to the study of faith healing sites. It looks to be examining faith healing sites from a critical psychology perspective and examining the idea of critique from a somewhat patient and empathic reading of culture, faith and religion, a rationality of reverence as suggested by Krishnachandra Bhattacharya (see Chapter 1). It looks at faith healing in terms of the logic of the system it is functioning in, which is also to take on board the post-colonial context of its location. This context does not allow for an original meaning and value that is already to be found within the practices and locales of faith healing. Instead it requires a critical look at both global systems as well as local systems … If this work has been located on the cusp of psychoanalysis and religion, both are taken for their

methodological input, rather than the content of their established canon. What was being elaborated was how they allow one to think through a problem (affliction and healing in this instance) instead of what they think of the problem. Rather than taking or sticking to the conventional wisdom of either, the attempt has been to tease out the way the reason-*ing* – including how the attendant 'unreason' – unfolds within psychoanalysis and religion. Nonetheless, both require critical analysis as they have made their way through the epoch of modernity, which is marked by a particular relation to knowledge production, wherein some knowledges have been subjugated, others have been disseminated. Thus perhaps we can say that this work has used a post-methodological approach to both psychoanalysis and religion premised on the turn, the constitutive turning of the Subject between the inside and the outside; this is the relation that the subject sets up with the Self (the secret inside) or the Other (the secret outside). It would be fallacious to designate the relation of the subject to the inside and the outside as belonging either to the domain of psychoanalysis or religion exclusively; the point is both have set up a method of attending to a subject situated on the cusp of the inside and the outside. Isn't the Aradhi setting up a relation with a community riddled by caste-oppression through a technology of the self understood as *Devi* possession? Isn't the Sawwalli at the *dargah* mediating a relation between *zāhir* and *bātin,* the two expressions of religious devotion? Throughout this work there has been a questioning of the secret, including attention to the question of the secret of the spectre. There is a spectrality to the secret and a secretiveness to the spectre and it returns, it keeps returning to haunt the subject: 'A question of repetition: a spectre is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*' (Derrida 1993: 11, italics in original). Thus, this is a method not only on the turn of the subject but what/who returns to the subject. The subject is waiting for the secret to reveal itself, for the spectre to be named and mourned and put to rest but this secret of the spectre is that not only it does not go away but it keeps coming back and becomes visible only in the return. It is because of this re-turn that this work has to produce a clinical thinking.

AD: The work thus takes us to the doorstep of the question: *what is the imagination and idea of the 'clinical' back home or in the Indian context*? It is, I feel, looking at and for mental health professionals who wish to reconceptualize the clinic and their own practices in the clinic or the ones who wish to take the clinic to the community or bring the community into the image and imagination of the clinical in India.

SS: And faith healing offers to the clinical imagination a critical method to think of that-which-(re)turns, in the haunting by the spectre and the secret of haunting, in the erotic and the esoteric that inhere in the questions on life and death, in the preoccupations of religion and psychoanalysis, taking into account the history of the colonial reorienting of the Oriental knowledge-praxis forms and the actual experience-phenomenology of faith healing practices.

GLOSSARY

Aradhi Idolized female medium to the Bhavani Devi of Tuljapur. See: *Devi*

Barakah Spiritual power of a Sufi saint to bless or heal, which can be passed on to the saint's *khadim*. See: *Khadim* under *Mujawar*

Buri nazar Evil eye, malevolent gaze

Dargah Shrine of a holy person in Sufi Islam. Related to *mazhar*: the grave around which the *dargah* is built

Dava Drugs, medicine

Devi Goddess from the Hindu pantheon, also called *Mata* or *Aai*: Divine Mother/Woman. Masculine form is *Devta* or *Dev*

Dharma Rightful duty ordained by spiritual and material considerations, one's ethical obligation

Dua Prayers, good wishes

Guru Spiritual teacher. Related to *Guru-Aai*: literally *Guru*-mother; female *Guru* of an *Aradhi*. See: *Aradhi*

Hazri The outward appearance of supernatural affliction in the behaviour and speech of a *sawwalli* (sometimes translated as trance or possession). See: *Sawwalli*

Jinn Being who exists in another dimension to the human realm in Muslim folklore

Karma Actions of the individual ordained by spiritual and material considerations

Karni Literally the doing; black magic, malevolent wishes

Mahant Head priest of a temple. Related to *Pujari*: priest belonging to a high caste

Mandir Temple, consecrated space to a god or diety of the Hindu pantheon

Maulana Learned person in the way of scripture or religion, a title of respect in Indian Islam

Mujawar Healer at a *dargah,* usually belonging to the lineage of a Sufi saint. Related to *khadim*: literally a servant; who serves a higher authority, holy person or saint by attending to either the person or their personal effects after death

Peshi The outward appearance of supernatural affliction in the behaviour and speech of a *sankatwalla*. See: *Sankatwalla*

Pitri Venerable deceased ancestor. Related to *pitrilok*: abode of the *pitri*

Preta Ghost of a dead ancestor, wandering spirit who has not passed on to the other world

Samadhi Final resting place of a holy person

Sankat Literally crisis or danger; a supernatural affliction. Related to *sankat-mochan:* literally the removal of crisis or danger; the treatment process of extracting a supernatural affliction from a *sankatwalla*. See: *Sankatwalla*

Sankatwalla Literally a man in crisis; a pilgrim at a Hindu shrine with a supernatural affliction. Female equivalent is *Sankatwalli*. See: *Sankat*

Sawwalli Literally a questioning person; a pilgrim at a Sufi shrine with a supernatural affliction, in the female form with no masculine equivalent

Shaheed A martyr, used here in the sense of dying in a holy cause of Islam, who then becomes a witness to faith. Related to *shahadat*: attainment of holy martyrdom

Shraddha Faith, respect. Related to *andhashraddha*: blind faith, superstition

Silsilah Spiritual lineage in a Sufi order. Related to *tariqah*: the method of becoming an adept in Sufi Islam that is passed down the *silsilah*

Swaraj Self-determination, home rule

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