

erected his camera. Such perspectival grids are rarely apparent in later Nathdvara images.

Other similar images from around this period (probably the mid-1920s) depict the Taj Mahal, Humayoun's Tomb, the Dargah of Nizamuddin, Mecca and Karbala, and a very large number of Koranic texts inscribed within ornate floral borders. *Karbala Moula* (no. 150) bears a close similarity to a Ravi Varma Press image (no. 741) and suggests something or the other change of designs during this period.

There are an equally significant number of Sikh prints depicting Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Arjun Dev, among others. Three of these are worth commenting upon. The first, *Ten Sikh Gomos* (no. 24), may well be from an earlier series of prints whose further discovery might substantiate the claims made on behalf of Hem Chander Bhargava. It shows Guru Nanak flanked by his attendants Mardana and Bala surrounded by further depictions, in distinct medallions, of the gurus. No. 50, *Guru Granth Prakash* (illus. 51), portrays all the gurus together in a unified pictorial space, a meeting which, as McLeod notes, 79 could never have taken place since more than two centuries separate the first from the last of the gurus. An image like this is powerful proof of a habitus characterized by 'messianic' time for such simultaneity could be made possible only by a 'Divine Providence which alone is able to devise such a plan of history and supply the key to its understanding'.<sup>80</sup> Although we can provisionally date this lithograph to about 1925, it bears a close similarity to a much earlier woodcut image collected by Lockwood Kipling about 1870,<sup>81</sup> clearly suggesting something of the diversity of printed images that always existed alongside the enthusiasm for realism within lithography at the end of the nineteenth century.

A third image of Guru Gobind (*Gomo Gobind Singhji*,

no. 37; illus. 52) by contrast exists in a state closer to what Anderson describes as 'homogenous, empty time'.<sup>82</sup> The scene - of Guru Gobind sitting on a *gaddi* (throne) - contrives to recreate the codes of photographic portraiture and background scenery of the



51 *Guru Granth Prakash*, c. 1920, chromolithograph. Hem Chander Bhargava.



52 *Goroo* (sic) *Gobind Singhji*, c. 1920, chromolithograph. Hem Chander Bhargava. An image which draws upon the conventions of early studio photography.

time.<sup>83</sup> There is a great attention to surfaces: the sumptuous *takia* (cushion), *gaddi* and curtain drapes are carefully worked over, and the pillar, plant pots and landscape vista all suggest the paraphernalia of photographic representation of the time. These conventions were apparent in the earlier image of George V, and an intriguing local Indian parallel is reproduced by Gutman in her study of Indian photographic practice.<sup>84</sup> The influence of conventions associated with photography is also apparent in two further images, *Shahidi Darshan* ('Darshan of the Martyrs', no. 53) and *Guru Arjan Dev* (no. 69; illus. 53). In both these images there are five narrative episodes presented in oval or irregular medallions as though they were photographic albumen prints inset in an old-fashioned photographic album designed for cartes-de-visite and cabinet cards. This impression is compounded by the presence of floral decorations, another feature of many of these early albums.

The inter-ocular field of the scopic regime outlined in this chapter is clear. phalke's work at the Ravi Varma Press ensured a profound intimacy between many chromolithographs and early cinematography. Hem Chander Bhargava was likewise sculpting a lithographic practice that was profoundly indebted to photographic conventions of the time. However, if (as Ashish Rajadhyaksha has argued) phalke's refusal of perspective might be seen as an 'ethical choice', a repudiation of the colonial world picture,<sup>85</sup> we might also see in Hem Chander's output a similar fumbling towards a post-perspectival practice. Photography is explicitly referenced in many images but more for its surface materiality (as in *Guru Arjan Dev*) than its perspectival rationalization of the world. The scopic regime that Ravi Varma, phalke and Hem Chander Bhargava articulate passes through an engagement with what Richard Temple had called 'powers of European art' and emerges on the other side marked by the external signs of that passage, but bearing a subtly different moral- and political- message.

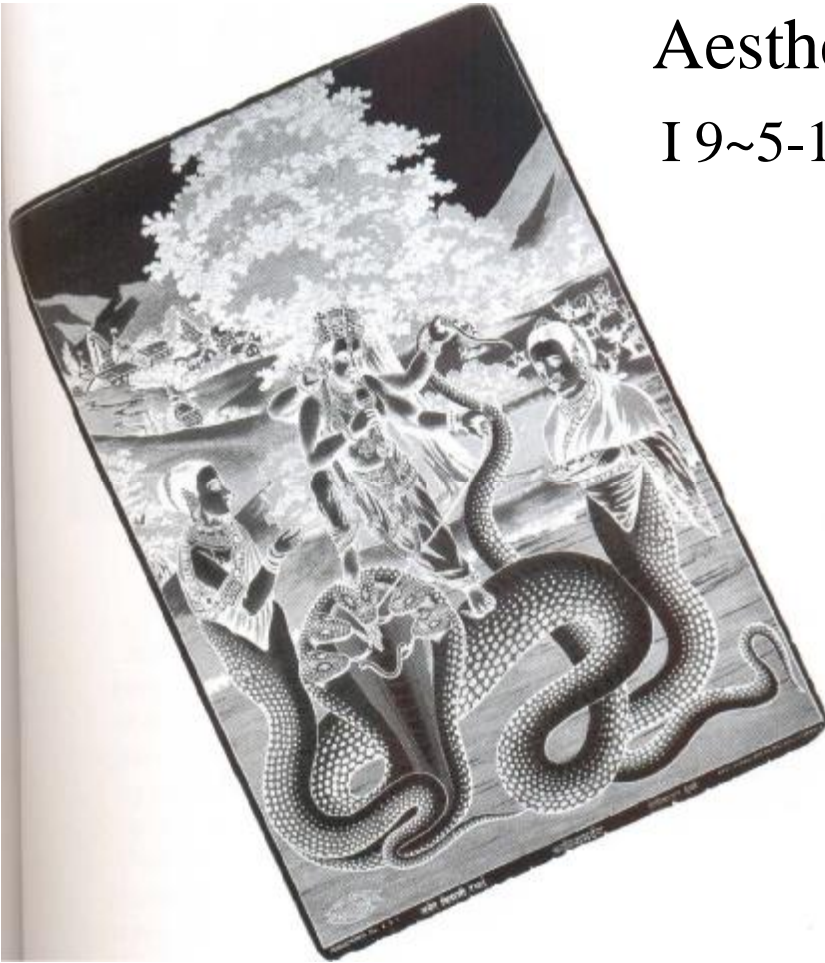
The scopic regime that these different practitioners together produced was built upon technologies and



53 *Guru Arjan Dev*, c. 1920, chromolithograph. Hemchander Bhargava. The design replicates the appearance of some late nineteenth-century photographic albums.

conventions promulgated by the British colonial state. However, these representational techniques had been appropriated rather than fully internalized.<sup>86</sup> Indian art had been undeniably 'modernized' but, to recall Gladstone Solomon, it was a 'secret of their own country' that Indians were now 'engaged in unravelling'.

5 pasto[al  
Realism: The  
Nathdva[a  
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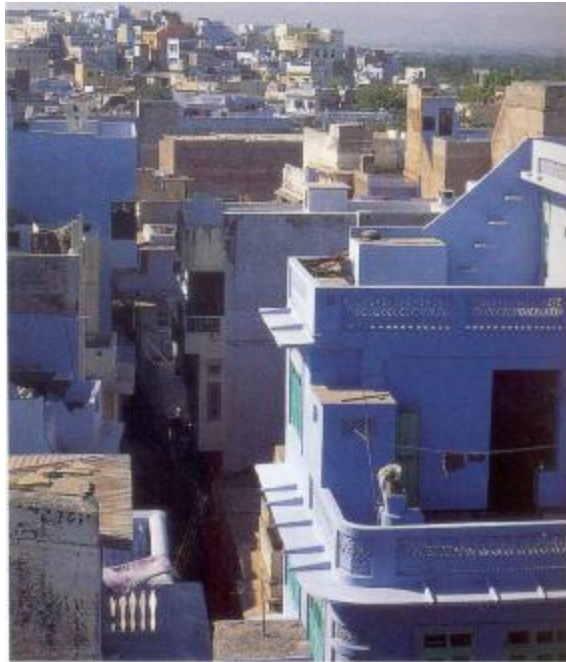


Nathdvara, Rajasthan: Sunday 17.12.94 was *purnima* (full moon) and I made my way up to the Shrinathji temple. En route, up the narrow streets crowded with souvenir shops, I spotted only one reminder of Narottam Narayan Sharma - a framed and faded print of *Murli Manohar*. This was a faint trace in a colourful world of large gilded Shrinathjis, brilliant *pichhvai* wall hangings and small images engraved into metal or sunk in plastic frames. Shrinathji appeared in different *shringaras* (adornments), but always in the same stylized frontal depiction. Occasionally he was juxtaposed in a frame with a *goswami* (priest) or sometimes with a clock. Some picture shops were interspersed with those selling saris and the draped textiles and images produced a dense and rich mixture.

The temple is a series of inter-connecting rooms in a large *haveli* and one enters these from the courtyard in which there are numerous further souvenir shops and where devotees' shoes litter the ground. On this full moon day there were many ecstatic devotees rushing for the afternoon *darshan*.

My guide showed me several of the smaller *svarups*

that lead off the main courtyard. One is a small domed temple surmounted by a painted Krishnalila (peeling



55 View from the rooftop of the artist Narottam Narayan's house, Nathdvara, Rajasthan, 1994.



54 Early photographic copy of a *ras lila pichhvai*, c. 1880. albumen print.

paint, and reputed to be 250 years old). In another, larger, room is Ladu Gopal, familiar through a painting by Ghasiram. In the storeroom ten lakhs rupees' worth of tinned *ghi* waits stacked up in great rectangular shiny mountains, waiting to be poured into *aghi* well that lies under the main image-- Similarly, huge piled sacks of sugar and other ingredients destined to be made into sweetmeat *prasad* (offerings) for the god to eat. Besides these are enormous weighing scales and boiling pans secured with padlocks. A huge image of Ganesh watches over all these and all new deliveries are placed in front of him so that they may double in size or value. An armed guard also waits with his rifle at the ready, ensuring that the stocks do not diminish.

Next into the main part of the *haveli* where the crowds are thickest, up some narrow stairs and along a balcony where we peer into a scene of frenzied industrial activity. Half a dozen men sit at sewing machines stitching new clothes for the images of the deity that are dressed anew every day.

Then down again, as we peer through a window at a silver and gold *chak*, a huge grinding stone used to prepare food for Shrinathji. In front of this is heaped another mountain, this time of many thousands of rupee notes and coins. We move down a narrow walkway to series of accountants' offices where records of donations are kept and to see the *gadi* of a venerated early *goswami*.

Back in the main courtyard, under the tailors' balcony we can just see the original chariot in which the *svarup* was brought from Braj during Aurangzeb's time. Then up some stairs past a long queue of devotees waiting to see the main image. To get near the image you need to join this queue, but you can easily melt into the jostling throng at the back. This great densely packed ecstatic mass collectively responded to the surging emotions that made it twitch and bend and

stretch as though commanded by the glittering *svarup* itself in the distance.

I would not have visited Nathdvara had it not been for the activities of Shrinathdasji and Shyamsunderlal Brijbasi in the 1920S and '30S. It was their mass-production of images by artists from the pilgrimage centre's Brahman painting community that precipitated a revolution in popular aesthetics and would place Nathdvara painters at the centre of the commercial picture production industry for the rest of the century.

The Brijbasi brothers were based in Karachi from 1918 until Partition. After 1927 Shrinathdasji commenced a series of regular travels to Nathdvara where he was to spend many months of each year in residence working closely with painters such as Ghasiram, Khubiram and Narottam Narayan. A perusal of a modern map suggests a tortuous journey via Bombay, or Lahore, to reach this small pilgrimage centre just north of Udaipur. But in pre-Partition India, Shrinathdasji would no doubt have travelled swiftly and in comfort on the newly opened Jodhpur Bikaner Railway. This line, which opened in 1900,'



56 Unfinished gouache by Hiralal of Krishna in a grove, c. 1920. A mythopoetic landscape of symmetry.

In other areas, by contrast, it was 'quite remarkable how rapidly Mughal-trained artists. . . reverted in style to the essential characteristics of the pre-Mughal Hindu school'.<sup>11</sup>

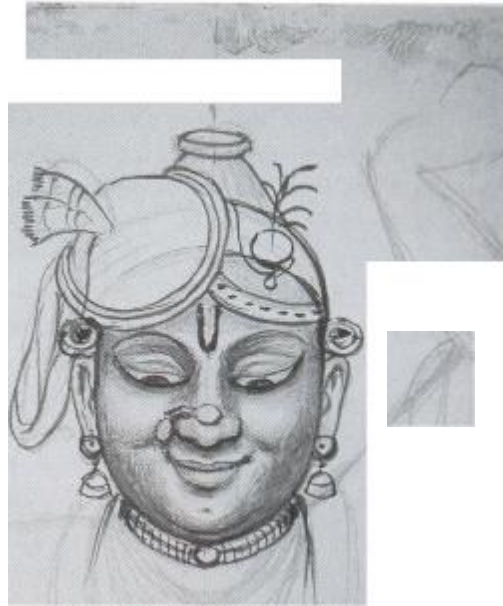
Mughal and Rajput painting have been contrasted in illuminating ideal-typical terms that also suggest something of the different chronotopes that informed them. In Mughal painting there is a form of protorealism; Mughal portraiture, for instance, presupposes some notion of an interior individual personality that can be revealed through exterior traces. Rajput painting is consistently less instantiated in such a ready-made world and reproduces ideal forms whose referents are to be found in a mytho-poetic world of natural beauty saturated with divinity (illus. 56).

Skelton contrasts the Mughal portrait where 'an eye with its wrinkled lids and world-weary glance mirrored the individual personality of the sitter' with the Rajput painter who represented the same referent with 'the flowing curves of a lotus petal and thus faithfully transcribed a poetic metaphor' (illus. 57).<sup>12</sup>

It is clear that Nathdvara art belonged to the Rajput mytho-poetic world: Nathdvara *pichhvais* (illus. 54) were designed to 'usher the viewer into the eternal Brindaban [i.e. Braj] where only ideal values prevail'.<sup>13</sup> This essentialized style, articulated in part through its opposition to Mughal idioms, would emerge in the late 1920s as a powerful aesthetic/political alternative to colonial representation.

The artists to whom Shrinathdasji Brijbasi offered commissions in the late 1920s were part of a large and thriving painting community that had been settled in the town for several centuries and had played a significant part in the evolution of the regional style of art known as Mewar painting.<sup>14</sup>

Although Nathdvara art's mass-produced ascendancy started properly only in the late 1920s, images produced by artists spanning the Nathdvara/Mathura axis were being reproduced photographically much earlier in the century. There are many images collected in Mathura and prefiguring later developments that can be positively dated as prior to



57 Unfinished sketch of Shrinathji by Narottam Narayan Sharma, c. 1930. The eyes trace the 'flowing curves of a lotus petal'.

1915. Many of these testify to the close relationship between ritual performance - in this case the *ras lila* and devotional painting. We have already seen a similar conjunction between Bengali mythological drama and many Calcutt chromolithographs in which the spectacle of the stage was translated onto the paper of the print. But whereas in late nineteenth-century Calcutta both chromolithography and theatre were driven with a desire to experiment with novel representational strategies, in Mathura and Nathdvara the work of the painter and actor was much more obviously driven by a set of devotional imperatives.

Two photographs reproduced here (illus. 58 & 59) were collected by Rai Bahadur Radha Krishna, the Director of the Archaeological Museum at Mathura, sometime before 1915. They were part of an extensive batch of two dozen sent to William Ridgeway (exPresident of the Royal Anthropological Institute and Disney Professor of Archaeology at Cambridge) for inclusion in the latter's treatise on dance (published in 1915 as *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of nonEuropean Races with Special Reference to the Origin of Greek Tragedy*) and were evidently collected in Mathura. Rai Bahadur Radha Krishna carefully documented the pictures he sent to Ridgeway, including quotations

from the *Premasagar* and matching photographs of *ras lila* performances with paintings of the same events. Braj - the land of Krishna's birth - had been steadily revitalized by pilgrims from the sixteenth century onwards and it appears through these images as an enchanted realm inscribed with an affective and performative significance through mass devotion. It is this space, a bounded pastoraPS world delimited by particular sites (Mount Govardhan, the villages of Brindaban, Nandgaon and Barsana) and its pastoral metonyms (vegetative fecundity and a topological repletteness), within which Nathdvara painting operates.



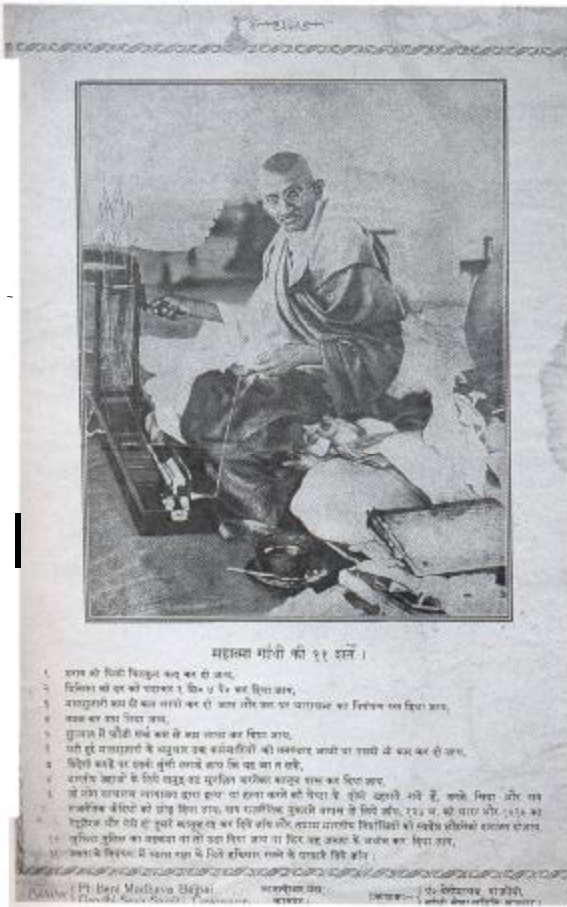
58 Krishna departs with Akrur for Mathura in the Brindaban *ras lila*, before 1915. Albumenprint on card.



59 Studio photograph of *ras lila* participants dressed as Radha and Krishna, BrindabanfMathura. before 1915. Albumen print on card.

The painted images are credited as 'From a native painting' by Ridgeway but originate in all probability from Nathdvara and may have been copied by a Mathura photographic studio, Bharat Hitaishi, which was established in 1900'6 and is known to have been selling photographic prints of paintings at around this timeY The photographic originals (now in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge) are inscribed 'Designed and painted by B.B.M.'

This juxtaposition of the performative and two-dimensional alerts us to a crucial feature of the early twentieth-century Nathdvara painting communities:



60 Azadi ke Paigambar ki Ghosana ( Proclamation of the Proposal for Freedom). A broadside showing Gandhi at his charkha and listing his main teachings. Issued by the Gandhi Seva Samiti, Cawnpore, printed by Anandeshwar Press. Late 1920S.

their immersion in a performative faith in which painted images played an instrumental role. Indeed we could go so far as to claim the Brindavan *ras lila* was to the Brijbasi style what the Star Theatre's mythological plays were to the early Calcutta picture presses.

In addition to this inter-ocular domain we need also to see the Nathdvāra aesthetic championed by the Brijbasi brothers in relation to the rise of Gandhian politics in the 1920S and the emergence of a powerful terrorist alternative in the early 1930S. Gandhi had returned to India in 1915 and thrown himself into public politics two years after that. The 1920S were characterized by the creation of a

nationalist mass-movement with a strong peasant following strongly articulated (at least by Gandhi and Sardar Patel) within a devotional idiom. The individual, physical, body became a new site for an ethicized political practice: the production of *khadi* (homespun cloth), vegetarianism and other interventions on one's own body became a new means of performing an ideal vision of community (illus. 60). There was a powerful homology between this Gandhian practice and the Brijbasi's Vallabha imagery.<sup>18</sup> In 1931, however, both were confronted with a violent and popularly attractive alternative in the form of the socialist and atheistic Bhagat Singh.



After his arrival in Karachi the elder brother, Shrinathdasji, spent four years exploring business opportunities before starting the framing shop. During the early years of this business he came to appreciate the possibilities of picture publishing and after five years, in either 1927 or 1928, a decision was made to publish their own images. This was precipitated by the arrival one day in their shop of a Sindhi client bearing a photograph of his young son dressed as Krishna in a style reminiscent of phalke's early filmic representation (illus. 64).

A travelling representative for the Berlin printers Grafima had at some point before this contacted Shrinathdasji and showed him samples of the reproductions which the firm he represented could produce. A number of original paintings were sent to Germany for reproduction as postcard-sized bromide prints.<sup>9</sup> A 1930 calendar, actually printed in 1928, reproduces 49 of these designs around a much larger image of what must have been the fiftieth - *Patit Pawan Ram* (illus. 65). The contrast between the beautiful colour originals (mostly 10 x 14 inches) and the small (3½ x 5 inches) bromide reproductions is striking and the reasons for choosing this means of reproduction are not completely clear. One very positive feature, which would have done much to offset their small size and subdued presence as compared with, say, Ravi Varma prints, was their overseas production. A German origin signified quality and the allure of the exotic at this time. A Brijbasi catalogue published in 1933 makes very frequent references to their superior quality: 'Pictures listed below are printed in a famous German workshop (*germani ke ek mashahur karkhane mem*) and are by photographic machines (*photographik mashinon*) and the paper used is very good quality, thick and glossy (*chikna*).<sup>20</sup> Further, they are printed in attractive colours (*akarshak rangon*) and have a 'wonderful brightness' (*gazab ki chamak*). Later in the catalogue further flourishes are added: the pictures are 'handsome' (*khubsurat*), printed in 'beautiful'



61 *Lord Krishna*, The first Brijbasi image, inspired by the photograph of a boy dressed as Krishna. First published as a bromide postcard in 1928, this image is a later copy, published in *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* (Ahmedabad, 1950).

(*khushnuma*) colours on 'thick and excellent' (*mote aur bariya*) paper. The Brijbasis even went so far as to claim that 'other pictures in the market cannot even be compared to the shadow of our quality pictures'.

It is also common to see the phrase 'Printed as German' on later Indian-made prints. This was an attempt to appropriate the cachet of foreign printing in a manner that would not make the Indian publisher liable to any legal proceedings. Grafima was later able to produce 10 x 14 inch hand-tinted bromide prints and after 1931 larger colour offset litho prints (20 x 28 inches) came from Peter May Verlag in Dresden. Prints were also imported from Topan in Japan. These



62 The same image reworked as part of an advertising placard for S. S. Brijbasi, c. 1930.

German supplies were suspended during the war, however, and the firm's images were then printed in Nagpur and Bombay.

The very first set of bromide postcard designs printed in 1928 was registered in Calcutta in July 1928.<sup>21</sup> M. L. Carg, the current proprietor of Brijbasi's Delhi branch, suggested that the early bromide prints would largely have been used as postcards for correspondence. The possibility that they would have found a quite different market niche to the technically superior colour lithographs, available from the Ravi Varma Press among others, goes some way to explaining why these small and unspectacular products should have been so commercially successful. All the cards I have seen from this period bear identical standard information on the



63 *Shri Murlidhar*, c. 1930, postcard published by Jugatram & Co., Bombay.



64 Still from D. G. Phalke's film, *Shree Krishna jamma*, 1918.

Brijbasi & Sons

Patit Pawan Ram

(All our designs registered.)

BUNDER ROAD KARACHI

Copyright No. 1623 of 1928. Printed in Germany.

WHOLESALE DEALERS IN PICTURES & POSTCARDS

65 Brijbasi promotional calendar for 1930, printed in 1928 in Germany, Hand-coloured bromide print,



66 The painter Ghasiram Hardev Sharma, c. 1925, albumen print.

Although they rebuked this first painter, later on they realized that it was not going to affect their market because wealthy people would still buy the paintings. Earlier the hand-made paintings used to sell at a very cheap price. Later they realized that with mass reproduction word about Shrinathji and other gods would spread - people would be more aware of religion - and in turn it would affect their market. Now the value for hand-made paintings increased. It was something that could not be bought in volume. They became very supportive of our printing because they realized that it had an effect on their own market, it [increased] the price for hand-made paintings: the value increased and at

the same time they also found an additional market - lithoprinters - and it created a greater general demand for religious items because of a greater awareness created through the spread of pictures in every household.

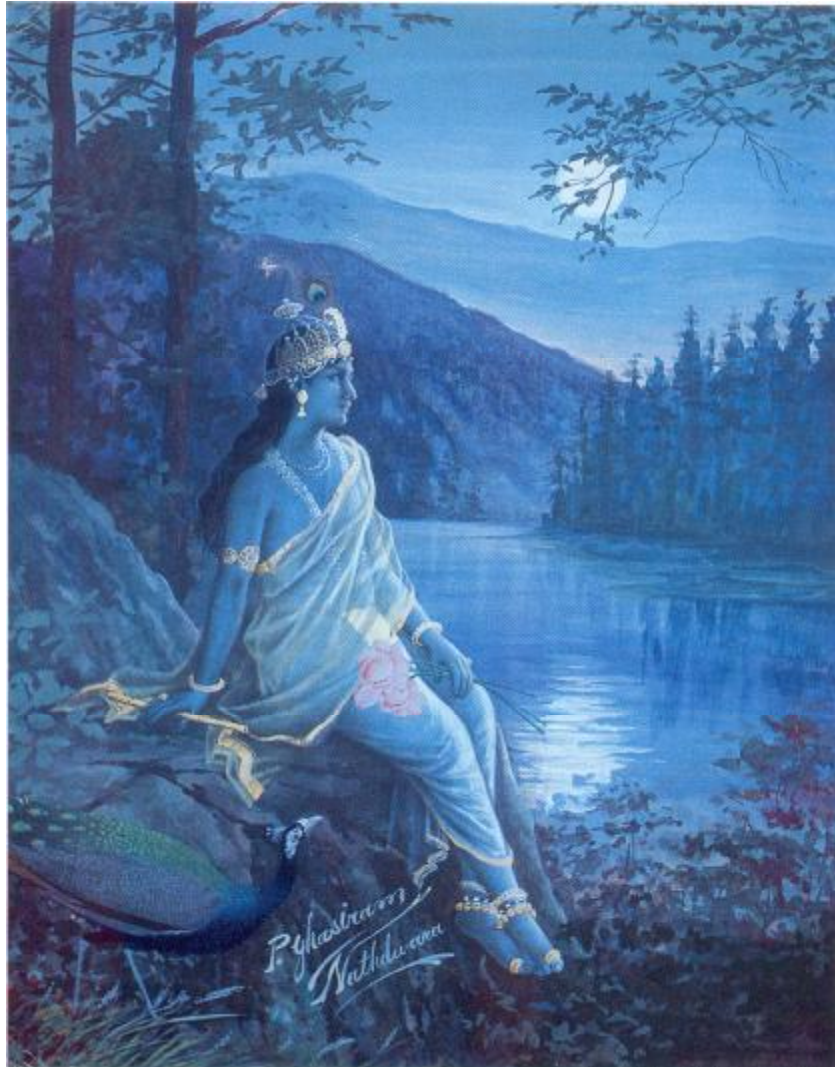
A Hem Chander Bhargava sample book (c. 1948) includes several prints of paintings by Ghasiram, probably dating from the last years of his life and published posthumously in the 1930S. They are noticeable for what to a modern eye looks a rather anaemic colour range and in many respects are very different from later Nathdvara artists such as Narottam Narayan. Ambalal stresses the revolutionary impact of his work on a style that was rapidly stagnating: 'the glowing aniline water colours imported from Europe thrilled him, and the use of transparent glowing colours thereafter became his hallmark'.<sup>26</sup> When contrasted with other Nathdvara painters who ventured into the mass market, however, this judgement appears somewhat puzzling. What is striking about Ghasiram's paintings as opposed to, say, Khubiram or Narottam Narayan is their very strongly marked 'traditionalist' Nathdvara identity.

In all Ghasiram's images the relation of figure to landscape is very similar to that in earlier Nathdvara images. The effect, consequently, is an immersion of relatively small figures in characteristically lush foliage-covered landscapes. Figures are also typically deployed along a single horizontal plane in the foreground of the painting. However, in Ghasiram's *Ras Lila* and *Panchabati* the influence of photographic studio conventions and foreign 'scenery' prints<sup>27</sup> is perhaps evident in the receding landscape on the far left of both images, which leads the eye out into the far distance.

Ghasiram's *Yogiraj Shri Krishna* (illus. 67), published by Brijbasi as a bromide card in 1928, manifests a further aspect of the hybridity that is still apparent in other early Brijbasi images. It combines the sentimentality of romantic kitsch with the dark brooding intensity and richness of Nathdvara landscapes.<sup>28</sup> It was images such as these<sup>29</sup> that earned the censure

of the Director of the Lalit Kala Akademi and coorganizer of the 1993 National Museum Ravi Varma exhibition, the painter A. Ramachandran. In an attempt to establish the aesthetic worth of Ravi Varma oils, Ramachandran decried the artist's 'oleographs' and vilified those painters who had subsequently been forced to 'incorporate popular Ravi Varma elements in their works': 'A pathetic example of this can be found in the works of Ghasiram, a traditional painter of Nathdwara, who made vulgarized versions of Radha

and Krishna paintings by copying picture postcards.'<sup>30</sup> Although by this stage Ghasiram was clearly producing work aimed at a specific market, it would be misleading to accept Ramachandran's criticisms. Indeed, while conceding the enormous influence of earlier commercial art in this Ghasiram image, I would argue that despite such hybrid amalgams Ghasiram, and the flood of Nathdwara artists who followed him, led to a marked 're-traditionalization' of this genre of mass-produced art.



67 *Yogiraj Shri Krishna*,  
Ghasiram, c. 1928,  
gouache.

Khubiram Gopilal was another prolific contributor to both Brijbasi's and Hem Chander Bharagava's early lists. Some of Khubiram's early images are clear copies of earlier Ravi Varma chromolithographs, such as his 'Mahalaksmi', which, apart from the characteristic fecund claustrophobia of twentieth-century Nathdvara paintings, is very similar to the Ravi Varma Press's very first print, the standing Lakshmi (see illus. 37).

5.5. Brijbasi also published paintings by Hiralal Udayram (1858-1928), who had worked with Ghasiram. Ambalal records that, in addition to Brijbasi, Hiralal's work was published by Hem Chander Bhargava, Nathmal Chandelia of Calcutta and Jaipur, and by Harnarayan and Sons, then based in Jodhpur. It was Harnarayan who was first to publish the work of the Nathdvara artist who would come to dominate popular Hindu art in the second half of the twentieth century, B. G. Sharma (see chapter 7).

If in Ghasiram's early work we can see the most obvious linkage between mass-produced images and the aesthetic of nineteenth-century Nathdvara painters, it was the artist Narottam Narayan Sharma (1896-1992; illus. 68) who from the mid-1930S came to define a new dominant Nathdvara style that was to dominate the market until the mid-1950S, when B. G. Sharma's brighter palette found national acclaim.

#### PASTORALISM, PERSPECTIVE AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Narottam's work most powerfully embodies what we might term 'neo-traditionalism'. I mean by this a conscious return to an earlier representational style. The move to an earlier imaginary practice also implies a partial repudiation of perspectival techniques and the wider calculating analytic of colonialism. Narottam's work exemplifies this most clearly, but he is part of a wider movement away from the 'strategic mimicry' of early presses such as the Calcutta Art Studio.

I have suggested that my reading of the history of mass-produced Hindu ritual art shows that this early



68 The painter Narottam Narayan Sharma, c. 1930, silver print.

period of strategic mimicry and experiment with perspective is replaced in the late 1920S by a form of 'neo-traditionalism'. In the new Nathdvara aesthetic, which very rapidly conquered the whole of India, there is less stress on a realist chronotope and fewer explicit attempts at linear perspective. Parallel to this there are a much larger number of composite images and portraiture becomes much more frontal and symmetrical. Rather than a window on reality, the images become icons whose foundational rationale is an engagement with the viewer. This can also be partly explained through the growth of an increasingly rural market for images for whom the ritual utility of images became paramount - this entails the triumph of what O. P. Joshi refers to as *darshani* images over *katha* images, that is the triumph of devotional images that permit mutual looking, over narrative images whose main function is pedagogic.

Parallel to the eclipse of the picture plane in Nathdvara images there is an increasing stress on the surface, rather than depth of the image. Compositions come to be carefully framed and crowded by sympathetic landscapes. These landscapes are the antithesis of the *tour d'horizon* that Anderson suggests is

characteristic of the nationalist novel.<sup>33</sup> Nathdvara images are marked by a singularity, a claustrophobic specificity. The example par excellence of such a landscape is Narottam Narayan's *Murli Manohar* of 1934 (illus. 69), reputed to be the best-selling image in the history of the industry. This depicts Krishna playing the flute in a landscape that is formally similar to that in Ravi Varma's *Vishvamisra Menaka* (see illus. 35). The central figure is placed slightly to the left of the picture, and the right side of the image is filled with a waterfall. In the Ravi Varma image, however, the waterfall is distant and conventionally sublime, drawing the eye out to infinity. Narottam's waterfall, by contrast, is shunted dramatically forward and the misty clouds surrounding the full moon collapse the pictorial depth, flattening the picture dramatically and giving it a surface density and plenitude. *Vishvamisra* and *Menaka* are figures placed conventionally within a landscape (it could almost be mistaken for a tourist photograph of a couple picnicking in the Yosemite); but the landscape around Krishna in *Murli Manohar* is clearly an exudation of his central figure.

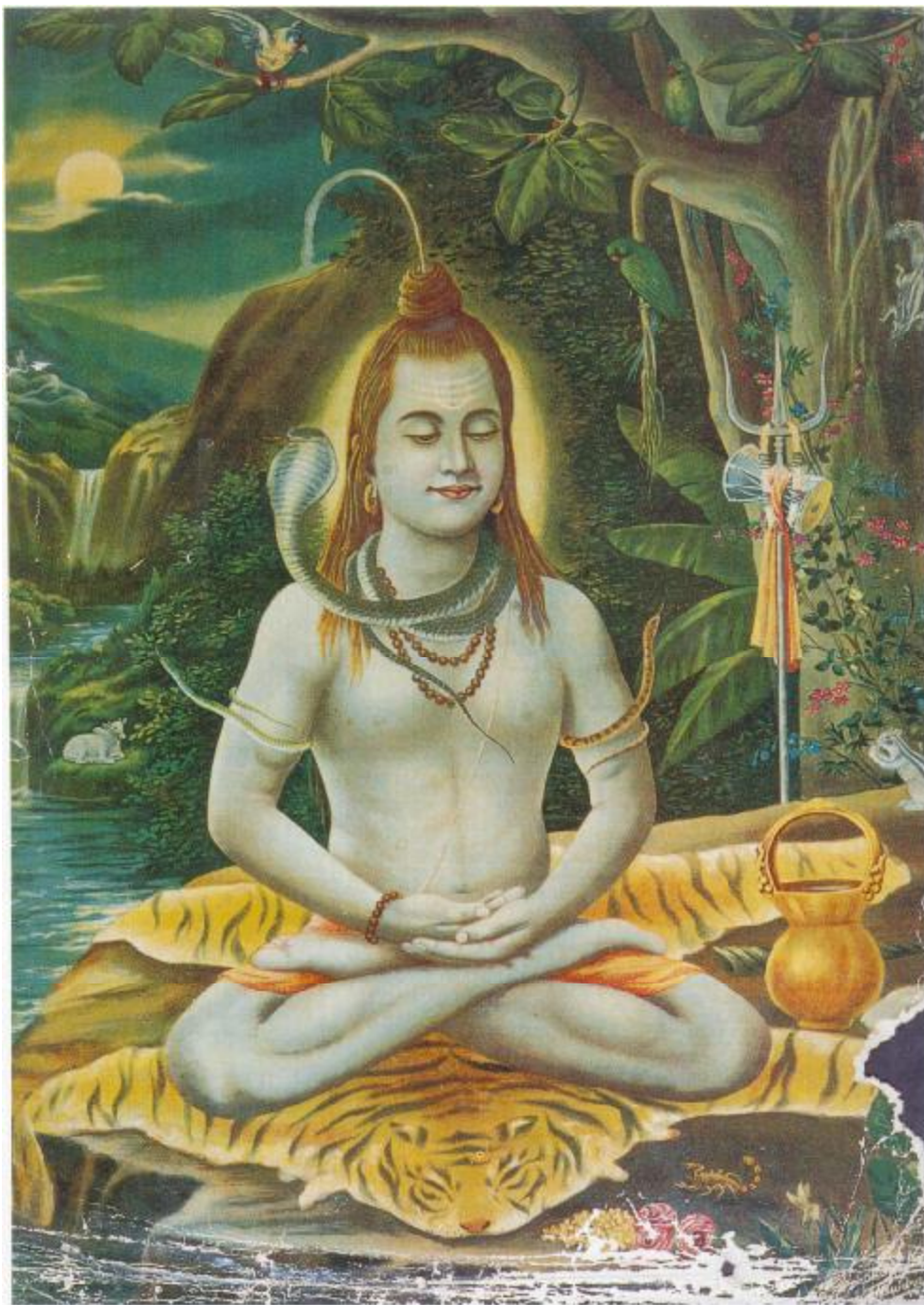
This point is made more powerfully in Narottam's image of a meditating Shiva (which appears under different titles including *Kailash Pati Shankar*; illus. 70 & 71). Here, the landscape that surrounds Shiv is literally of his own making: the river Ganges sprouts from his head as he sits high in the Himalayas, immersed in deep transcendence on a tiger-skin. The water that flows to his left (or right depending on the process used and date of the print) originates from him. All is equally part of him and thus distance and nearness lose their conventional cartographic significance: he is not a figure in landscape, but an animating force in a world of his own creation.

I have already suggested that Nathdvara painting is highly theatrical, both in Michael Fried's sense and in its clear continuity with the devotional performativity that unfolds each year in Braj. The Nathdvara imagery that Brijbasi conveyed to the rest of India takes as its reference point the landscape of Braj and addresses the spectator (in part) through the conventions of the *ras*



69 Narottam Narayan Sharma, *Murli Manohar*, 1950s offset print of a c. 1934 image, published by S. S. Brijbasi. Reputed to be the biggest-selling image in the history of the industry.

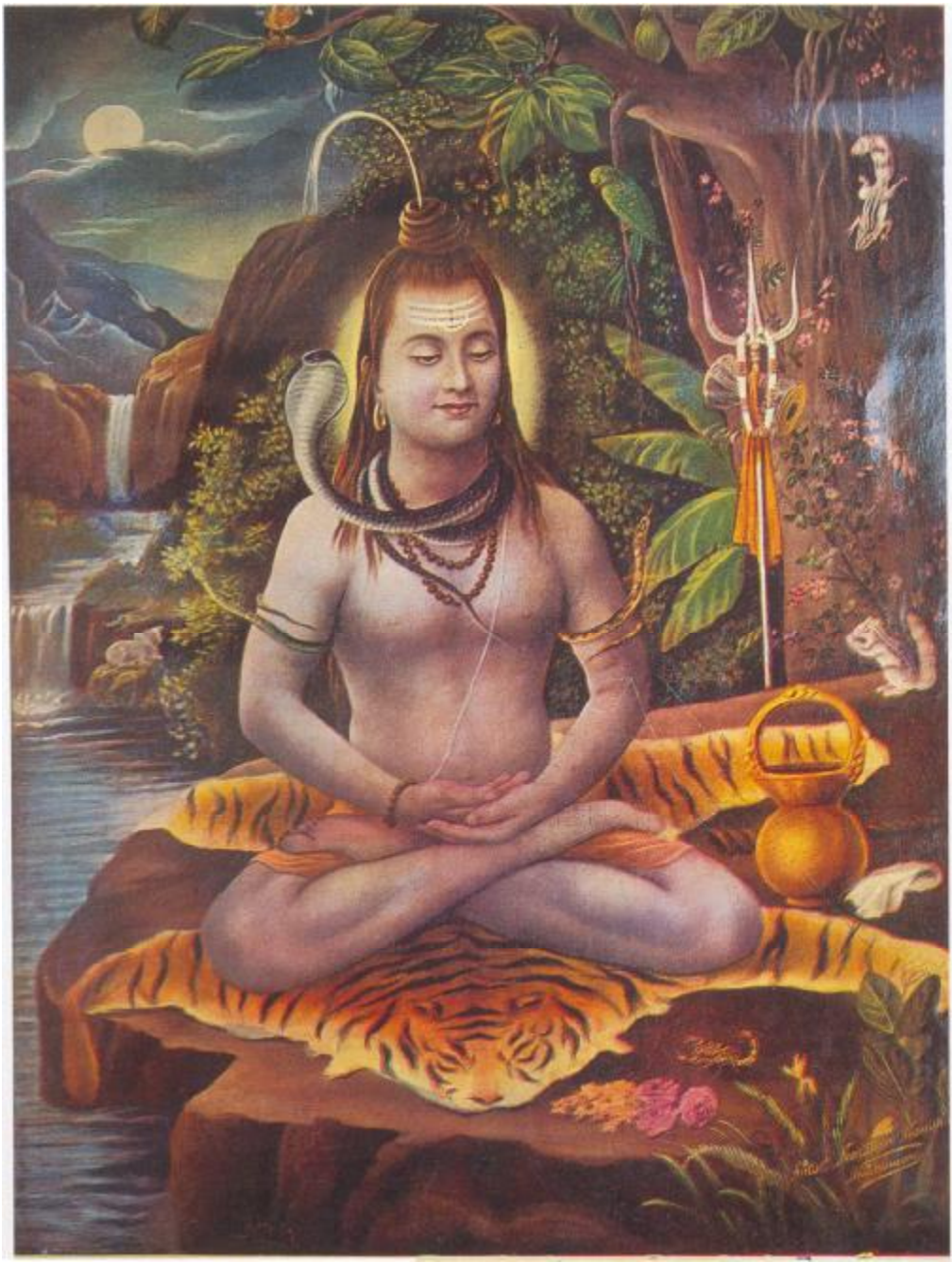
*lila*, the annual performative recreation of Krishna's activities in Braj.<sup>34</sup> But of equal importance is the impact of photography in creating the Nathdvaraf Brijbasi allure. This is exceptionally clear in the case of *Kailash Pati Shankar*, in which the central figure of Shiv is without question modelled directly, or indirectly, via a photograph. Narottam's family are hesitant to acknowledge this, but it is clear from other of his images that he overpainted photographs.<sup>35</sup> The fascination and power of *Kailash Pati Shankar* lies in part in the tension between, on the one hand, the depiction of Shiv in a world he has created, and the friction that arises from his hyper-real, photographically montaged disjunction with his setting. Nathdvara painting


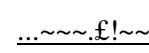


70 Narottam Narayan Sharma, *Kailash Pati Shankar*, c. 1935 chromolithograph published by S. S. Brijbasi.

The contrast between this and the following illustration demonstrates the dramatic impact that the lithographic artisans had on the original images from which they worked.





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[ 317 ]  

71 Narottam Narayan Sharma. *Kailash Pati Shankar*, 1950S offset print of a mid-1930s image. Published by S. S. Brijbasi. This photo offset image is much closer to Narrottam's original conception.

simultaneously rejected the colonially authorized technology of perspective at the very moment that it adopted another technology - photography - that gave it a direct route to a hyper-reality.

Photography was eagerly embraced in Nathdvara during the nineteenth century to picture *pichhvais*, as we have seen (see illus. 54), but also *goswamis*, the priests who tend Shrinathji. Very early (c. 1860s-70s) carte-de-visite sized albumen prints of *goswamis*, crudely pasted onto yellow card, can still be easily found in Udaipur. Such photographs were also clearly the basis for the portraiture in early *manoratha* paintings. This highly conventionalized form of representation shows Shrinathji in various adornments with on each side, at the bottom of the picture, groups of *goswamis* and devotees attending to the *svarup's* needs. *Manorathas* were a painterly genre,<sup>36</sup> which then also appeared in chromolithographic form. *Shrinathji ka Annkut*,<sup>37</sup> published by a small press in the nearby town of Kankroli, depicts eight *goswamis* together with four sari-clad devotees disposed symmetrically beneath the deity (illus. 73). It is clear that the *goswami's* faces are reworkings of photographic portraits, and in some similar examples they were actual collaged photographic images.<sup>38</sup>

Studio photography now makes possible a variation on the picturing of this relationship between humans and the deity, for most Nathdvara photographic studios offer clients a painted backdrop depicting Shrinathji, which allows them to adopt the devotional poses associated with *manorathas* (illus. 72).

The *manoratha* also leaves a powerful trace in many of the most successful NathdvarafBrijbasi images. Narottam Narayan's *Shree Sulyanurain*, for instance, appropriates the formal structure of the *manoratha* (illus. 74). Like Shrinathji, Satyanarayan is commonly described as an *avatar* of Krishna.<sup>39</sup> Narottam's image endows the central figure of Satyanarayan with Shrinathji-like direct 'theatrical' vision. The viewer is immediately hailed by his gaze and we are commanded to reciprocate. On either



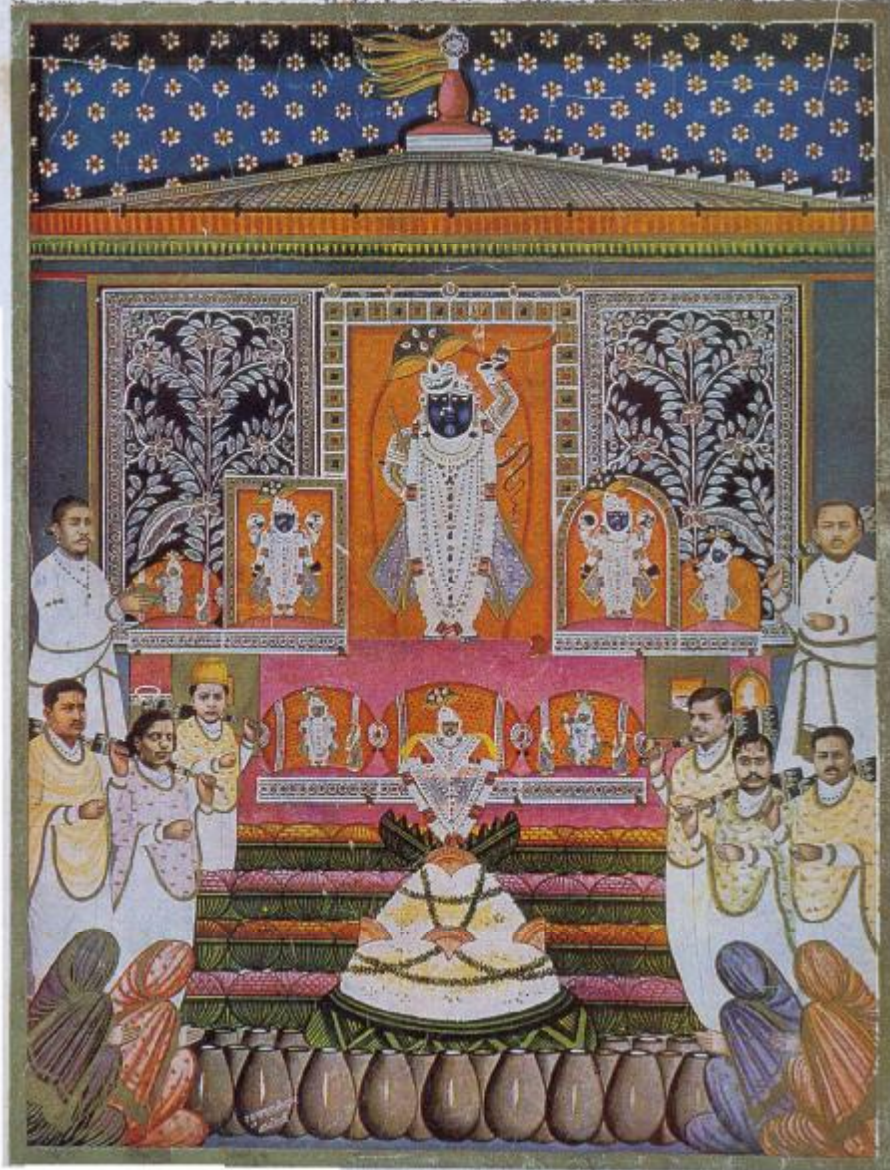
72 Studio photograph (c. 1994) of devotees with wall-painting of Shrinathji, Nathdvara. Photography here replicates conventions established in painting and chromolithography.

side of the deity are devotees whom we see gazing upon Satyanarayan. At the bottom a local Raja receives prasad from the priest. Symmetrical banana leaves (commonly used in Satyanarayan *puja*) at the top of the picture enhance the image's fecund claustrophobia. There is thus an 'absorptive' dimension in the image, but one which serves only to lay the foundations for the central and all important theatrical gaze of the deity, who looks at *us*, the devotee for whom this image has been prepared.

The subsidiary absorptive figures may also be seen as playing the role of critics' recommendations displayed outside a theatre, or the enthusiastic response of reviewers to be found on the covers of some books. They confirm in the viewer of the image the expectation that the deity will be efficacious, for he has already attracted the devotions of those we can see in the image. These figures also serve as prompts, facilitating the 'locking in' of vision between devotee and god that early cinema also struggled to perfect.

The NathdvarafBrijbasi style is strongly marked by its hybridization of photography for its own devotional and theatrical purposes. We should also keep reminding ourselves of the creational moment

\* श्रीनाथजी का अन्नकूट \*



रघुनील  
पाली

73 Shrinathji ka Annkut. c. 1950. Print published by Raghunath Paliwal & Co., Kankrali, Rajasthan. A chromolithographic example of the manoraltha genre.



SHREE SATYANARAIN

74 Narottam Narayan Sharma. *Shree Satyanarain*, 1950S offset print of mid-1930S image. Published by S. S. Brijbasi.

of Brijbasi (the disseminator of the most significant popular style in twentieth-century India): a man enters their shop bearing a photograph of his son dressed as Krishna and asks for it to be framed.

#### PASTORALISM AND POLITICS

Just as Anderson's newspaper reader is 'continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life' through the observation of 'exact replicas of his own paper being consumed' elsewhere,<sup>40</sup> it is my suggestion that the Nathdvara-style

chromolithographs that proliferated in the 1930S produced a similar effect through the semiosis created by their inter-ocular and, of course, through their sheer ubiquity. The prints collectively, through their many hundred million acts of consumption, consolidate an internally referential landscape that came to exist in parallel throughout India. We are confronted with not so much a temporal 'traverse'<sup>41</sup> as a spatial shadow, an ideal space and time that runs alongside everyday reality.<sup>42</sup>

We have already had some sense of the enduring popularity of images such as *Kailash Pati Shankar* through the variety of different versions that have ~\~1:~ ~u m~ "Th:~1: \~rou \0 Qocument is the way in which images entered everyday spaces. The anthropologist McKim Marriott's photographs from the 1940S and '50S in rural Uttar Pradesh and urban Maharashtra are one of the few records we have of this everyday penetration. A 1952 photograph of a Brijbasi bromide postcard of *Kailash Pati Shankar* placed inside a copy of the *Bhagvata Purana* by a wealthy landlord (illus. 75) allows us to glimpse, through Marriott's lens, one small fragment of the spatial shadow of popular images insinuating themselves into the smallest (indeed thinnest)

everyday spaces. We see here in its purest form the emergence of a new form of authority (the mass-produced visual) in conjunction with the old (the rural 'oralization'<sup>43</sup> of texts by learned intermediaries), the local political consequences of which are described in more detail in chapter seven.

Some sense of how, from the late 1920S onwards, Nathdvara landscapes came to do an important part of the work of imagining the nation can also be had from the juxtaposition of images hung on the fa\ade of Brijbasi's office in Karachi in the mid-1930S (illus. 76). Shrinathdasji and Shyamsunderlal Brijbasi are shown seated with their staff in front of the original oil paintings of their best-selling chromolithographs. In addition to portraits of Nehru and Gandhi there are also four images by Narottam: the two images just discussed, *Murli Manohar* and *Kailash Pati Shankar*,



75 Postcard-size bromide print by S. S. Brijbasi of Narottam Narayan's *Kailash Pati Shankar* placed in a copy of the *Bhagvata Purana*, Aligarh district, Uttar Pradesh, early 1950s.



76 The staff of S. S. Brijbasi outside the firm's Bunder Road office, Karachi, mid-1930s. Shrinathdasji and Shyamsunderlal are seated in the centre.



77 Narottam Narayan Sharma, *Maharana Pratap*, c. 1944. Published by S. S. Brijbasi.

I

becomes a camel's head and the guru's head part of its

I

saddle. Narottam also produced several sketches and paintings of landscapes in which rivers tumbled over, or burbled alongside, rocks which on closer inspection reveal themselves to be crouching monkeys. These signify Hanuman's monkey army, which, as the *Ramayana* relates, rescued Sita from Lanka and whose actions helped restore the moral universe.

Narottam Narayan's images can be seen as a technician's experiment with a living landscape, in which he tests the capacity of different categories of being to invade and infest each other in a manner that recalls Arcimboldo. At one level this strategy develops a pre-existing concern with the mutually inclusionary capacity of visual forms to encompass the gods, which is apparent, for instance, in the 'Cow with 84 Deities' (illus. 79) and in a remarkable photographic montage of Gandhi (see illus. 100).

Narottam's experiments with the mutual imbrication of different domains are, however, accented in radically different ways. His *monkey-landscape* sketches are a positive affirmation of the Nathdvara pastoral aesthetic in which a figural excess signifies a religious repleteness. The monkey-landscapes work not through substitution but through addition - the river remains a river but is then revealed to be *also* a river *and* fragments of Ram's army. The monkey



78 Unfinished sketch by Narottam Narayan Sharma, c. 1940.

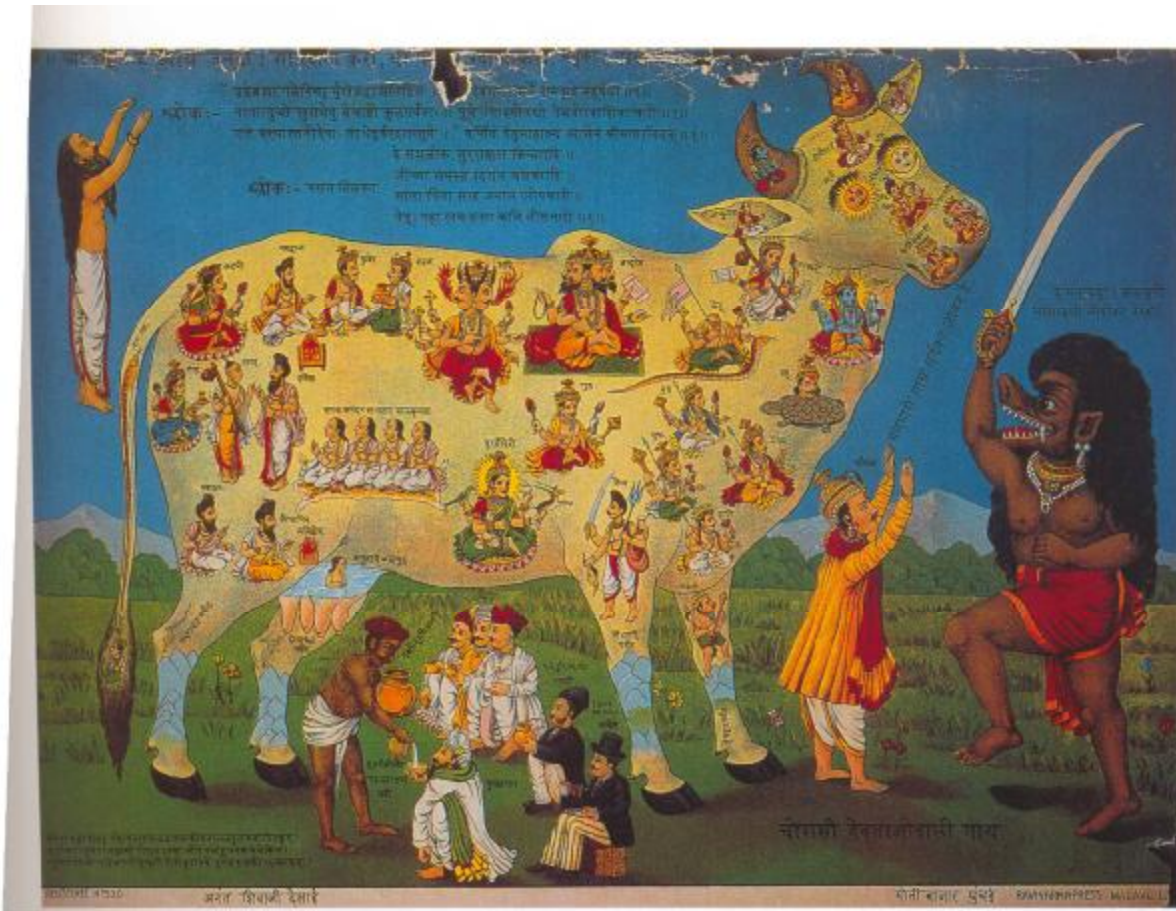
landscapes thus exemplify a crucial quality of the figural density and multivalency of Nathdvara imagery. Narottam translates the task of representation from the modelling of objects within a three-dimensional space as a field of certainty (the colonial aspiration) into the presentation of cryptic elements on the picture plane. Depth is rejected in favour of the complexity of surface and clarity rejected in favour of uncertainty.

#### 'NATIONAL FEELING'

My antiquarian enthusiasm for the work of artists such as Narottam and publishers such as Brijbasi might be read as an obscure argument about some obscure pictures. But I believe that they lay the foundation for some grander claims about nationalism, or as I would prefer to call it, following many nationalists' own usage, 'national feeling'.

*Benedict Anderson's* model of *nationalism-like* nearly all theories of nationalism - is a bigly cerebral! construct invoking flows of discourses in a world stripped of its materiality. Recent criticisms<sup>52</sup> have objected to its assumption that a 'modular' nationalism was reproduced globally (a claim that Anderson retracts in the second edition of *Imagined Communities*), and the elitism implicit in his stress on the cognitive dimensions of nationalist 'imaging', arguing instead for a subaltern messianic nationalism.

It is possible, however, to push these criticisms much further, and to edge to the centre of the nationalist stage a dangerous corporeality that 'national feeling' invokes.<sup>53</sup> Although in India, as elsewhere, nationalism had a life as a discourse, it also operated through the libidinous force fields that flowed around various embodiments. Embodiment is indeed crucial to the idea of the nation, embodiment in the form variously of gender, visual symbol, visual style, or sound. Nationalism indeed might be defined as culture materialized and embodied in the service of identity. I have already alluded to the argument that



79 Chaurasi Devata Auwalli Gay (the Cow with 84 Deities), c. 1912, Ravi Varma Press. The original image.

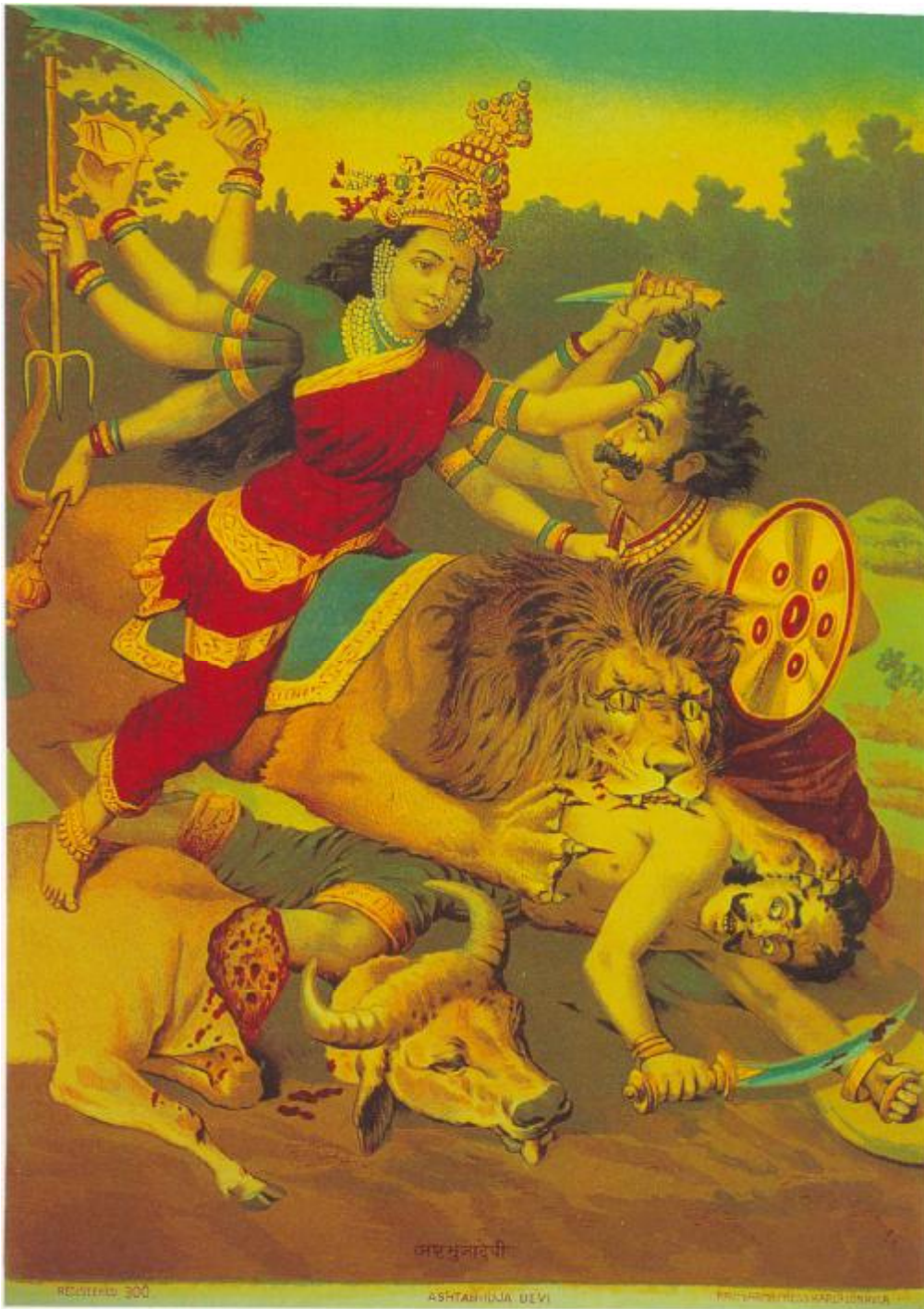
We can see here - in the use of the didactic image and its exegesis - the appropriation of missionary techniques of propaganda,<sup>17</sup> as befits a movement started by Dayanand Saraswati, who applied missionary rhetoric to Hindu concerns. Freitag notes that in addition to the distribution of pictures at meetings, plays were also staged and placards and pamphlets distributed.<sup>8</sup>

#### WORKING WITH THE 1910 PRESS ACT

The colonial state's response to the 'increasing activity of controversy' was the 1910 Press Act, which

would become the chief means of controlling the 'native press' and the huge upsurge of topical broadsheets and visual images.<sup>9</sup> The colonial state's paranoia about the representational genie it had unleashed was expressed not only through the proscription of complete images but also in a prohibition of individual elements of images in an attempt to mitigate their power. However, although the colonial state could quite easily prohibit it could not interdict, since it could not unsay what it had itself helped to create and authorize. Proscription thus operated within a double-bind in which every denial was simultaneously a rein scriptation of representational potency: to proscribe was also to specify a





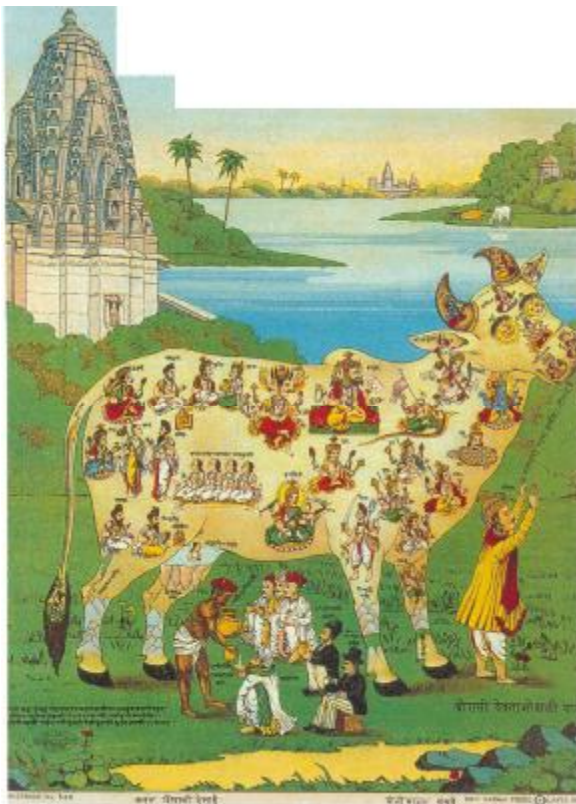
80 *Ashtabhuja Devi*, the original Ravi Varma Press chromolithograph.

figure with the sword who has just slain the buffalo/cow and upon whom the lion wreaks vengeance. In the absence of clear textual knowledge among the popular consumers of this image a reading that constructs it as the goddess's retribution upon two Muslim or Untouchable butchers who have just slaughtered a cow seems highly plausible.

The precise nature of the agreement reached between Schleicher and the Government indicates that those who sought to proscribe it had a clear sense of the deliberate mis-recognition that the image was seeking to provoke. Following advice to the Government that they were likely to be unsuccessful in their prosecution, they proposed that if Schleicher consented to 'make certain alterations in the pictures' and

withdrew his suit they would pay compensation for the pictures seized earlier by the police. In return Schleicher agreed that in future copies of the picture 'the blood stains on the sword of one of the two men will be removed and the animal will be coloured black'. Schleicher did this and the print was quickly reissued with these marginal changes (illus. 82).

A similar undertaking<sup>25</sup> was given in respect of another Ravi Varma Press picture that we have already seen (see illus. 79). This was but the latest in a line of similar images stretching back two decades, and under the terms of the compromise Schleicher agreed that in future copies 'the figure of the demon in front of the cow shall be removed'. Shortly thereafter a similar print was issued, this time in vertical portrait format, in which Dharmaraj beseeches the empty void where once the swordwielding demon stood (illus. 81).

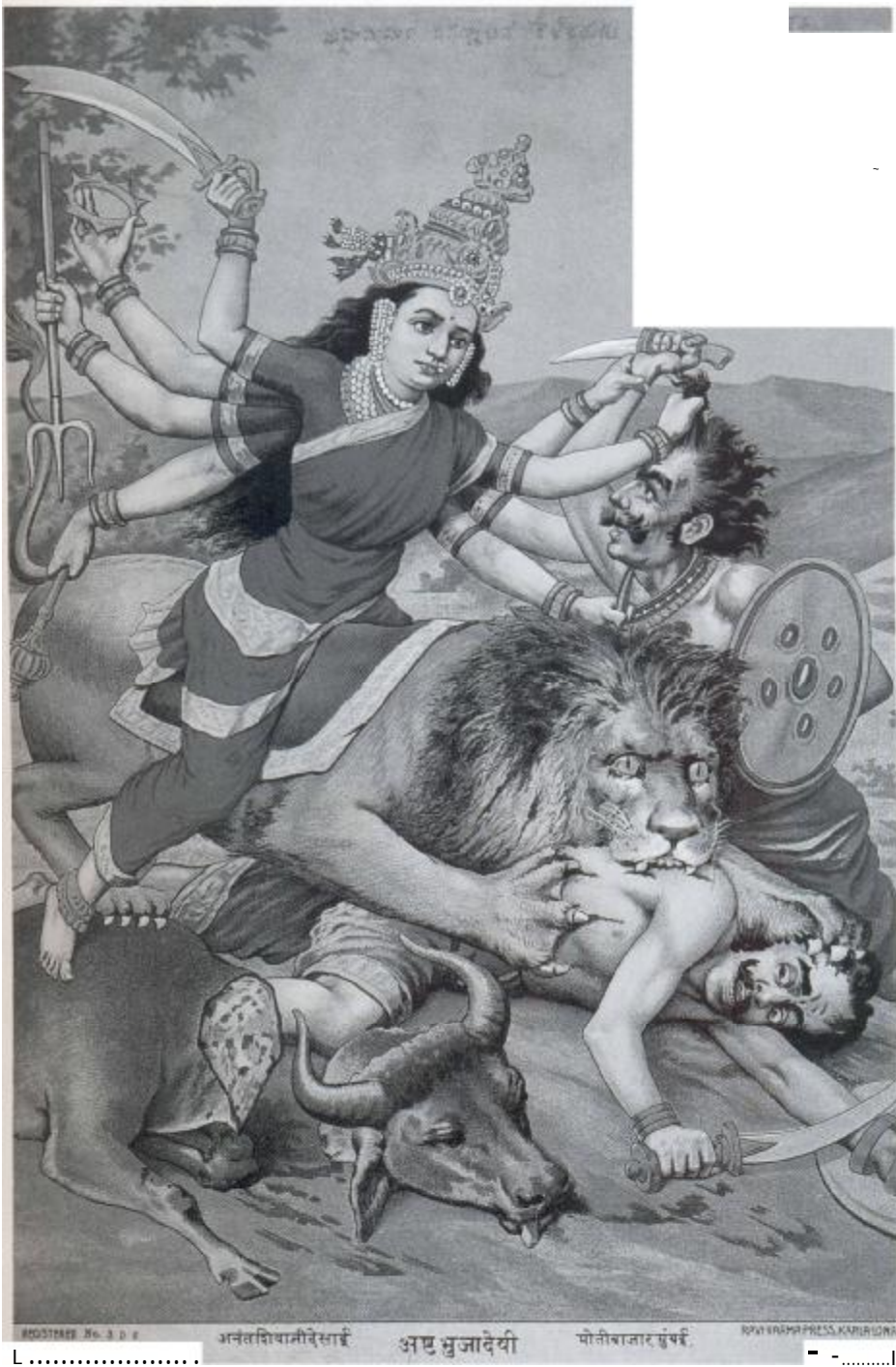


81 The amended version of the Ravi Varma Press *Chaurasi Devata Auvali Gay* (see illus. 80).

#### NATIONAL ALLEGORY AND THE RISE OF NATIONAL FIGURE

. . . if it is through the historian one learns of national destiny, the paradigmatic figure of the national community is the artist.<sup>26</sup>

In early Calcutta lithography (for instance depictions of Nala Damayanti), and in the disputed Ravi Varma Press images described above, it is clear that the nation is invoked primarily through allegory. This is an allegory open to 'linguistic' decoding and was highly susceptible to colonial control. Within a few decades, however, it was superseded by what we might term 'figure' or the affective. In part, this history was determined by .dialectical constraint: figural affective intensities required the semiotic infrastructure of allegory and other political significations, which of necessity had recourse to substitution. Once allegory has done its laborious work, figure could transform these associations into immediate identifications.



82 Ashrabhuja Devi, the revised Ravi Varma Press chromolithograph.

Allegory offers the theoretical possibility of closure. 'Meanings' can be specified and secured: producers and consumers can agree (or rather attempt to agree) that under the prevailing code a particular sign stands in for another sign. This is the basic mechanism of allegory, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* explains as the 'description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance'.

*Bharat Uddhar*, a proscribed image from 1931 (illus. 83), presupposed knowledge of its missing allegorical referent: the story of Markandey. Images produced by Chitrashala and the Ravi Varma Press (illus. 84)

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BHARATUDDHAR.

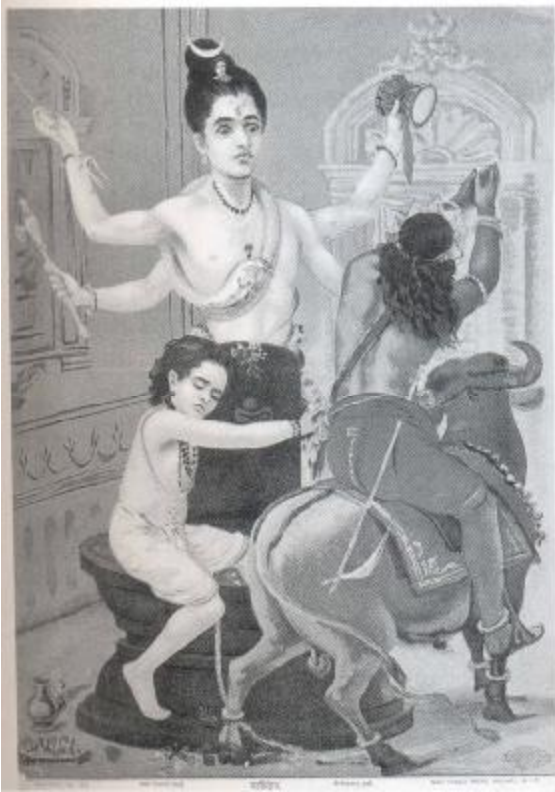
83 *Bharat Uddhar*. Prabhu Dayas. Published by Shyam Sunder La!, Cawnpore. A proscribed image in which Gandhi saves Mother India from the deprivations of colonial rule.

depicting Shiv saving the young Markandey from Yam, the lord of the dead astride a buffalo, had circulated widely since the 1880s. *Bharat Uddhar* appropriated this basic structure but substituted Mother India for Markandey, British Rule for Yam, and Gandhi for Shiv. With foreknowledge of the Markandey image, the viewer of *Bharat Uddhar* could readily translate the one narrative into the other.

Allegory's referentiality was certainly presumed by the colonial state, and its method of surveillance was (to use Dan Sperber's term) 'cryptological', that is predicated on the assumption that signs could be decoded for their 'true' meanings.<sup>27</sup> Thus Kunja Behari Gangopadhyaya's early twentieth-century Bengali drama *Matri Puja* was 'a seditious allegory on the present political situation of the country',<sup>28</sup> despite being 'ostensibly founded on a well-known incident of Hindu mythology';

But the colonial state was also *ethnographical*-concerned with audiences' reception of signs, seeking confirmation in the ability of the wider audience to decode the 'message': 'It will be clear from the newspaper criticisms printed at the end of the book that it has been generally understood as referring "to many present day political and social ideas"',<sup>9</sup>

Many Home Political Department proscription orders describe pictures under a cryptological rubric,<sup>30</sup> assuming that the image can be disassembled and its signs checked off against their presumed referents. Alongside court judgements on the 'meanings' of contentious images, there are a number of remarkable adjudications on seditious poems and plays in which colonial judges turn their hands to practical criticism, minutely analysing the possible intentions and effects of words and phrases.



84 *Markandey*, c. 1900. Ravi Varma Press. The mythological template for the previous image.

#### OF STAMPS, DHOTIS AND THE EVERYDAY

Popular anti-colonial interventions appear to have created an increasingly congested circulation of signs continually available to public recall in this semi-otically saturated domain of the everyday. **In** this circulation, events and their representations criss-crossed media - from lithograph to theatre, from theatre to cinema, from cinema to leaflet, a pattern with which the reader will by now be familiar.

In July 1930 the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee issued stamps bearing the words 'Boycott British Goods' with the intention that its supporters would affix these to envelopes and postcards. The colonial state's response to these

'boycott stamps' was to throw into stark relief the difficulties it faced in regulating the visual 'everyday'.

Initially it appeared that there would be no objection to the use of such stamps. The Bombay Presidency Postmaster told the *Indian Daily Mail* on 4 July that 'You can write anything you like on your cover. If you like you may even affix your photograph to it. So long as it bears our usual stamp there can be no objection.' Such indifference caused concern to others in the Government and legal clarification was sought as to whether the slogan ('Boycott British Goods') might be considered 'seditious', 'scurrilous' or 'grossly offensive' under the relevant section of the Post Office Act. The advice given indicated that the Government could act if it wished, but it would then also have to proscribe slogans such as 'Shop with Selfridges'. Extensive correspondence between the Home Political Department and the Bombay Postmaster General ensued, and suggestions for further legislation were made before the Legal Department again pointed out the difficulties of isolating these specific stamps in any new proscription. 'I have found great difficulty' opined D. G. Mitchell, 'in devising a formula which is free from obvious objection':

I have tried several variants of the term 'political significance', but could not find one which did not cover harmless activities. . . The difficulties may be seen from a consideration of the following actual cases - or probable cases (1) Photographs of Mr. Gandhi with no accompanying text; (2) reproductions of the 'national flag'; (3) the device of the Overseas League, from whom I have just received a communication; (4) an open post-card soliciting a vote at an election; (5) post-cards bearing the slogan 'Vote for Swaraj' (or any other political cause); (6) the device on the envelopes of the P. & O. [Company]



85 *Bharat Ki Lut*. Devnarayan Varma. A proscribed image from 1930: an engorged and rapacious England loots a starving India.

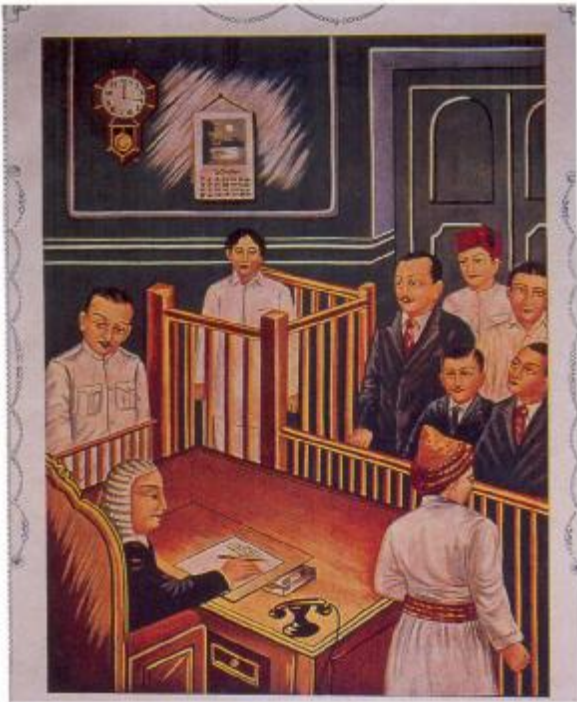
This domain of indeterminate 'political significance' is precisely the domain that 'national figure' comes to occupy.

Perhaps the most striking anti-colonial cross-media artefact was a *dhoti* sold in Calcutta in 1910, on which was printed a song in praise of Khudiram Bose, who had been executed in 1908 (see below). The Bengali text both began and ended with words that are still widely sung in Calcutta: 'Mother, farewell; I shall go to the gallows with a smile.; The people of India will see this.; One bomb can kill a man.; There are lakhs of bombs in our houses.; Mother, what can the English do?'<sup>31</sup> The appearance of this *dhoti* triggered a surreal debate as to whether it could be considered a 'document' under section 2(6) of the Indian Press Act 1910 (it was finally deemed to be so and Notification no. 1350-P was published in the *Calcutta Gazette Extraordinary*, declaring that all such *dhotis* should be 'forfeited to His Majesty').

This is one of many examples of nationalist signs' continual challenge to the colonial state's ability to categorize and control them. Many Nathdvara images, such as Narottam's *Maharana Pratap* (see illus. 77),

presented a similar, though more successful, challenge: allegory (intentional politics) becomes 'figure' and is mutated into a realm of the unclassifiable, a corporeal domain beyond analysis and constraint. This process can perhaps be seen most clearly in the transformation of the artist Rup Kishor Kapur from allegorist to figuralist. His career is discussed in the next section.

My use of 'figure' here loosely follows the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard's use of it to connote a domain where 'meaning is not produced and communicated, but intensities are felt',<sup>32</sup> Lyotard invoked 'figure' as the opposite of 'discourse', a domain of the knowable characterized by 'linguistic philosophical closure'. My own usage of 'figure' differs from Lyotard, however, in not assuming the same ontological independence that he grants it. I use it to invoke, in a deliberately flexible manner, the densely compressed performative and the affectively and libidinally charged domain that escapes conventional signification.



KHJDDIMS-L.L

86 *Khudiram's Trial*. c. 1940. Unknown Bengali artist and publisher. A later image depicting events in 1908. Note the clock and calendar at top left.

writing and the telephone to his right, and above all by systems of temporal regularity - the clock and calendar hanging on the wall behind Khudiram.

The image presents what is literally a carpentered universe - the perspectival regularities of the judge's desk expand to trap Khudiram within its wooden constraints, and this space of colonial jurisdiction is further defined through linear rigidities of the background wall and the door, which are arbitrarily truncated by a photographic framing. Unlike the Nathdvara idealized landscapes, whose completeness curls up and around the picture frame, the realist framing of 'Khudiram's Trial' suggests its relation to a continuum of other hostile spaces and this linkage is further suggested by the telephone, whose wire leads



87 Brojen, execution of Khudiram, c. 1930S-40S. Unknown publisher. A barbarous colonial temporality again features prominently.

out of the bottom of the picture, the recipient of the letter the judge is writing and the 'meanwhile' of all the other colonized spaces in which similar clocks tick away in this barbarous and violent 'empty homogenous time'.

Lithographs of Khudiram's execution continue to explore this confrontation with the 'calculating analytic'<sup>34</sup> of colonialism. Brojen's image (see illus. 87) traces the causal connection between the judgement shown in the top-right corner and the execution that is the main subject of the image, and counterpoises this on the left with an open doorway. The main part of the Brojen image shares much with a Rising Art Cottage lithograph (illus. 88): the retributive state technology of death is represented in detail, with



88 Khudiram's execution. Rising Art Cottage chromolithograph c. 1940. The British figure on the left times the event precisely.

Khudiram suspended from a wooden frame and his noose controlled by a complex system of pulleys. Other foundations of the colonial state (the gun and the bible) are shown, and controlling the whole event is a red-uniformed, sola-topped English soldier who looks at his watch, synchronizing this particular act of barbarity with a 'meanwhile' of countless other brutalities. In the Rising Art Cottage print the technorationalist grid of this barbarity is mapped by the chequered floor and the striations of the brick wall over which, nevertheless, an Indian sky can be seen and thus the immortal can be contrasted with the temporal and corrupt.

'Among those', in the words of the 1918 Rowlatt Sedition Committee Report, 'who united to excuse

Khudiram and to praise the bomb as a weapon of offence against unpopular officials was Tilak', whose connection with the Chitrashala Press from the late 1870s onwards we have already discussed (see chapter 3).<sup>35</sup> One of the manifestations of this was an article entitled 'The Country's Misfortune', which appeared in *Kesari*, the Marathi paper that Tilak himself edited, on 12 May 1908. In this, Tilak expressed his sorrow that a country 'which by its very nature is mild and peaceloving' has fallen into a condition akin to European Russia. He noted that even Khudiram felt sorry for the two women he had killed, but that since the partition of Bengal 'the minds of the Bengalis have become most exasperated' and that:

under these circumstances, no one in the world, except the white officials, inebriated with the insolence of authority, will think that not even a very few of the people of Bengal should become turn-headed and feel inclined to commit excesses. Experience shows that even a cat shut up in a house rushes with vehemence upon a person who confines [it there] and tries to kill it,<sup>36</sup>

It was this article, together with a subsequent piece published on 9 June 1908, bearing a title that translated as 'These remedies are not lasting', that was the official provocation for Tilak's trial in Bombay later in 1908, following which he would be imprisoned for six years. 'These remedies are not lasting' forecast the end of an iniquitous British rule in India. Earlier oppressive and unjust colonizers such as the Mughals, Tilak suggests, prompted discontent and extreme acts of *self-sacrifice but no report of this ever reached* 'the ears of the Government'.

In the twentieth century all this had changed: 'turn-headed men' now had access to the bomb and could make everyone sit up and listen. Tilak articulates this historical transformation not simply in terms of the oppressed's new access to weaponry but to the dissemination of a very particular chimerical technology of vernacular bomb-making. 'The bomb', he



Calcutta, to monitor popular chromolithographs for seditious intent. Gupte wrote to Risley that 'Of those I could collect last evening, I feel that the one printed for a cigarette manufacturer is *the most effective* and significant.<sup>42</sup> Gupte was referring to a Calcutta Art Studio lithograph of Kali (illus. 90) which had been in circulation in various forms since the late 1870S.<sup>43</sup> Gupte was alarmed, although quite why is sometimes hard to discern. He remarked on 'the artistically cunning "modulation" of the caste marks' on Kali's, garland of heads, noting that some lacked these marks, Gupte's conclusions seemingly being that they must be Europeans. **In** a similar vein, Gupte notes 'the symbolical British lion couchant in the. . . N. W. corner, his fall in the N. E. corner and a decapitated *red coated* soldier in the S. E. corner'. 'The falling head near the toes of the prostrate "husband" [Shiv]', he continues, 'leaves no doubt as to the intention of the designer'.<sup>44</sup> Gupte concludes with the observation that he is 'promised more "editions"', and that they will be forwarded to Risley.<sup>45</sup> It was Risley's awareness of such 'seditious' material, freely available on the streets of Calcutta, that encouraged him to draft the 1910 Press Act.

For Tilak the sense of a technology that had 'more the form of knowledge' must have had an earlier resonance as the result of his intimate relationship throughout the 1870S and '80S with the picture publisher Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar. Lithography itself, which had been so important in democratizing Indian print culture, might also be considered a technology that has 'more the form of knowledge'.

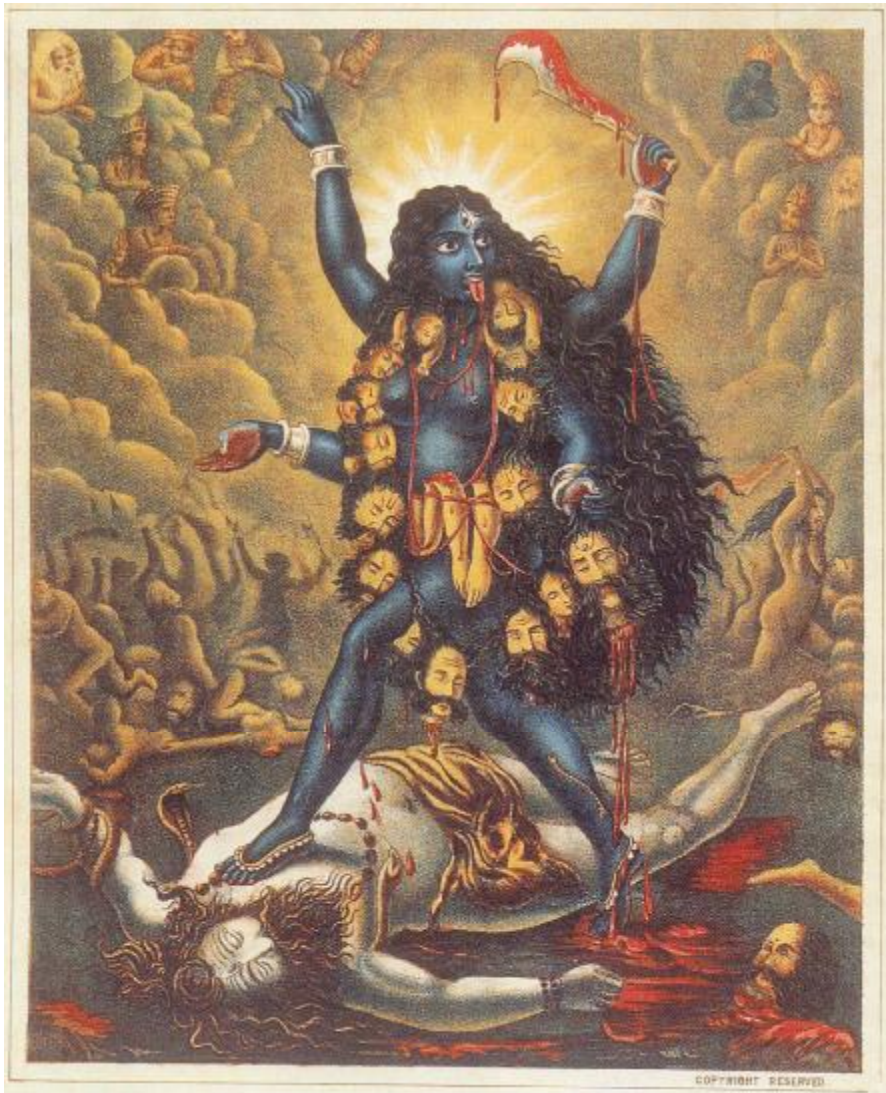
**If** the bomb was, for Tilak, especially attractive because of its new democratic technology, it was mobilized in counterpoint to a much older weapon - the sword. Like the bomb, the sword embodied a technological simplicity, but it was also a sign that linked the contemporary struggle to a mythic infrastructure that validated the freedom-fighters' actions. We have already seen some aspects of the complex pan-Indian linkages between images of Bhavani's sword that criss-cross from Maharastra to

Bengal and back again, and we will return to this shortly.

The 1908 trial is *interesting* in another respect: the verbatim proceedings *published* by Kelkar, the editor of *Mahratta*, had as its frontispiece a striking studio portrait of Tilak (illus. 89), beneath which was printed Tilak's proclamation that 'In spite of the verdict of the Jury, I maintain that I am innocent. There are higher Powers that rule the destiny of things and it may be the will of Providence that the cause which I represent may prosper more by my suffering than by my remaining free.' The photograph itself is attributed to 'Phalke and Co. Dadar Bombay'. It is *impossible to be* certain, but it is overwhelmingly likely that this was a



89 Portrait of Tilak by 'Phalke & Co.'. Pasted in photographic frontispiece to N. C. Kelkar's verbatim report on the 1908 trial.



90 Calcutta Art Studio chromolithograph of Kali, collected by B. A. Gupte in Dalhousie Square, Calcutta, in December 1908. The advertising messages around the image urge Indians to buy Kali cigarettes 'to look after the interests of this country's poor and humble workers'.

product of O. G. Phalke's period working as a photographer, before the founding of Lakshmi Art Printing Works, his work for the Ravi Varma Press and his emergence as the 'father' of Indian cinema (see chapter 4). We should recall that it would be Tilak's *Kesari* in which Phalke would announce the nationalist aspiration that had impelled him to make films: the desire to 'see Indian images on the screen'.<sup>46</sup>

Tilak's closeness to another major figure, Lala Lajpat Rai (the 'Punjab Kesari'),<sup>47</sup> was marked in some visual propaganda. The *Om Arya Kailendar* (illus. 91) for February 1919 pictures them both beneath a swordwielding Mother India. The sword is inscribed 'shakti' and she bears a book inscribed 'vidya' (education). 'Awake brave Indians', the calendar (which was proscribed) implores. Each month of the year delivers a new energizing proclamation:

Indians should now give up their natural humbleness . . . we must avoid expressing our demands in doubtful and ambiguous terms.

Arise, Mother India! Awake, Mother India! Wipe the tears from your face! Do not be anxious. Your sons have determined to give their lives for your sake, if you require it.

Be ready with body, mind, wealth and strength to obtain your birth right.<sup>48</sup>

During the widespread opposition to the Simon Commission's arrival in 1928 Lala Lajpat Rai was injured when police charged with lathis and subsequently died. The Intelligence Bureau's *Terrorism in India 1917-1936* report claimed that his death was 'falsely alleged' to have been 'the result of his having been beaten by the police' but that 'in point of fact L. Lajpat Rai received no injury' at their hands. Contemporary press images, however, suggest the contrary (illus. 92).

The Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (HSRA), which had been founded two months earlier in September 1928,<sup>49</sup> then targeted J. A. Scott, the Senior Superintendent of Police in Lahore who was held to



91 *Om Arya Kailendar*, 1919, with vignettes of Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai beneath Mother India. A proscribed publication.

be guilty of Lajpat Rai's death. On 17 December the HSRA assassinated Assistant Superintendent Saunders whom they mistook for Scott; Rajguru fired at him, causing him to fall from his motorbike, and Bhagat Singh shot Saunders several times as he lay on the ground. Chandra Shekhar Azad killed Head Constable Chanan Singh as they made their escape. Posters subsequently appeared (in Bhagat's handwriting) announcing that 'Saunders is dead, Lalaji is avenged'. Following this Bhagat Singh went to Calcutta, seeking instruction in explosives technology from Jatindra Nath Das.



92 Newspaper image of Lala Lajpat Rai's wounds received while demonstrating against the Simon Commission in 1928 (source unknown). It is these wounds which led to Rai's death, triggering some of the actions of the HSRA.

Further HSRA actions included Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt throwing bombs into the Legislative Assembly in April 1929. Bhagat was arrested, sentenced to death by a Special Tribunal under Ordinance No. III of 1930 and, together with Shukhdev and Rajguru, hanged on 23 March 1931 (illus. 93 & 94). The images of Bhagat Singh's execution complete, with Khudiram, the circle along the other arc of which lies Lala Lajpat Rai and Tilak.

Bhagat Singh's popular appeal was (and still is) enormous, and this is usually presented as an intriguing anomaly: Jawaharlal Nehru's *Autobiography*

is usually cited noting Bhagat's 'sudden and amazing popularity'. The *Terrorism in India 1917-1936* report also commented on this remarkable popular acclaim:

Public opinion, unsettled by the Civil Disobedience Movement, ran wild and was further excited in favour of the revolutionaries under trial by most of the nationalist newspapers, which painted the accused as oppressed martyrs placed on their trial by an Imperialistic Government for purely patriotic acts. Bhagat Singh especially became a national hero, and his exploits were freely lauded in the nationalist press, so that, for a time, he bade fair to oust Mr. Gandhi as the foremost political figure of the day. His photograph was to be met with in many houses, and his plaster busts found a large market.

50

Bhagat Singh has also been the subject of numerous chromolithographs since 1931 and of several films: Jagdish Gautama's *Shaheed-E-Azam Bhagat Singh* (1954); K. N. Bansal's *Shaheed Bhagat Singh* (1963); S. Ram Sharma's famous hit *Shaheed* (1965), starring Manoj Kumar; and most recently Rajkumar Santoshi's *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* (2002). At the time of writing there are a further three films on Bhagat due for release.

Bhagat remains prominent in many South Asians' consciousness: I. K. Gujral's speech on the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence commenced with his 'gratitude [to] those innumerable martyrs who suffered in jail', and he then listed Ashfaq, Bismil, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Shukhdev. The Tamil Tiger leader Velupillai Pirabakaran, interviewed by a Jaffna literary magazine in April 1994 and quizzed as to what had impelled him to take up arms against oppression, replied that 'I developed a deep attachment to the Indian freedom struggle and martyrs like Subhash Chandra Bose, B[h]agat Singh and [Balgangadhar] Tilak'. And this celebration by national figures has been reciprocated consistently at a grass-roots level. Thus, for instance, in November 1998 the Chandigarh



93 Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Shukhdev, anonymous print c. 1931. Watched over by Nehru and Gandhi at the top of the image. the three martyrs are depicted within a tomb to sacrifice.



94 Lahore Case Conspiracy Decision. c. 1931. The main protagonists offer their heads to Mother India on the left. Krishna hovers above and on the right a ship takes revolutionaries across the Bay of Bengal to incarceration in the Andaman Islands.



KK: 'I'ilm  
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Shahud Bhagot Singh

95 Shaheed Bhagat Singh. c. 1940. A later colour version that develops Rup Kishor Kapur's iconography. Published by Rising Art Cottage, Calcutta.

Bharatiya Vidyalaya celebrated its Annual Day (with Finance Minister Kanwaljit Singh presiding) by staging a play: *Bhagat Singh, Prince among Martyrs*.<sup>53</sup> Continuing buoyant sales for H. R. Raja's images (see chapter 7) suggest that this popular enthusiasm is pervasive, especially in the Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.<sup>54</sup>

Bhagat Singh's huge popularity is on the face of it very surprising, indeed it is one of the puzzles of twentieth-century Indian history. The HSRA represented the antithesis of Gandhianism not only because of its commitment to violence, but also in its militant atheism. This, as Sumit Sarkar notes, was most marked in Bhagat Singh (the HSRA member who most captured the popular imagination), who was 'marked by an increasingly deep commitment to Marxian

socialism and - equally remarkable, perhaps, given the strong Hindu religiosity of the earlier terrorists militant atheism'.<sup>55</sup> Bhagat Singh's remarkable prison notebooks, which have been published recently, provide ample testament to his rigorous materialist mind.<sup>56</sup>

But this puzzle can be partly unravelled by attending to the images themselves and their chief feature the trilby. In so doing we will find an echo of Tilak's trope of the bomb as 'a practice of knowledge' in Bhagat Singh's audacious mimicry. The trilby will emerge as the chief sign of Bhagat's ability to 'pass'.

Since the first popular images of him appeared in 1931, Bhagat has nearly always been depicted wearing a trilby. Although born into a Jat Sikh family and returning to the turban just prior to his execution, under the influence of Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh,<sup>57</sup> his popular visual incarnation has nearly always been as a mimic of the English sahib. His trilby, it transpires, has a historical explanation: pursued by the police, Bhagat Singh escaped disguised as a wealthy official.<sup>58</sup> J. N. Sanyal's proscribed 1931 publication gives this account:

He dressed up as a young Government official, adopted a big official name, put labels on his trunk and portmanteau~ and in the company of a beautiful lady, entrained a first class compartment at the Central Railway station in the face of those very cm officials who were specially deputed to arrest the assassin of Mr Saunders. <sup>59</sup>

Sanyal, we should remember, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for the publication of this book. Other key texts in the Bhagat cult, such as those by K. K. Khullar<sup>60</sup> and Manmath Nath Gupta, concur in emphasizing this episode. Gupta explains that Chandra Shekhar Azad, who is commonly represented with Bhagat, had to adopt a different disguise:

Chandrashekhar Azad, owing to his unique personality, could not fit into this bourgeois set up.









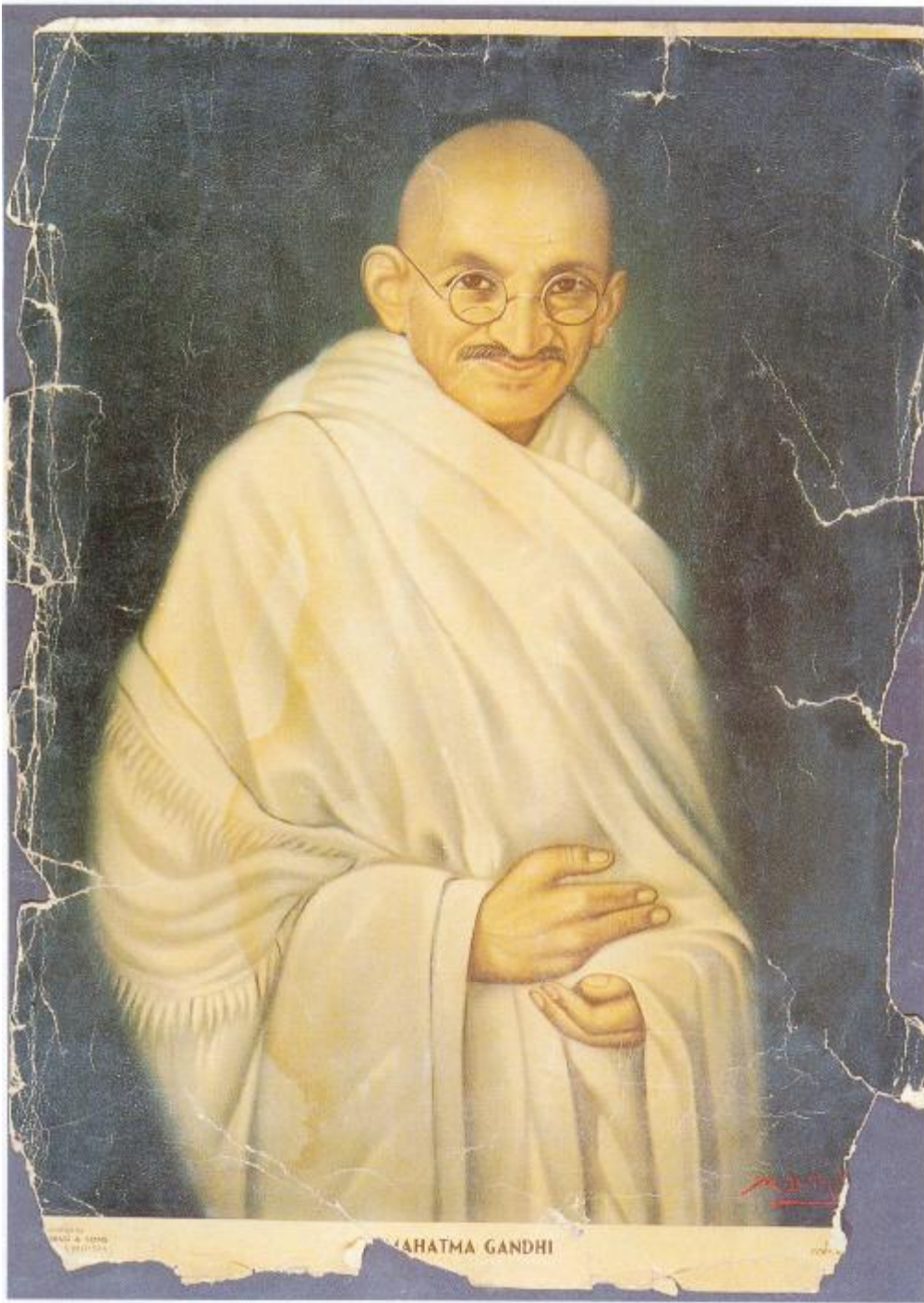
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महामाया शक्ति

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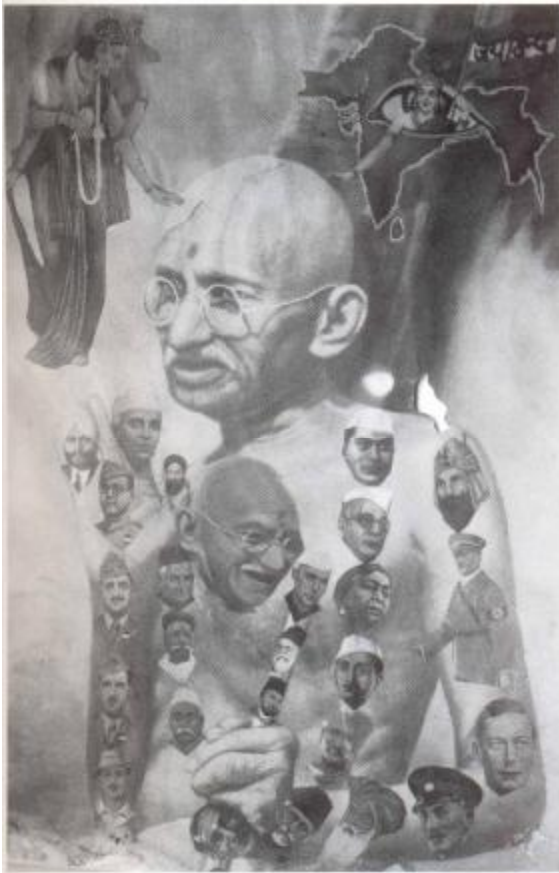
98 Mahamaya Shakti, 'Chitrashala Oehradun' (Rup Kishor Kapur and Kalicharan) c. 1940S. Published by Hem Chander Bhargava.





99 M. C. Trivedi, *Mahatma Gandhi*, c. 1931. Chromolithograph published by S. S. Brijbasi.

(illus. 100). These take the form of the montaged heads of contemporary national and international political leaders, including Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Subhash Chandra Bose, Hitler, Mussolini, Bhagat Singh, Tilak and many others. This unlikely cohort clearly share a common concern with power and efficacy, rather than ethics. A further montage from the same source, beneath the slogan 'Jay Hind' (victory to India) shows Gandhi on the right of the image pointing towards the central figure of Subhash Chandra Bose. Bose, as is customary in such images, is attired in the uniform of the Indian National Army (INA), with whose forces he hoped to free India (illus. 101). His auto-beheaded figure (of the sort we have



100 Photographic montage of Gandhi embodying other figures of political potency. c. mid-1940S. central India.

seen commonly used for Bhagat Singh) is captioned *Subhash balidan* (Subhash's sacrifice) and he kneels amidst the severed heads of others who have suffered or died in the struggle. Underneath the figure of Mother India, who is receiving Bose's gift, is a garlanded monument. Barely readable, this would have been immediately recognizable to Bose admirers as the INA martyrs monument to Bose, following his probable death in an air crash on 8 July 1945. Other figures included in this astonishingly complex montage are Chandra Shekhar Azad and Sardar Patel.

We are confronted with an interesting paradox: during Gandhi's lifetime chromolithography generally positioned him within the 'empty, homogenous time' of the documentary photographic image.<sup>82</sup> But local

photographic practice, at least as evidenced by the two Mhow prints, was able much more easily to discard a disenchanting chronotope and inhabit a messianic space. The technology of production and its economic/ideological constraints may supply the answer to this: the artisanal montage techniques of the local photographer were more likely to reflect the popular messianism of the streets than the capitalintensive products of national colour presses.

An overview of local print culture suggests, however, that the 'official' vision of Gandhi as an inhabitant of an empty, homogenous, space is - in the broader scheme of things - the exception to the general messianic rule. We have already noted the prevalence of pictorial affirmations of Bhagat Singh's violent actions. Even more striking are the images

that question the relationship between what we might term 'official' and 'unofficial' nationalism. Images commonly suggested the indebtedness of official nationalism to revolutionary terrorism. Among the Bhagat Singh related images proscribed in the early 1930S were some that depicted B. K. Dutt tearing open his chest to reveal the face of Bhagat Singh and other co-revolutionaries. This gesture, signifying devotion to one's personal master, has as its visual archetype the monkey-deity Hanuman's cleaving of his chest to reveal his master, the god Ram. Circulating alongside



101 *Jay Hind*, photographic montage of Subhash Chandra Bose, Gandhi and others, c. mid-1940s, central India.

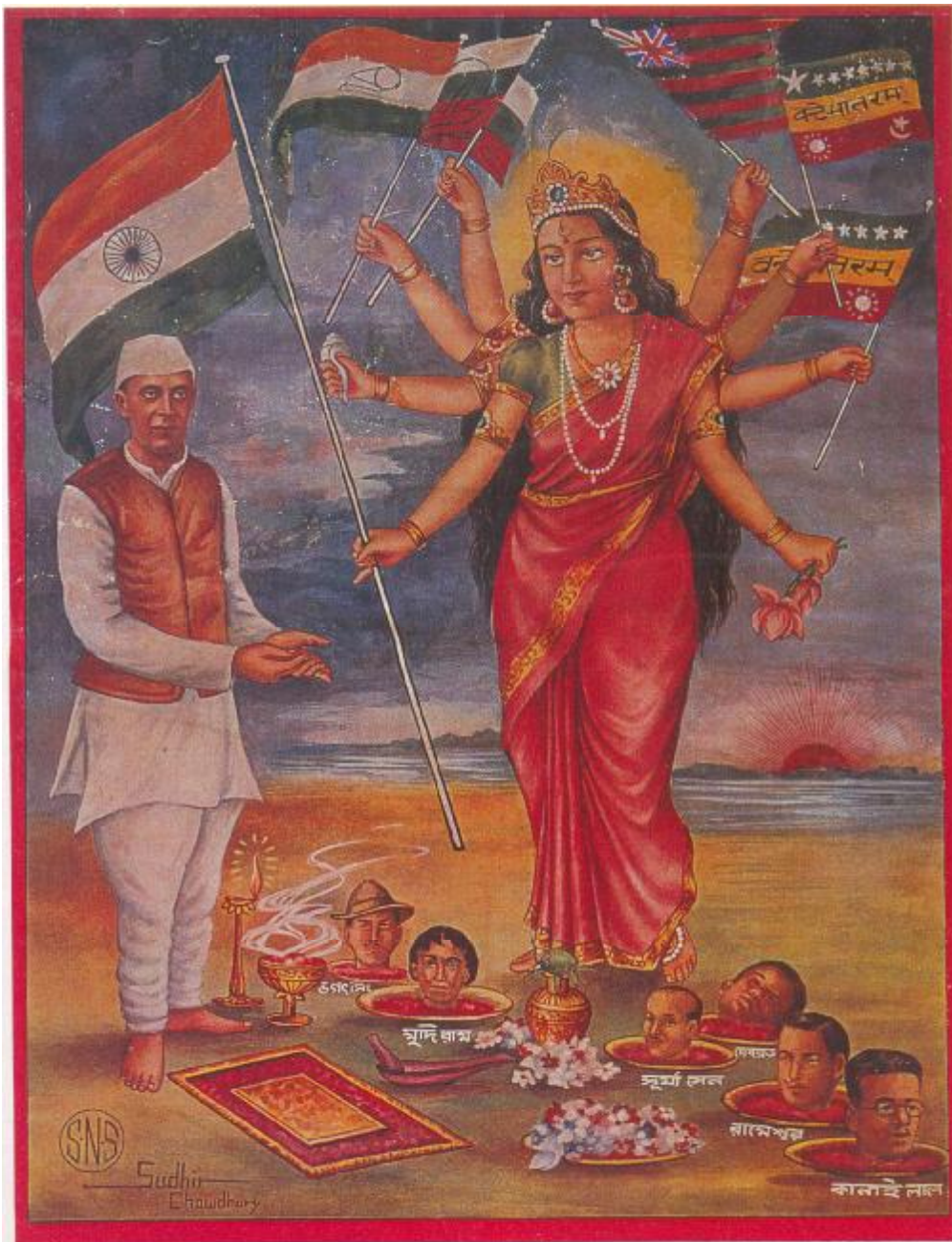


102 Gandhi reveals his true allegiances to B. K. Dutt, C. 1931. Just as Hanuman, the monkey-god tears open his chest to reveal his allegiance to his master, the god Ram, so here Gandhi tears open his (inferior) peaceful exterior to reveal his faith in revolutionary struggle.

these images of B. K. Dutt were even more astonishing ones that position B. K. Dutt opposite Gandhi (illus. 102). Gandhi, who has cast down his staff, is himself tearing open his chest to reveal Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Shukhdev. In a similar way an image by Sudhir Chowdhury, *Shaheed Smirity* (Remembrance of martyrs), dating from about 1948 and published by the Calcuttan 'S.N.S.', shows Nehru as the recipient of the blessings of a free Mother India, made possible only through the sacrifices of revolutionary terrorists (including Bhagat Singh), whose severed heads are placed alongside a *lata* and *puja* lamp (illus. 103). Official nationalism may have decried the activities of revolutionary terrorists, but popular visual culture asserted the nation's debt to those prepared to kill and be killed in the cause of freedom.

A similar principle of the accession of nonviolence to the power of violence is apparent in the Calcutta Rising Art Cottage's *Mata Ka Bandhan Machan* (Mother's deliverance from bondage; illus. 104). This depicts Mother India giving (on either side) a spinning wheel to Gandhi, and the flag of Independent India to a crouching Nehru. But in the centre she bestows the *talvar* (sword) of freedom on Subhash Chandra Bose.

For consumers of this image, conditioned by similar images that show figures identified along the continuum of BhavanijBharat Mata giving a sword to Shivaji (the narrative that Tilak had propagated; see chapter 3), there could have been little doubt that this was the same sword, given once again. The doubling of PratapjShivaji and Bhagat SinghjChandra Shekhar Azad (sometimes replaced by their Hindu rightist antinomies, K. B. Hedgewar and M. S. Golwalkar) and the occasional interpolation of a mediatory Sub hash Chandra Bose, establishes a messianic time in which persons and objects leap across empty, homogenized time. *Mata Ka Bandhan Machan* establishes a commensurability between Gandhi's freedom through spinning, Nehru's freedom through conventional statist politics and Netaji's liberation through the sword.



Shaheed-Smiriti,

m:-~

103 Sudhir Chowdhury, *Shaheed Smirity*, late 1940s. The sacrifices of slaughtered revolutionaries permit Nehru to receive Mother India's blessing.



104 *Mata ka Bandhan Machan*, late 1940s. Rising Art Cottage. Calcutta. Bose accepts Bhavani's sword, repeating earlier imagery in which Shivaji received the same sword.

The major presses' unwillingness to affirm Gandhi as an avatar during his lifetime rapidly decayed with the grief of his assassination on 30 January 1948. The images issued after this event are radically different in style and substance and can be divided into 'apotheosis' images and 'avatar cycle' images. The former depict Gandhi ascending to heaven in the manner of eighteenth-century European Imperial heroes, and the latter present a central atemporal form around which a biography in the form of 'descents' appears.

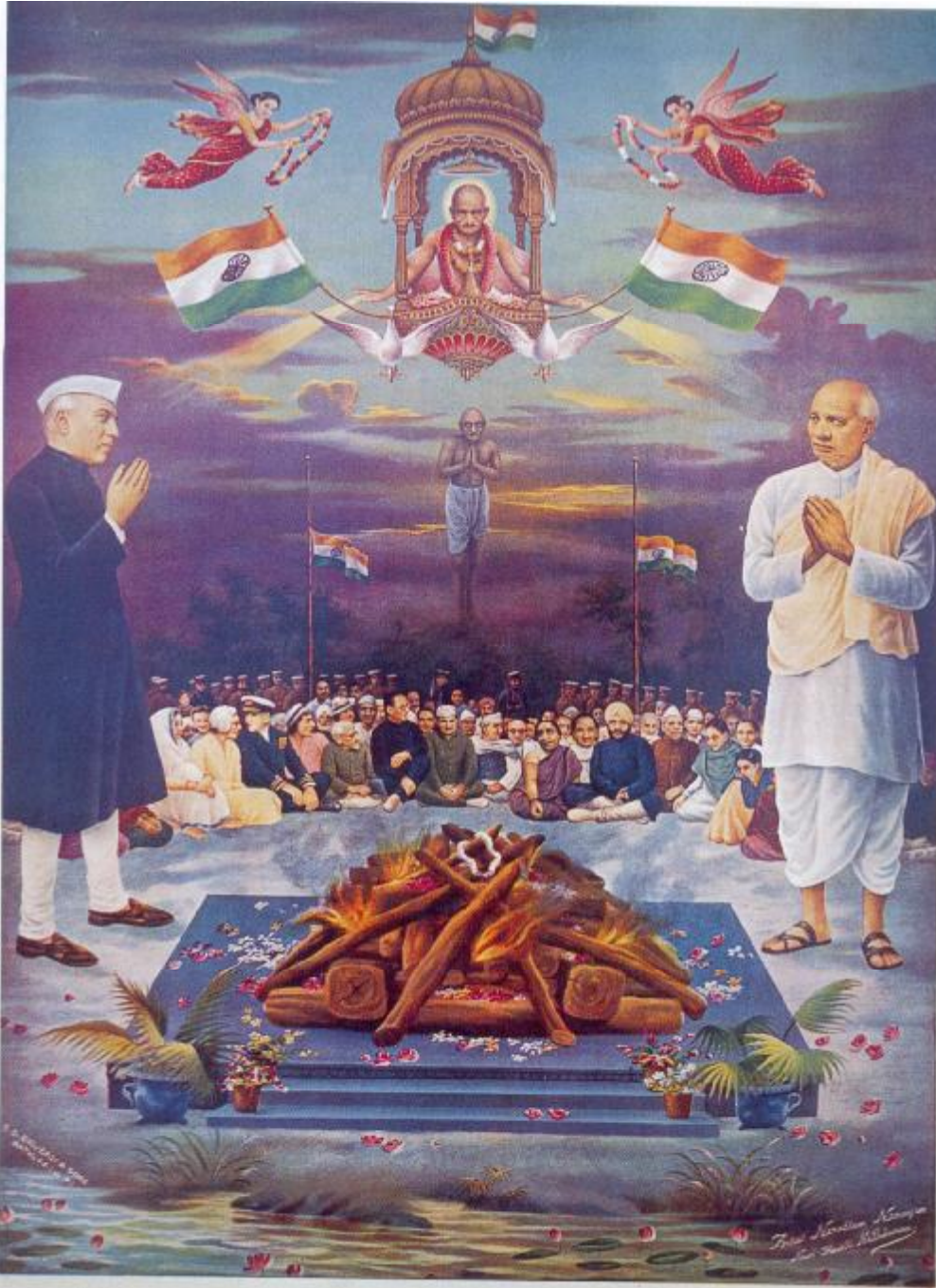
Brijbasi's *Gandhiji ki swargyatra* (Gandhiji's journey to heaven) shows Gandhi hovering above the heads of Nehru and Patel as he is borne up to heaven in a celestial *rath* drawn by two *apsaras* (illus. 105). This mode of locomotion is also present in a similar

image (probably by Sudhir Chowdhury), but here the Buddha and Jesus take the places of the *apsaras*, waiting to welcome Gandhi into a realm of renunciatory beatitude.

*Gandhiji ki swargyatra* was painted by that great Nathdvara image-maker Narottam Narayan Sharma and in the intriguing detail of the image he conveyed much about the nature of the relationship between the Brijbasi business and Gandhi. Margaret Bourke-White witnessed the scene that Narottam painted at close quarters and has left a moving record:

Nehru, Patel and Baldev Singh, the Defence Minister, performed the final touches on the bier. . . At the burning ground I made my way to the pile of sandalwood logs where the cremation would take place. Three Hindu priests were pouring pails of ghee . . . on the logs. . . Then an oddly assorted little group came and sat down cross-legged on the ground, as though facing a camp fire. Among them were Lord and Lady Mountbatten, the Chinese Ambassador, Maulana Azad, the Muslim scholar who had been so close to Gandhi, Mrs Naidu, the warm-hearted poet, who in happier days called Gandhiji her 'Mickey Mouse', and Raj Kumari, literally bowed down with grief.

Suddenly these watchers had to rise to their feet and cling together to keep from being trampled on. The procession was approaching, the crowds about it surging, uncontrollably, close to the pyre. Although I was within a few feet of the sandalwood logs, my view of Gandhi's body was blocked off by the crush of people desperately eager for one last look before their Mahatma was given over to flames. Sometimes I could catch sight of Nehru's haggard face as he stood by the edge of the bier, then a glimpse of Patel in his toga-like robe. . . The flames rose high into the sky now, and the million people seemed to have sunk into a low bowl of darkness.<sup>83</sup>



... I

105 Narottam Narayan Sharma, *Gandhiji ki Svargyatra* ('Gandhi's Heavenly Journey'), 1948. Published by S. S. Brijbasi.



Narottam Narayan's image gives little sense of the grief-stricken panic that Bourke-White evokes so well, but he provides a remarkably accurate record of the individuals present at the cremation. We may presume that he relied on some photographic reference<sup>84</sup> for most of this: Nehru and Patel are given prominence on either side of the pyre, and in the background we can see the Mountbattens, Baldev Singh and others. Among these, however, there is a curious, though familiar, interpolation: the face of Shrinathdasji Brijbasi (see also illus. 112) can be seen peering between the Chinese Ambassador and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (see detail in illus. 106). Narottam here, perhaps inevitably, conjoined two men who were arguably equally dependent on each

other: Srinathdasji, the businessman who found in Gandhi a saleable icon who also animated the divine landscape that his images constructed; Gandhi, who in Srinathdasji unknowingly found the ideal liaison officer in the production of the poetic landscape of a morally pure and independent India.

Brijbasi images also depicted Gandhi's arrival in the world of the gods. *Devlok* (illus. 107), painted by the Nathdvara artist K. Himalal, shows Gandhi at the front of a group of deceased nationalists who are being honoured by a group of ancient *rishis* (sages). All this takes place under the benign watch of the three major deities: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv. The formal symmetry of the image is accentuated by the framing arch that contributes to



106 Detail of illus. 105. The face of Shrinathdasji Brijbasi is shown peeping between Abul Kalam Azad and the Chinese Ambassador to Delhi.



07 K. Himalal, *Devlok*, c. 1948. Published by S. S. Brijbasi. Gandhi, Tilak, and other deceased nationalists meet with the *rishis* under the gaze of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv.

the creation of a meaning-saturated space, which stands in sharp contrast to the empty homogenous time of elite nationalist politics.

Ashis Nandy has argued that Gandhi was in many respects as much 'Christian' as 'Hindu'.<sup>85</sup> This provocative and troubling suggestion seems to have been taken as axiomatic by painters in the late 1940s, for a recurring theme is that of the parallelism between Gandhi and Christ and between Gandhi's assassination and the crucifixion of Christ.

This visual metaphor occurs in a painting by B. Mohar, distributed by Hem Chander Bhargava, which depicts Gandhi seated on top of the world. Behind his manifest fleshy form is a shadow in which the yogic contours of the Buddha encompass the silhouette of the Crucifixion. This morphological similarity was also used by the prolific artist

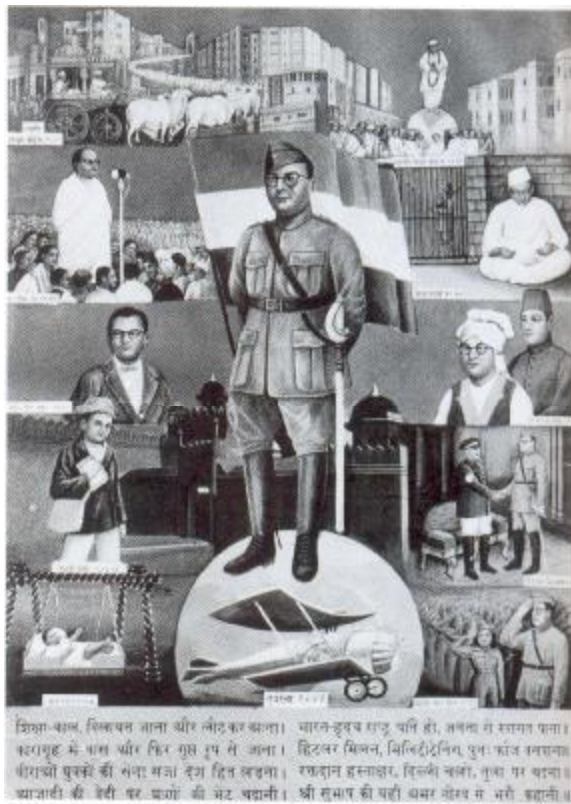
M. L. Sharma in an image in which Gandhi's posture and raised hand are mirrored by those of the Buddha behind him.

Some images do posit a divine Hindu identity. In one he is shown standing on top of the world in a pose associated with Hanuman. Other images make the association more explicit: an anonymous print from Tower HalfTone Calcutta positions Gandhi in front of a celestial Om - the transcendent syllable - above the clouds. This connotes Gandhi's absorption into the void of Brahma, but it also draws on a long tradition of similar imagery dating as far back as Ravi Varma and, more recently, two Narottam Narayan portraits of Krishna depicted within the sacred syllable.

Perhaps the most revealing images, however, are those that suggest Gandhi's status as an avatar through their appropriation of the pictorial forms of avatar representation. Since the 1880s, prints have been in circulation depicting Vishnu and his avatars. All of these have a common pictorial structure: Vishnu is depicted at the centre and around this, usually in a clockwise order, are represented his various avatars (most commonly 10, but sometimes 22 or 26). The same structure is also used to reveal the narrative of a particular avatar: Krishna may be given the central

place and his biography then unfolds in a clockwise set of vignettes. These images give form to the notion that the enduring abstract form of Vishnu is periodically made manifest through different incarnations who descend to play their role in the affairs of man.

This established template has been used to document the lives of many major nationalist figures following their death. Several images by different publishers position Gandhi within this avatar-template.<sup>86</sup> In the artist Dinanath's *Evolution of Gandhi* (illus. 109), published by Kananyalal Lachoomal of Delhi, the circle of Gandhi's life is mediated by his corpse shrouded in a flag (bearing his last words, 'Hare Ram') at the bottom of the picture. At the start of the circle at the bottom left we see his birth from a lotus, his early years as a suited barrister, the Dandi salt march at the top and



108 The ten avatars of Subhash Chandra Bose, c. 1950.



109 Dinanath, *Evolution of Gandhi*, c. 1948. Published by Kananyalal Lachoomal, Delhi.

