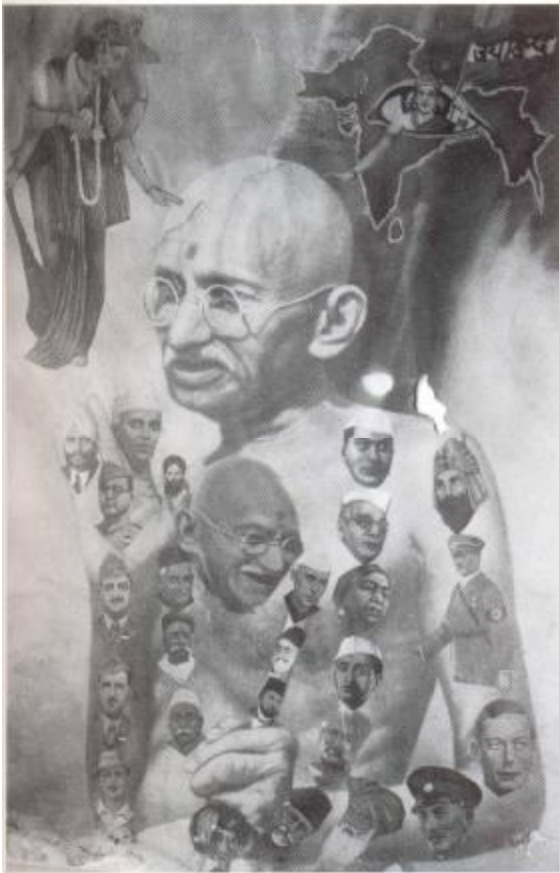


99 M. C. Trivedi, *Mahatma Gandhi*, c. 1931. Chromolithograph published by S. S. Brijbasi.

(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.⁸² 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.

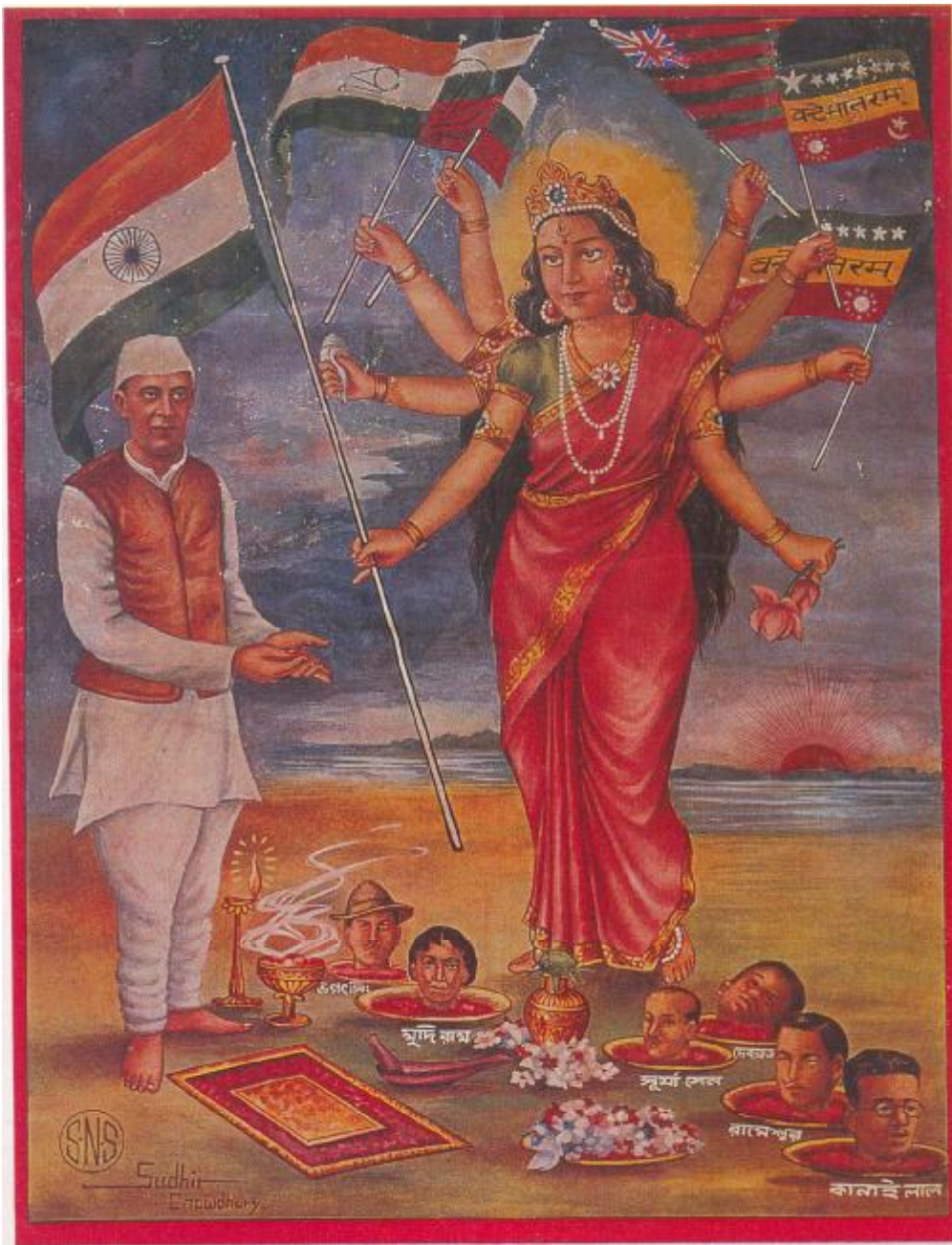


102 Gandhi reveals his true allegiances to B. K. Dutt, C. 1931. Just as Hanuman, the monkey-god tears open his chest to reveal his allegiance to his master, the god Ram, so here Gandhi tears open his (inferior) peaceful exterior to reveal his faith in revolutionary struggle.

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.

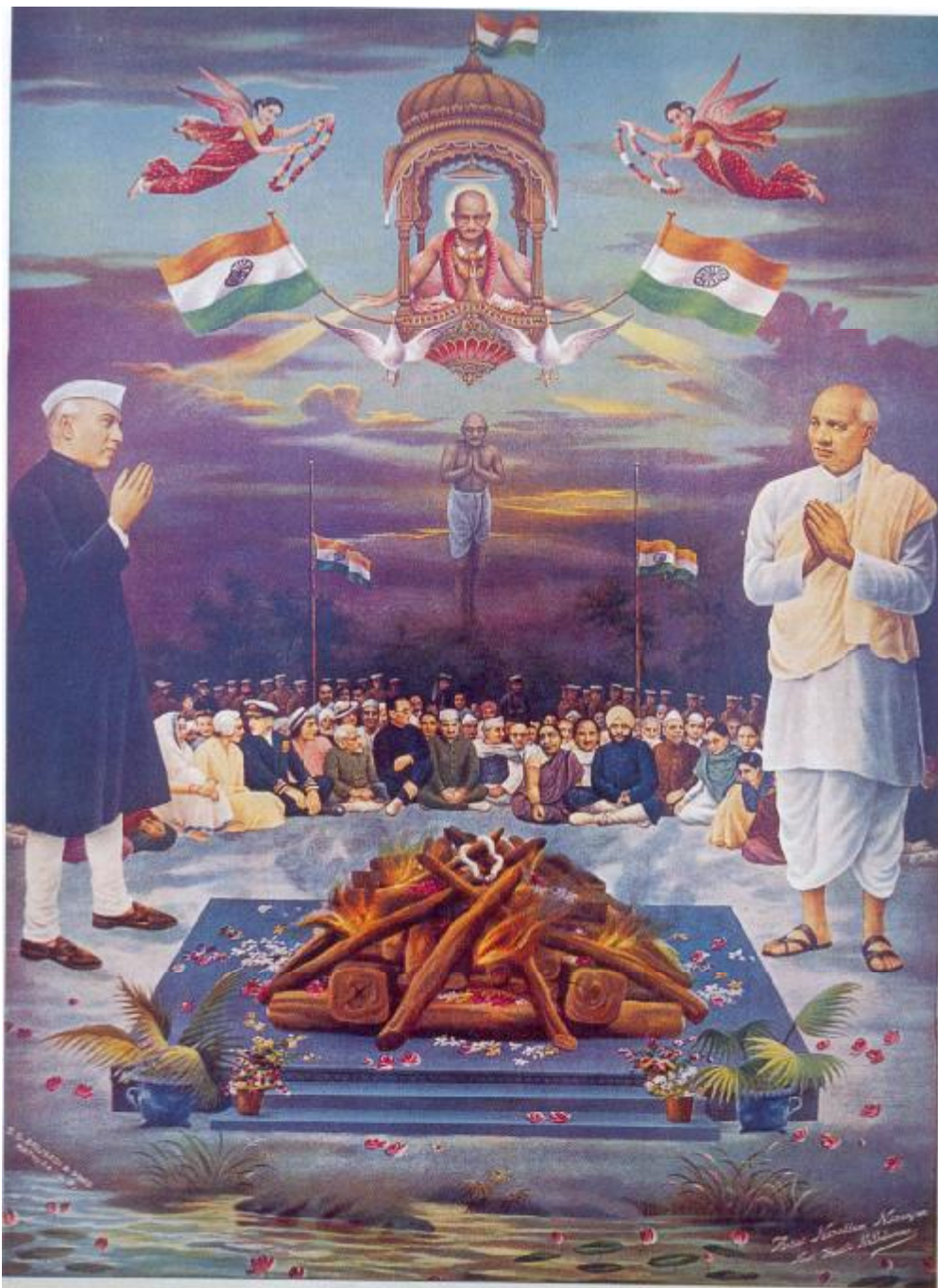
Brijbasi's *Gandhiji ki swargyatra* (Gandhiji's journey to heaven) shows Gandhi hovering above the heads of Nehru and Patel as he is borne up to heaven in a celestial *rath* drawn by two *apsaras* (illus. 105). This mode of locomotion is also present in a similar

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.⁸³



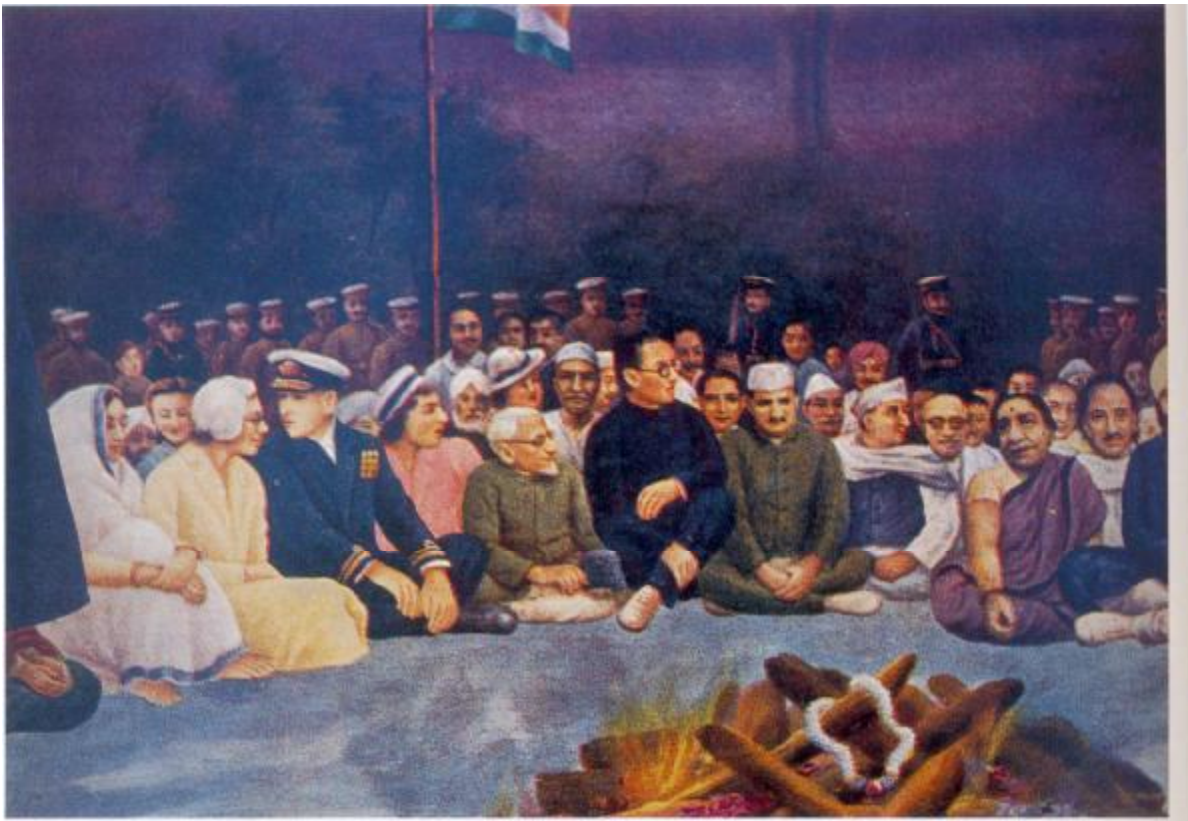
... I

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 reference⁸⁴ 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'.⁸⁵ 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

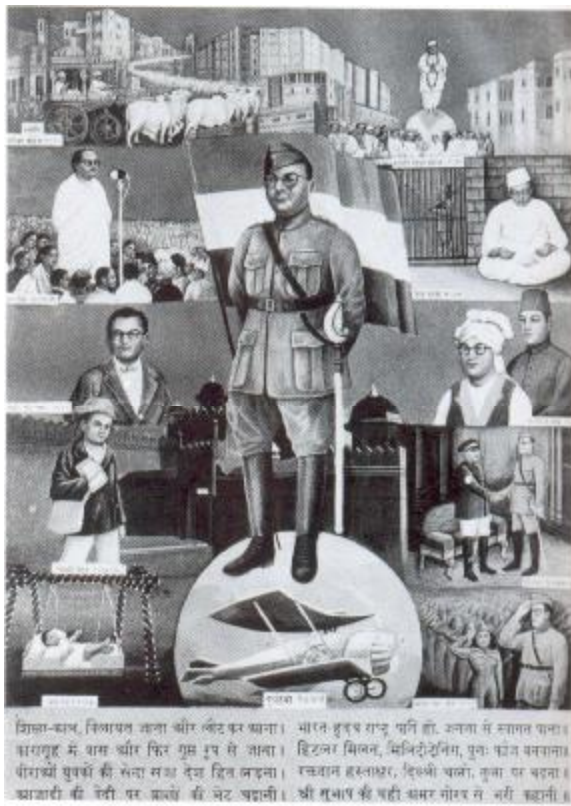
M. L. Sharma in an image in which Gandhi's posture and raised hand are mirrored by those of the Buddha behind him.

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.

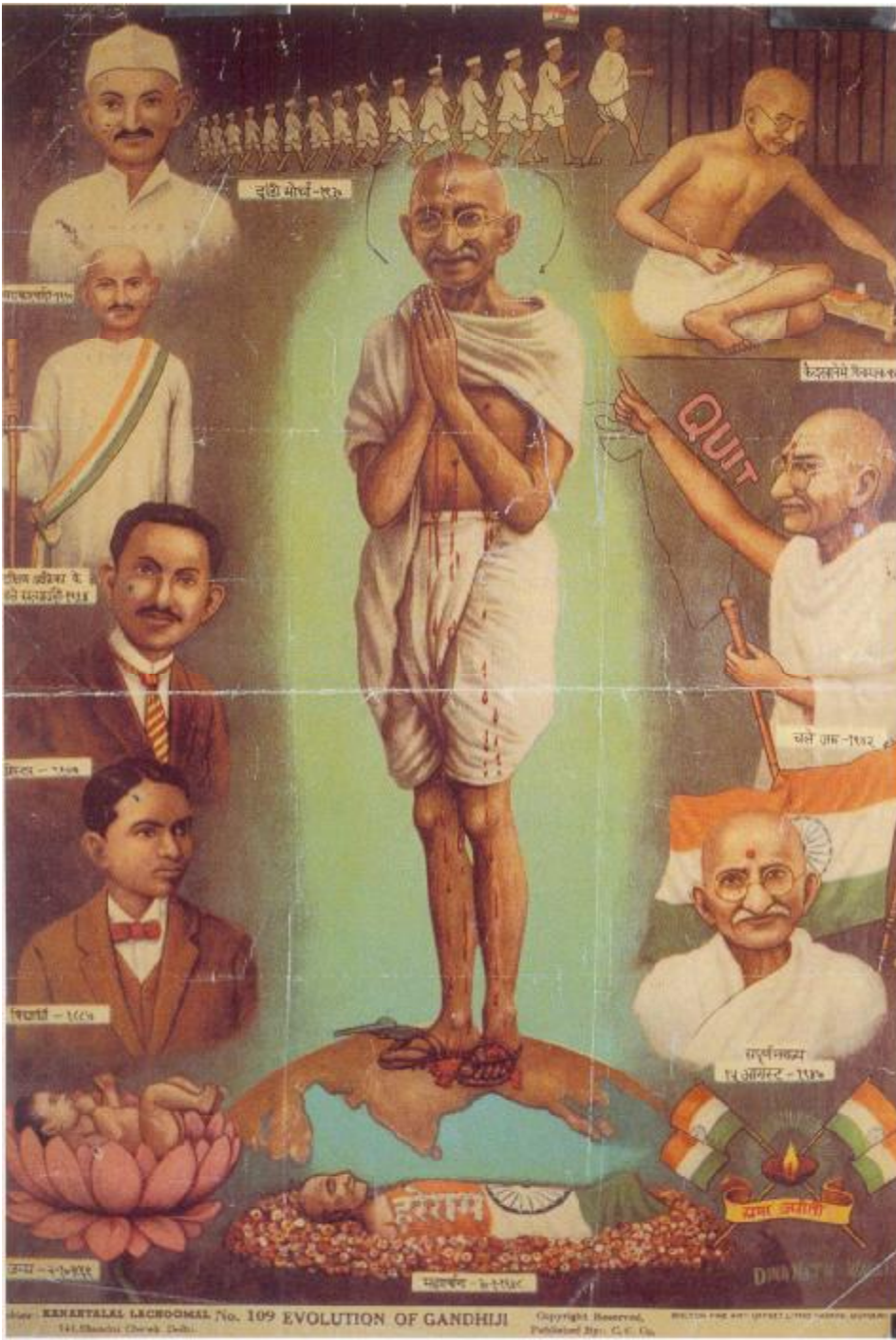
Perhaps the most revealing images, however, are those that suggest Gandhi's status as an avatar through their appropriation of the pictorial forms of avatar representation. Since the 1880s, prints have been in circulation depicting Vishnu and his avatars. All of these have a common pictorial structure: 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.⁸⁶ 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.

