Legacies of Colonial History:
Region, Religion, and Violence in Postcolonial Gujarat

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation takes the routine marginalization and erasure of Muslim presence in the contemporary social and political life of the western Indian state of Gujarat as an entry point into a genealogy of Gujarati regionalism. Through a historical anthropology of the reconfiguration of the modern idea of Gujarat, I argue that violence against religious minorities is an effect of both secular nation-building and of religious nationalist mobilization. Given this entanglement, I suggest that we rethink the oppositional relationship between religion and the secular in analyzing violence against Muslims in contemporary Gujarat.

The modern idea of Gujarat, I further argue, cannot be grasped without taking into consideration how local conceptions of region and of religion were fundamentally altered by colonial power. In particular, I suggest that the construction of Islam as inessential and external to the idea of Gujarat is a legacy bequeathed by colonialism and its forms of knowledge. The transmutation of Gujarati Muslims into strangers, in other words, occurred simultaneously with the articulation of the modern idea of Gujarat in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I focus in particular on the role of nineteenth-century regional history-writing, in which the foundational role of Islam was de-emphasized, in what I call the making of a regional tradition. By highlighting the colonial genealogy of contemporary discourses of Gujaratni asmita (pride in Gujarat), in which Hindu and Gujarati are posited as identical with each other, I argue that colonialism was one of its conditions of possibility. One result of this simultaneous reconfiguration of religion and region, I argue, is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to inhabit a Hindu religious identity that is not at the same time articulated in opposition to a
Muslim Other in Gujarat. Another consequence is that it is becoming increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for Muslims to represent themselves or advocate for their rights as Muslim and as Gujarati. How the reconfiguration of a Gujarati regional identity is imbricated with transformations in conceptions of religion is part of what this dissertation seeks to think about.

Furthermore, I argue that the marginalization of Muslims in Gujarat cannot be understood through an exclusive focus on organized violence or on the Hindu nationalist movement. While recent studies on Gujarat have focused mainly on the pogrom of 2002 to think about the role of the Hindu nationalist movement in orchestrating mass violence against Muslims in contemporary Gujarat, I argue that the pogrom of 2002 is but one part of a broader spectrum of violence and exclusion that permeates the body of the state and society. In addition, I suggest that one of the conditions of possibility for such violence is the sedimentation of a conception of Gujaratiness as identical with Hinduness that cuts across the religious/secular divide.

Instead of focusing exclusively on the violence of the Hindu nationalist movement, I explore this process of sedimentation as it manifests itself in the intersecting logics of urban planning, heritage preservation, and neoliberal development in contemporary Gujarat. Through an analysis of the contemporary reorganization and partitioning of the city of Ahmedabad along religious lines, I show how it is continuous with colonial and nationalist urban planning practices of the early twentieth century. Using ethnographic examples, I also argue that the contemporary secular nationalist discourse of heritage preservation is both complicit in the marginalization of Muslims and continuous with practices of urban planning and preservation that were articulated in the late colonial period. Finally, my dissertation demonstrates the enabling nature of neoliberal logics in the organization of violence against Muslims in Gujarat and argues that anti-
Muslim violence and prejudice are enabled by and intertwined with narratives about the promises of capital and progress.

Combining historical and ethnographic methods, this dissertation seeks to contribute to an anthropology of colonialism, nationalism, religion, secularism and violence in South Asia that is attentive to the continuities and discontinuities that are constitutive of the postcolonial present we inhabit. By historicizing contemporary debates and assumptions about Muslims in Gujarat and describing some of the genealogies that have contributed to their sedimentation, I hope to have argued that colonial legacies have enduring effects in the present and that the question posed by colonial forms of knowledge and representation is not merely epistemological or historiographical but also a political one. Written as a history of the present, this dissertation is motivated by a desire to imagine a future in which Hindu/Gujarati and Muslim are no longer conceptualized as oppositional categories; in which Gujarati Muslims are able to represent themselves as Muslims and in their own (varied) terms; and where Hindus are no longer invited and incited to inhabit a subjectivity that depends on making Muslims strangers to Gujarat.
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for Nadia
Introduction

In November 2006, about three weeks after I arrived in Ahmedabad in the Western Indian state of Gujarat to begin fieldwork in that city, a scholar who was visiting from a university in Africa called me on the phone.¹ He asked if I would join him and his wife for dinner that evening at the Ellis Bridge Gymkhana and if we could make plans to see the historic walled city of Ahmedabad the following day. The Gymkhana is a private recreation and sports club that was established in 1962 by a retired officer of the Indian Civil Service and some of the leading industrial magnates of Ahmedabad.² The city’s elites, some of whom are leaders of civil society groups while others are state officials who describe themselves as liberal and secular, meet regularly with each other at the club. Because of its exclusive nature and the large number of businessmen, industrialists and members of the higher civil service and judiciary that are part of its membership, the club is also a site where important decisions that affect the life of the city are sometimes made. The dinner that evening was organized by the editor of a Gujarati newspaper who was hosting the African professor and his wife, so that they could meet with local journalists and writers. The professor had asked if he could bring me along as an additional guest and his host had graciously agreed. We had been introduced to each other over email a few weeks before by one of my teachers at Columbia University. The professor and his wife were spending a few days in Ahmedabad after visiting their ancestral hometown, Porbandar. A coastal city located on the Arabian Sea, Porbandar is known to the outside world as Gandhi’s birthplace. In the nineteenth

¹ In order to protect their confidentiality, I have either left my interlocutors un-named and the particulars of their background unspecified, or I have used pseudonyms. Exceptions to this rule include public figures, politicians, and local scholars (unless they have specifically asked to remain un-named).

² In 2008, when I was finishing up my fieldwork, the club had about 4000 members. At that time the population of Ahmedabad and its suburbs was a little more than 5 million.
century, the professor and his wife’s grandparents had joined the large numbers of Kathiawadīs (i.e., those from the Saurashtra peninsula, a sub-region of Gujarat) who were conscripted by Britain to work in its colonies in Africa. However unlike Gandhi, their grandparents had never returned to the land of their birth. In fact, for the professor and his wife, this was their first ever visit to Gujarat.

We agreed to meet at the club before the other guests arrived for dinner so that we could get some time alone to talk. The professor and his wife told me that they had come to Delhi two weeks earlier, where he had given a talk at a conference. It was at this conference that they had met their Gujarati host, who had helped with the arrangements for their visit to Porbandar and their week-long travels through Gujarat. Based on their account, it was clear that their host had been generous and hospitable to a fault. In many ways, his hospitality was reminiscent of an older way of being that has been adapted to the demands of Indian urban life in the age of neoliberal reforms. Although the editor host had remained in Delhi, he was nevertheless omnipresent throughout their journey in Gujarat. He had helped the professor and his wife find a rental car and driver in Ahmedabad, so that they could travel comfortably through Saurashtra, the peninsular area of Gujarat. Throughout their travels, he had kept in touch by cellphone with them and with the driver in order to ensure that their travels were progressing smoothly. He had also prepared an itinerary that would take them to what he thought were the most important sites in the region and would introduce them to its cultural and social life. That evening, he had asked some of his writer and journalist friends in Ahmedabad to join the professor and his wife for dinner at the Ellis Bridge Gymkhana and keep them company.

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3 The word Kathiawad means the land of the kathis; a name derived from the kathi Rajput chiefs that controlled the southwestern peninsula of contemporary Gujarat. Under British rule many of these fiefdoms were classified as princely states and from 1947 to 1960, the area was a separate administrative unit known as Saurashtra.
As the evening progressed, I learnt more about the couple’s background and life in Africa and about their travels in Gujarat. It quickly became apparent to me that their encounter with their host, while gracious, was marked by a deep dissonance that had left them feeling unsettled. In large part, this was because each had a very different idea of Gujarat and related to the region on very different terms. For the professor and his wife, who identify as Africans whose ancestors came from Gujarat, Porbandar and Kathiawad were “des lieux de memoire,” sites of memory that occupied a central place in the stories that they had heard from their grandparents (Nora 1989). These memories had been equally important in their formation as individuals as had their own experiences growing up in Africa. This was their first and probably only visit to Gujarat and they had hoped to walk around the streets of old Porbandar to see if they could find any of the places in the city that their grandparents and parents had spoken so fondly about. They wanted to experience first-hand some of the places that their grandparents had described as sites of Memon sociality in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Their Gujarati host, on the other hand, had arranged a road trip of the Kathiawad peninsula that began from the airport in Ahmedabad, took them to the Jain temples in Palitana, then to the temple at Somnatha, then for a brief visit to Porbandar where they saw Kirti Mandir (Gandhi’s birthplace) and an extended stay in Dwarka, the Vaishnavite pilgrimage center whose importance has increased dramatically since the late nineteenth century. Their journey through Gujarat did not include time to walk around and explore parts of the city of Porbandar. Nor did it involve a visit to Junagadh or to Bantwa (on the route to Dwarka), both of which are towns where Gujarati Memons, Bohras and Khojas have long histories. Their host had simply assumed that visiting Gujarat meant making a pilgrimage to various Hindu and Jain shrines, leaving out any sites of Muslim memory and social life from their itinerary. This absence was so poignant that at one point in our conversation, the
professor asked me quietly whether there were no more Muslims living in Porbandar, as he and his wife had seen no evidence of Muslim life during their brief stop there. Nor had they encountered any Muslims elsewhere in Saurashtra or in Ahmedabad. They had found this experience particularly discordant because in their own social milieu in Africa, interactions between Muslims and Hindus of South Asian descent were routine and the presence of both communities palpable in public space.

As the evening progressed, it also became clear to me that the host and his Ahmedabadi friends at the dinner had assumed that the professor and his wife were descendants of Gujarati Hindus. Like many Gujaratis, the professor and his wife have a last name that is indicative of their membership in a caste that has both Hindu and Muslim members. Their last name, in other words, was not specific to either a Muslim or Hindu identity. Yet, the guests at the dinner and the host who was managing their visit from afar all assumed that their African guests were Gujarati Hindus returning on a pilgrimage. It was at this dinner that I began to more clearly recognize the important ways in which regionalist and religious nationalist discourses in contemporary Gujarat were mutually imbricated with each other. This encounter also compelled me to rethink some of my own questions and assumptions about Hindu nationalist violence and prejudice against Gujarati Muslims. What struck me most that evening was the normative nature of the equation of Gujaratiness with Hinduism and the fact that this assumption permeated spaces not generally associated with Hindu nationalism. The dinner took my project in a new direction, leading to explorations of the historical processes that have contributed to the sedimentation and banalization of the idea that Gujarati and Hindu are identical with each other. What makes Hinduism so normative in Gujarat today that all Gujaratis, whether residing in the state or in the

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4 Jhaveri is one such caste name, used by both Hindus and Memons.
diaspora, are assumed to be Hindu unless something marks them otherwise? What explains the fact that a couple from Africa coming to visit the homeland of their forebears is presumed by a gracious host not to have any relationship to Gujarat’s rich Islamic past and present? Even if the couple had been of Gujarati Hindu origins, why was the state’s Muslimness considered irrelevant to their journey? When and how did Muslims cease to be imagined as belonging to Gujarat and/or as representing Gujaratiness? Through what processes of violence, forgetting, and erasure did a region whose religious and political histories were forged by conquerors, itinerants and settlers, come to be imagined as exclusively Hindu? How did over five million Muslims get discursively erased from Gujarat’s map? What is the significance of the fact that this erasure is as common in a liberal space like the Ellis Bridge Gymkhana as it is in the discourse of Hindu nationalist politicians in Gujarat today? And what does this tell us about the relationship between secularism and Hindu nationalism in postcolonial India? These are some of the questions that form the core of this dissertation. Written as a history of the present, this dissertation seeks to provide a genealogy of the reconfiguration of the idea of Gujarat and to demonstrate some of its tragic effects in the present. One effect, as I hope to show, is that the modern making of Gujarat as a region has been coterminous with making the Muslim into a stranger.

Questions, Stakes and Contributions:

This dissertation takes the routine marginalization and erasure of Muslim presence in the social and political life of contemporary Gujarat as an entry point into a genealogy of the reconfiguration of the idea of Gujarat. While it seeks to provide a historical ethnography of the
idea of Gujarat in which the Muslim emerges as the Other, it is not intended as an ethnography or history of the Muslim communities of Gujarat. Drawing on the work of anthropologists who have taken discourses and/or controversies about Islam and Muslim minorities as entry points to think about the politics of secularism and multiculturalism in liberal democracies, (Asad 1993 and 2003; Scott 2007; Ewing 2008), I similarly take discourses and assumptions about Gujarati Muslims as an entry point to think about the politics of nationalism, secularism, and regionalism in contemporary Gujarat. In addition, while it is situated at a conjuncture that is haunted by the devastating effects of the anti-Muslim pogrom of 2002, this dissertation is not about the pogrom but about some of its conditions of possibility. When I began my fieldwork in Gujarat in late 2006, the Muslim sense of injury and injustice were palpable in Ahmedabad. Just four and a half years before, on the night of February 28, 2002, activists of the Hindu nationalist movement had begun a systematic assault on Muslim lives and properties all over north and central Gujarat. The assault began within several hours after television news channels reported that 58 activists of the Hindu nationalist movement returning from the north Indian city of Ayodhya were killed in a fire at the train station in Godhra, a city in central Gujarat. Despite the substantial evidence of the involvement of politicians and state officials in the violence, many sophisticated commentaries and analyses have continued to describe the violence that followed the events in Godhra as a riot (cf. Berenschot 2012). However, what followed can hardly be described as a riot. Rather, the incident at the train station in Godhra was a trigger for the Hindu nationalist

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5 Several of my interlocutors in Ahmedabad told me that in the months leading up to the pogrom, the Hindu nationalist movement had been organizing “pilgrimages” by large groups of its activists to Ayodhya and specifically to the site of the Babri Masjid (Babur’s mosque), which was destroyed by movement activists in 1992. The movement has claimed the site of the mosque as the birthplace of the Lord Ram and has campaigned to build a temple there. Personal interview with Achyut Yagnik in Ahmedabad, February 2, 2007.

6 In public discourse in India, the violence of 2002 is most often described as a riot despite extensive evidence of state participation and of the organization and planning that went into it. Some human rights groups and scholars have described the violence as genocidal (e.g., International Initiative for Justice 2003; Nussbaum 2003). My own
movement to launch a well-organized and systematic pogrom targeting Muslims communities all over Gujarat. During the pogrom, which lasted for several weeks, the most brutal and large-scale assaults occurred in central Gujarat, especially in the cities of Ahmedabad and Vadodara. In Ahmedabad, the attacks were concentrated primarily in the working class and poor neighborhoods. For the first three days of the pogrom, large bodies of men moved through the city targeting Muslims in neighborhoods where they lived in close proximity to non-Muslims or were a vulnerable minority in Hindu-majority areas. According to several investigations by human rights groups, the Hindu nationalist government of the state as well as police officers, civil servants and members of the judiciary were complicit in the violence. In several well-documented cases, such as the massacre at Naroda Patiya, the police joined civilians in the assault on Muslims and became the perpetrators. For Muslims, the time after the pogrom could hardly be described as normal. Many of the most notorious perpetrators such as Jaideep Patel (the Vice President of the state unit of the VHP), Babu Patel (known as Babu Bajrangi because of his status as leader of the Bajran Dal), who were identified as the planners of the massacre in preference is to use the word pogrom instead of genocide or riot. The word riot fails to recognize the systematic nature of the violence against Muslims, understates the planning and organization that went into the assault and most importantly, elides the extensive participation by state officials in the violence. Paul Brass has suggested we think of Hindu nationalist violence as the product of institutionalized riot systems—the handiwork of a network of specialists that include societal actors and the state (Riots and Pogroms 1996; 2003). However, my own preference is to use the word pogrom to describe the 2002 violence because of the extent of state and popular participation in it. I have refrained from describing the violence as genocidal because there is little evidence to show that the Hindu nationalist movement is committed to the total elimination of Muslims.

These incident in Godhra and the pogrom that followed have been the subject of multiple judicial inquiries, including trials of the accused. The Hindu nationalist government has always claimed that the pogrom was retaliation (a “natural reaction” according to the Chief Minister of the state) for these events. However, several investigations by human rights groups provide substantial evidence indicating that attacks on Muslims were planned and deliberate and involved extensive state participation. For example, see Crimes Against Humanity: An Inquiry into the Carnage in Gujarat (Concerned Citizens Tribunal 2002); “We have no orders to save you”: State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat (Human Rights Watch 2002); Rights and Wrongs: Ordeal by Fire in the Killing Fields of Gujarat, Editor’s Guild of India Fact Finding Mission Report by Aakar Patel, Dileep Padgaonkar, B.G. Verghese (2002). Several scholars have published monographs and edited volumes on the pogrom. For example, see Nussbaum (2007); Lobo, Das, and Bandukwala (2006); Valiani (2011); Ghassem-Fachandi (2012); and Berenschot (2012). On the complicity of the police see the reports by Human Rights Watch (2002) and the Concerned Citizens Tribunal (2002).
Naroda Patiya, remained free while one of their co-perpetrators, Maya Kodnani, a gynecologist and BJP politician, won the legislative elections in 2002 and was appointed minister of children’s and women’s development after winning again in 2007.\(^8\) The air of impunity was magnified by the fact that after the pogrom, several young Muslim men and women, including Ishrat Jahan (a student from Mumbai), Sohrabuddin Sheikh and his wife Kauserbi were victims of extrajudicial murders committed by senior police officers in the state.

When it occurred in 2002, the pogrom in Gujarat was seen by many as antithetical to Indian secularism and as an aberration that reflected the intolerance and fanaticism of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism). It is by now well recognized that the conception of secularism in India is historically specific. The operative understanding of the term is quite unlike French \textit{laïcité} or the principles of separation of Church and state in the United States. Even so, debates about secularism in India hinge upon a normative understanding of nationalism as by definition modern and secular. In addition, given that nationalism, modernity and secularism are conceptually intertwined and mutually reinforcing, the presence of religion in public arenas is often characterized as the return of tradition and as anti-modern (Anderson 1991; Gellner 1983). Those who acknowledge the modernity of religious nationalist movements such as the BJP tend to characterize it as antithetical to secular modernity (Juergensmeyer 1993). Given this, in liberal public discourse in Gujarat and in India more generally, the violence of the pogrom and the politics represented by the Hindu nationalist movement in Gujarat are very often perceived as anomalous and as requiring a stronger commitment to secularism.\(^9\) This is a narrative that I seek

\(^{8}\) For more on Kodnani, see Chapter IV.

\(^{9}\) Every time there is an election, the speculation in Gujarat (and in the English language press in India) is whether the BJP will emphasize development (progress/rational/secular) or whether it will focus on religious concerns (euphemistically described as “emotive issues,” hence backward looking).
to complicate in this dissertation by juxtaposing Hindu nationalist and secularist discourses that have the effect of marginalizing and othering Muslims in Gujarat.

Recent studies on Gujarat have focused mainly on the pogrom of 2002 to think about the role of the Hindu nationalist movement in orchestrating mass violence against Muslims (e.g., Valiani 2011; Ghassem-Fachandi 2012; Berenschot 2012). While these studies have made important contributions, in this dissertation I argue that the pogrom of 2002 is but one part of a broader spectrum of violence and exclusion that permeates the body of the state and society in contemporary Gujarat. In addition, I suggest that one of the conditions of possibility for such violence is the sedimentation of a conception of Gujarati identity as identical with Hinduness. This sedimentation, I further argue, cuts across the secularist/Hindu nationalist divide and has become so banal that it is barely noticed by a large spectrum of non-Muslim Gujaratis. Indeed throughout my fieldwork, I routinely encountered visceral expressions of prejudice against Muslims as well as more routine practices of Muslim othering and exclusion by self-described liberal and secular Gujarati Hindus as well as by activists of the Hindu nationalist movement. In addition, there was a stubborn refusal to acknowledge the injury and injustice to Muslims caused during the pogrom of 2002 that was shared by a broad cross-section of political actors. Instead,

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10 I use the word pogrom instead of riot because of the organized nature of the massacre that began in Gujarat from the night of February 28, 2002 onwards. The trigger event for the pogrom was the death of 59 activists of the Hindu nationalist movement at the train station in Godhra, where the coach in which they were travelling was set alight. That evening, organized groups of Hindu nationalists began carrying out a systematic assault on Muslims all over the state. Officially, the death toll has been estimated at 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus. However, it is clear that many more were killed in this violence.

11 In the three campaigns for election to the legislative assembly (2002, 2007, 2012) that have occurred in Gujarat since the pogrom of 2002, the Congress Party, which describes its program as secularist and is the largest opposition party in the state, has announced that it will not publicly support the campaigns for justice by Muslim victims and their advocates in the human rights community. According to Congress-party spokespersons, who always speak off the record on this question, expressions of solidarity with Muslim victims in Gujarat do not win elections. Rather, they “play into the hands” of the Hindu nationalist BJP, which would successfully claim that this was further proof of an attack on and prejudice against Gujarat and Gujaratis. In effect, the Congress party is conceding that in contemporary Gujarat there are two classes of people: Gujaratis/Hindus who make up the majority and non-Hindus
there was a palpable sense of impatience about the rare conversations taking place about the pogroms and its devastating effects on Gujarati Muslims. In blurring the distinction between secularist and Hindu nationalist prejudice against Muslims, I do not mean to suggest that there are no major political differences between the Hindu nationalist movement and other political parties and social movements in Gujarat. Nor do I wish to suggest that the electoral defeat of the Hindu nationalist movement in Gujarat will not substantively contribute to ameliorating the daily lives of Gujarati Muslims. Rather, my primary aim is to show how anti-Muslim prejudice has become normalized in post-colonial Gujarat and to suggest that it is this normalization that makes it possible to imagine and justify episodes of mass violence such as the pogrom of 2002. So although I describe and analyze the violence and the aftermath of the 2002 pogrom at various points in this dissertation, my primary aim is to provide examples of the normalization of Muslim exclusion in contemporary Gujarat through more mundane forms of discursive violence, silencing and displacement. In doing so, I want to make it clear that my aim is not to downplay the horrific nature of the 2002 pogrom but rather to understand some of its conditions of possibility. These conditions of possibility, I argue, include myriad forms of everyday violence and prejudice against Muslims that are deeply sedimented and cut across the Hindu nationalist/secularist divide.

Furthermore, by focusing on anti-Muslim prejudice and violence against Muslims in Gujarat, this dissertation seeks to unpack the entanglements of region, religion and secularism in postcolonial India. The reconfiguration of ideas of Gujarat, I argue, cannot be grasped without taking into consideration how local conceptions of region and of religion were fundamentally altered by colonial rule and “its forms of knowledge” (Cohn 1996). Talal Asad has shown us who are the minority; it is also conceding that it is willing to contribute to the maintenance of this binary in order to win elections.
how religion and secularism are mutually imbricated with each other (2003). In the aftermath of
the reformation, religion came to be defined as belief and as belonging in the private domain
while secularism was understood as the differentiation of religion from the state. With the
emancipation of reason and politics from religion, it has been argued, the public sphere and its
embodiment, the modern liberal state, were able to define and articulate the public good (Taylor
2004). However, several important interventions have reminded us that this triumphalist
narrative of the progressive emancipation of human reason from religion is problematic when
applied to the West and even less helpful in thinking about postcolonial contexts like India (Van
Der Veer 1994; 2001; Hansen 1999). In the context of South Asia, such an account elides how
colonial government policed and regulated religious practices and how colonial technologies of
government effected new conceptions of religious community and religiously defined majorities
and minorities (Asad 1993; 2003; Cohn 1987; Dirks 2001; Scott 1999). Colonial power, as
many have argued, not only transformed conceptions of religion, it simultaneously reconfigured
ideas of region by altering the relations between people, places and their past (Chatterjee 1993;
Dirks 2001; Cohn 1987). While many scholars have argued that colonialism reconfigured local
conceptions of religion in India, in this dissertation I suggest that the reconfiguration of religion
has had regionally specific effects and was accompanied by a reconfiguration of regional
identities. Put differently, the colonial reconfiguration of Hinduism and Islam as distinct and
oppositional religions was also accompanied by a reconfiguration of what it means to be a
Gujarati. One result of this simultaneous reconfiguration of religion and region, I argue, is that it
is becoming increasingly difficult to inhabit a Hindu religious identity that is not at the same time
articulated in opposition to a Muslim Other in Gujarat. How the reconfiguration of a Gujarati
regional identity is imbricated with transformations in conceptions of religion is part of what this dissertation seeks to think about.

Finally, my dissertation seeks to demonstrate the enabling nature of neoliberal logics in the organization of violence against Muslims in Gujarat. Many of the contemporary examples of anti-Muslim violence and prejudice that I discuss in this dissertation are enabled by and intertwined with neoliberal narratives about the promises of capital and progress. This intersection of neoliberalism and Hindu nationalism is at some levels the result of historical contingency. Indeed, the Hindu nationalist movement’s electoral strength has coincided with the era of neoliberal reforms in India. In this dissertation however, my argument is not only that neoliberal discourse and majoritarian politics contingently intersect with each other or that they are compatible with each other. Rather, I argue that the two are mutually sustaining and reinforcing.

Research and Methodology:

This dissertation is based on 18 months of ethnographic research in urban and rural Gujarat in the period between October 2006 and April 2008. This was supplemented by a subsequent visit in the winter of 2010-2011 when I conducted follow-up research with many of my interlocutors and shared some of my preliminary findings with them. My research was concentrated in the city of Ahmedabad, but I also conducted field research in the cities of Junagadh, Rajkot, Gandhidham and Bhuj. In addition, I conducted ethnographic research in rural areas of two districts – Kutch and Banaskatha—which lie on the border with Sindh province in Pakistan.

My interlocutors included a wide range of individuals including Muslim and Hindu residents and families, victims as well as perpetrators of the 2002 pogrom, secular NGO activists
and members of the Hindu nationalist movement, local politicians from the Congress party and from the BJP, state officials, intellectuals, writers, journalists, artists, lawyers, judges, and religious figures. In some cases, I spoke with individuals and recorded interviews and in others I recorded the life histories of individuals and entire families. During my fieldwork, I attended political rallies and community meetings, participated in religious recitals, and attended conferences and workshops organized by NGOs. In addition, I was fortunate to be invited into the homes of many of my interlocutors to spend extended periods of times with them, their families and their neighbors. I participated actively in the life of the neighborhood in Ahmedabad where I resided order to understand how middle-class Hindus inhabit the city along religiously segregated lines and how Muslim Gujaratis navigate the hostility that permeates the city and its spaces around them. In contemporary Ahmedabad, roads and streets connecting neighborhoods are perceived as virtual borders, and urban space is chopped up and segregated along religious lines. However, it is important to recognize that this segregation, although more pronounced now, predates the major episodes of Hindu nationalist violence. For instance, one of my interlocutors, a retired faculty member from one of the more prestigious colleges in Ahmedabad, told me that when he arrived in the city in the early 1960s at the beginning of his career, he was unable to rent a room or house in the newly developed western part of the city because no Hindu landlord was willing to rent to a Muslim. Similar stories are, of course, much more ubiquitous now and entire neighborhoods of the western parts of Ahmedabad are described by their Hindu residents are “clean” or Muslim-free areas (e.g., Jasani 2010). Although the street on which I lived in Ahmedabad was less than one kilometer from Juhapura, the neighborhood where Muslims are concentrated and where I spent a lot of my time, few if any of my middle class Hindu neighbors ever ventured into it. Instead, many of them warned me of the

12 Name withheld to protect the confidentiality of my interlocutor.
dangers of spending so much time in what they derisively referred to it as “mini-Pakistan.” In addition to fieldwork, I followed local debates on religion and politics very closely by reading the Gujarati and English-language press. I also conducted research in the state archives and local libraries of Gandhinagar, Rajkot, Mumbai and Delhi.

My research was aided by the fact that Gujarati is my mother tongue. Because I grew up there and went to school in rural and urban Gujarat, I had some familiarity with many aspects of Gujarati society and history. At the same time, however, my research was complicated by my membership in a family that is recognized as descended from a person revered as a saint by Gujarati Hindus. Because members of my extended family continue to fulfill the inherited obligation of maintaining the saint’s shrine and keep alive its tradition of providing food and shelter to pilgrims and visitors, it has also determined the religious and social standing of everyone who shares the family name. In many cases, these ascriptive ties shaped my encounters and interactions with Gujarati Hindus in very fundamental ways. As a result, I enjoyed privileged access to individuals and spaces all over Gujarat. I was warmly welcomed by many of my Hindu interlocutors into their homes and continue to feel deeply grateful for the insights that these interactions offered. At the same time and in many instances, these ties put me in very uncomfortable situations. Indeed, it was not unusual for my Gujarati Hindu interlocutors to assume that our conceptions of the Hindu tradition were similar. In particular, many of them assumed that I too was invested in a Hindu normativity organized around anti-Muslim prejudice. As a Gujarati Hindu who is deeply critical of exclusionary conceptions of both Hinduism and Gujaratiness and who furthermore is married to a (non-Indian) Muslim, I found the dominant discourse about Muslims in Gujarat and the assumptions that accompanied my Hindu identity deeply unsettling. I also found the uncritical embrace of secularism and the
self-certainty that permeated the language of liberal and NGO activists very troubling, especially when some of them uncritically participated in the naturalization of Hindu normativity in Gujarat while discursively distancing themselves from the project of Hindu nationalism. Some of this discourse participated in making demands on Gujarat’s Muslims to give up on their traditions in order to be accepted as equals.

Similarly, my interactions with Muslim interlocutors in Gujarat were fraught with challenges and ambivalences, but for different reasons. Mostly, these had to do with the climate of anti-Muslim hostility and Hindu normativity that prevailed at the time of my fieldwork, with the physical and psychic wounds of the 2002 pogrom that were still acute for many of my Muslim interlocutors, as well as the routine forms of discrimination to which many of them were subjected on a routine basis. Although every one of my interlocutors in the Muslim communities of Gujarat welcomed me, in many cases into their homes and families, and gave generously of their time and insights, I was always acutely aware that our interactions placed a far greater burden on them and that our relationships were therefore always unequal and problematic. What some of my interlocutors described as “riot tourism” (meaning a certain local and international journalistic voyeurism) was still taking place in Muslim neighborhoods at the time of my research, and I wanted to make sure that none of my interactions participated in such deeply problematic and unethical practices.¹³ For this reason, I focused on building and nurturing relationships with a limited number of individuals and families rather than on solely collecting victim testimonies.

¹³ By “riot tourism” they meant the practice of foreign and Indian journalists working for the English-language media to show up in hordes at election-time and hunt for victim’s narratives and then disappear. In 2007, when assembly elections were being held, I ran into at least two or three foreign and Indian correspondents and their translators every day for about two weeks before the elections. Once the elections were over, there was barely a mention of Gujarat or the victims in the press.
Dissertation Outline:

This dissertation is organized into four chapters that explore the sedimentation and normalization of anti-Muslim discourse and exclusionary conceptions of Gujarat at different historical conjunctures and in diverse locations. As a history of the present that seeks to raise questions about some of the continuities and discontinuities that are constitutive of this particular conjuncture, this dissertation does not follow a linear structure but moves instead between the present and the past. It also goes back and forth between secularist and Hindu nationalist discourses in order to challenge the notion that secularism is an antidote to Hindu nationalist violence against Muslims. In the first chapter, I begin with an exploration of the life and career of Morari Bapu, a popular reciter of Tulsidas’ Ramcaritmanas, whose vast following includes cosmopolitan Gujaratis in India and abroad as well as members of subaltern castes and tribes. I treat his career and interpretation of the practice of reciting the Ramcaritmanas as an entry point to argue that, at this particular conjuncture in Gujarat, ideas of religious toleration and Hindu nationalism have become mutually imbricated. I suggest that arguments about religious toleration in the wake of the 2002 pogrom in Gujarat have the effect of asserting the power of the Hindu majority over a Muslim minority even as these are offered as an alternative to the violence of Hindu nationalism. I do this by exploring the effects of the colonial reconfiguration of ideas of religion and religious community on contemporary practices such as the katha and by comparing and contrasting Morari Bapu’s conception of toleration to that of Gandhi. In addition, I argue that because of its insertion into relations of power defined by the modern nation-state, the katha is accountable to different notions of religious and political community and is a site where religion and politics become co-constituted in very particular ways. Although Morari Bapu is not a member of the Hindu nationalist movement, his performances of the katha in the
modern public sphere in Gujarat (and elsewhere) have become available to his audiences for cultivating a vision of a unified Hindu community that is distinct from and opposed to Muslims. By drawing on insights from Asad (1993, 2003), Scott (1999), and Dirks (2001), I show that in contrast to prior conceptions of the Hindu religious tradition, the *katha* has now become a space for articulating an idea of the Hindu religious tradition *as that which* is not Muslim.

In the *second chapter*, I turn to an examination of how secular-liberal discourses of heritage preservation and urban planning are complicit in the marginalization of Ahmedabad’s diverse and heterogeneous Muslim communities. After Delhi, Ahmedabad has one of the largest collections of structures and buildings that are designated as national monuments under the care of the Archeological Survey of India. Not only are many of its Sultanate and Mughal era structures located in densely populated areas of the city, the majority of its old mosques have remained in continuous use for the past six centuries. One of the striking features of Ahmedabad that elicits comments from visitors is how segregated the city is. In part, statements about the religiously partitioned spaces of Ahmedabad were overdetermined by the pogrom of 2002. However, in the early 1980s, when I began to visit Ahmedabad frequently, I recall my hosts warning me to not venture into the walled city after dark. Indeed, the city’s urban spaces are divided on the basis of caste and religion, and the majority of its Muslim population lives on the margins in an area called *Juhapura* (Thomas and Jaffrelot 2012). When I conducted fieldwork in *Juhapura*, it lacked in rudimentary infrastructure such as paved streets and drainage; it had no government-run public schools, and urban authorities provided few services to the area. This segregation has either been explained in culturalist terms as the vestige of *traditional* caste practices or as an effect of the reconfiguration and adaptation of practices of vegetarianism (Gillion 1968; Ghassem-Fachandi 2012). In contrast, I argue that segregation in postcolonial
Ahmedabad is driven by modern practices such as heritage preservation and urban planning. In contemporary Ahmedabad, the preservation of this architectural heritage, especially of monuments dating back to the era of the Gujarat Sultanate and of private residences inside the historic walled city, has emerged as a central element in liberal civil society’s critique of Hindu nationalism. On the view of the heritage preservation activists, this architecture symbolizes the composite culture of the city (and of India) and therefore must be preserved in an effort to counter the Hinduization of Gujarat.

I interrogate the Hindu nationalism versus heritage preservation dichotomy on which this narrative hangs by suggesting that the campaign for heritage preservation is entangled with both Hindu nationalist and neoliberal logics, and that it contributes to the ongoing marginalization of Ahmedabad’s diverse and heterogeneous Muslim communities. Put differently, I suggest that contemporary efforts at heritage preservation are not only compatible with the project of Hindu nationalism, but in fact themselves participate in the ongoing marginalization of Ahmedabad’s Muslims. In addition, I argue that both the neoliberal restructuring of the city under the direction of the Hindu nationalist government and heritage conservation are continuous with practices of urban planning that were articulated in the late colonial period. In the early twentieth century, both the colonial state and anti-colonial nationalists began to view the historic walled city as diseased and violent, and both participated (albeit, on unequal terms) in restructuring the city in the name of order and security. One effect of this restructuring was the displacement of the historic or walled city of Ahmedabad and its ways of living by newly developed areas in the West. I further argue that it is through the violent displacement of traditions of urban living in the old city that the objects we recognize today as Ahmedabad’s “architectural and cultural heritage” or the city’s “Indo-Islamic architectural heritage” were constituted. In other words, I
argue that heritage and Muslim marginality have been co-constituted in the modern history of Ahmedabad. Thus, to posit them as oppositional is to elide this historic imbrication. The chapter provides a genealogy of this co-imbrication and argues that Muslim marginalization in the city of Ahmedabad cannot be understood through an exclusive focus on organized violence. Rather, the depth of Muslim injury can only be understood by paying attention to other modalities of power that operate through the intersecting logics of spatial organization, neoliberal development, and heritage preservation.

The chapter begins by providing a brief account of the organization of urban space and the understandings of religious and political community that shaped the morphology of the city in medieval Ahmedabad. I show how the reorganization of the historic or walled city leads to its displacement as the locus of cultural and political life by the new, planned areas on the western banks of the Sabarmati. I also show how this restructuring provides the framework for the subsequent partitioning of city spaces along religious lines. I argue that it is in the context of the decline of the old spatial order that Muslim communities became marginal in the political and cultural life of the city and that the walled city became perceived as a site of violence and disorder. I then examine two incidents of heritage preservation that I witnessed during my fieldwork to show how they contribute to the marginalization of Muslims in the city. These examples are also used to illustrate the continuities between colonial urban planning and the contemporary restructuring of the city along neoliberal and Hindu nationalist lines.

In the third chapter, I turn to a critical reading of a contemporary debate over the question of Gujarati asmita, a phrase that means pride in Gujarat, that was triggered by the publication of an article entitled “Hating Muslims is a Natural thing in Gujarat” by the Gujarati writer Ganesh Devy. This debate, which took place in the public sphere amongst members of
Gujarat’s literary community, is an example of how civil society in contemporary Gujarat participates in the construction of a Gujarati regionalist identity that posits the Muslim as other and is unable to challenge the Hindu normativity that underlies contemporary regionalist discourse. The chapter situates Devy’s article within a longer discourse about Gujaratni asmita which began in the nineteenth century; it suggests that such contemporary debates have antecedents in the colonial period and have to be understood in relation to such genealogies. The chapter also situates this debate within neoliberal practices of urban re-organization and discourses of progress. I describe the demolition of the dargah, the event that triggered Devy’s intervention, and situate it within the Hindu nationalist government’s “Vibrant Gujarat” campaign to transform the state into a model of neoliberal development. I argue that in its contemporary form, anti-Muslim discourse and practices depend on a rearticulated form of Gujarati nativism that is intertwined with neoliberal narratives about the promises of capital and progress. In the final section of the chapter, I examine some of the responses to Devy by Gujarati writers and suggest that regionalist and secular-liberal responses to his article share an affinity with each other on the Muslim question in Gujarat. This is not to say that any of the participants in this debate endorsed Hindu nationalist violence against Muslims. In fact, none of them did. However, with few exceptions, both sides in the debate reproduce the notion that Gujarati and Hindu are identical, effectively reiterating the very claim that Hindu nationalism depends upon: that the Muslim is the Other of the Gujarati.

In the fourth and final chapter, I provide a more detailed discussion of Gujaratni asmita (pride in Gujarat) and argue that contemporary iterations of the idea of Gujarat are continuous with and made possible by the legacies of colonialism and its forms of knowledge. In this chapter, I situate contemporary iterations of Gujaratni asmita within the history of the
making of a regionalist political and cultural tradition in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I begin with a brief description of the Gujarat Vernacular Society and of the community of Gujarati intellectuals who collaborated with its founder, Alexander Forbes. I suggest that the histories of the region that were produced at this time laid the groundwork for the articulation of an exclusionary idea of Gujarat in which Islam and Muslims figure as both the Other and the outsider. I then provide a close reading of Alexander Forbes’ *Ras Mala: Hindoo Annals of the Province of Goozerat*, a work written in 1856 that is based on the oral narratives of local genealogists (*charans* and *bhatt*). Forbes was an administrator and judge deputed to Gujarat in the early nineteenth century and went on to found the Gujarat Vernacular Society. He was also an early proponent of indirect rule and argued that British sovereignty in the region ought to be grounded in a network of princely states governed by Rajput castes. Forbes’ argument in support of princely rule also valorizes Rajput and Brahmanical virtues as the core of the Gujarati traditions. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Forbes’ text which was translated into Gujarati, informed the work of local writers and their explorations of Gujarat’s heterogeneous communities. It also served as the canonical source for cultural and political histories of the region. Amongst these, the historical writings of K.M. Munshi are the most well-known and have provided inspiration to the political project of Hindu nationalism. In contrast to Gandhi, who imagined modern Gujarat and Gujarati (as a linguistic and cultural community) as the product of interactions between diverse communities and traditions, Munshi and others who followed him have construed the period of Sultanate and Mughal rule (Muslim rule) as having ruptured the region from its “natural” milieu. Although present-day Gujarat as a political and cultural entity is a product of the post-colonial state formation, narratives about its past and statements about its culture, I argue, continue to derive their authority from colonial forms of
knowledge that were brought together in Forbes’ *Ras Mala* and construe Muslims and Islam as alien to the region. Although the text is full of ambiguities and tensions that make it available to different interpretations, I argue that it has lent itself to an exclusionary reading and making of Gujarati history, one that intersects with many of the premises of the Hindu nationalist project of Hinduizing Gujarat and making its Muslims into strangers. The chapter aims to highlight the colonial genealogy of contemporary conceptions of Gujarat as a Hindu state, and to suggest that colonialism was one of its conditions of possibility. By emphasizing the *making* of a regional tradition, my reading of Gujarati regionalism departs from an “invention of tradition” argument that has influenced historical and ethnographic writings on South Asia (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992).14

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14 For a provocative critique of the idea of “invented traditions,” see Talal Asad’s “From the History of Colonial Anthropology to the Anthropology of Western Hegemony,” (1991:314–324)
Chapter I

For the Love of Ram: Traditions and Toleration in the Making of Hindu Nationalism in Gujarat

I worship Rama, the perfect being of my conception, not as a historical person, facts about whose life may vary with the progress of historical discoveries and researches. Tulsidas had nothing to do with the Rama of history. Judged by historical test, his Ramayana would be fit for the scrap heap. As a spiritual experience, his book is almost unrivalled, at least for me. And then too I do not swear by every word that is to be found in so many editions published as the Ramayana of Tulsidas.—Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Introduction:

In the month of shravana (i.e. August-September 2007), while I was doing fieldwork in the Western Indian state of Gujarat, the local press reported that large numbers of Hindus and Muslims in Kutch, a district bordering Pakistan were participating in kathas (recitals or narrations) of puranic and epic texts. Reading, reciting and listening to sacred texts are considered important activities in the cultivation of pious and devotional dispositions in the Hindu tradition. The katha, which is a type of public performance of devotionalism, can also function as a vehicle for securing and legitimizing the ritual and social status of individuals and families that sponsor it. In Gujarat, the traditional katha usually involves a seven day (saptah) recital of the Gita or of the Bhagwatapurana (a text which narrates the life-story of the child Krishna) by a local Brahmin or qualified adept. Participants generally belong to members of the caste or kinship network of the sponsoring family. In contemporary Gujarat however, recitals increasingly consist of a reading over nine days of the Ramcaritmanas, the medieval poetic

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16 Shravana is the tenth month of the lunar calendar followed by Hindus. It is considered to be an auspicious month by Hindus because Vishnu and Krishna are said to have been born in shravana. In 2007, shravana coincided with August and September of the Gregorian calendar.
retelling of the story of Rama composed by Tulsidas. In addition, today’s recitals are usually performed by professional kathakars (reciters) at large temple complexes, in public maidans (grounds) in city centers, in community halls and even in elite private clubs. The more talented kathakars can attract audiences of over one hundred thousand listeners, audiences that are far larger than those gathered at political rallies. According to the newspaper reports, many of the recitals in Kutch involved a reading of the Ramcaritmanas and were being performed at dargahs or the tombs of sufi pirs (warrior-mystics). The recitals had been sponsored by prominent Muslim families of the area and were attracting large audiences of Hindus and Muslims from nearby. Some reports claimed that these recitals were organized in order to promote and celebrate Hindu-Muslim unity and harmony. One report described them as an exemplary way of building a spirit of toleration, and praised the sponsors for discovering an “alternative route to spiritual harmony” and “Hindu-Muslim amity and friendship.”

One of the largest such recitals was organized at the shrine of Hajji Pir, a sufi pir (warrior-mystic) of whom very little is known. Hajji Pir’s shrine is located close to the national border separating India from Pakistan. The jats, a pastoral-nomadic Muslim community that lives in the area, reveres Hajji Pir as the community’s guardian. Since 1965, when India and Pakistan fought a war, the state has fenced the border and built a Border Security Force (BSF) base near the shrine to police the area. In addition, the state has become increasingly suspicious of the nomadic traditions of the jats and introduced policies designed to sedentarize them (Ibrahim 2009). In this context of suspicion, the press reported that a group of local Hindu and Muslim notables organized a press conference to announce that they had sponsored a recital of

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17 Tulsidas’s composition is one amongst numerous tellings of the Rama story in circulation in India and as I discuss later in the chapter, the public recital of this poem is a relatively new practice in Gujarat.

18 See for example Phulchaab (Rajkot), 19 September, 2007.
the Ramcaritmanas at Hajji Pir’s shrine in order to promote religious toleration between Hindus and Muslims. The reading would be performed by Morari Bapu, a charismatic, revered and highly mediatized adept of the tradition of reciting and interpreting Tulsidas’ Ramcaritmanas.19

In statements to the press, Morari Bapu announced that the concept of love as it figures in the Ramcaritmanas—the story of the life and actions of its principle character Ram—would be the theme for this event. During the recital, which was scheduled to last nine days, he would elaborate on nine lakshans (symbols/meanings) of love as enunciated by Tulsidas and embodied by Rama, his wife Sita, his brother Lakshman, and Rama’s principle devotee—the simian deity, Hanuman.20 Morari Bapu went on to add that the centrality of love in the Hindu and Islamic traditions would, he hoped, heal the wounds of past violence between Hindus and Muslims.

In 2002, the Hindu nationalist movement had carried out a systematic assault on Muslims all over Gujarat. Over the course of several months, an estimated 2000 individuals, the majority of them Muslim, were killed.21 When Morari Bapu announced his katha to promote religious

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19 I want to state at the outset that I first met Morari Bapu in 1982 and that my extended family has a long and complicated relationship with him. In fact, the first recital by him in which I participated was sponsored by a member of my extended family and performed in 1982. I also want to note that while I have relied primarily on material gathered during fieldwork between 2006 and 2008 and in January 2011, prior knowledge and understanding of his life and work also inform my account. I reflect more on my positionality in the introduction to the dissertation.

In Gujarati, Bapu is used to express respect for elders and to express affection for a younger person. It can be appended to a person’s name or simply used on own its own as a sign of respect. For example, Mahatma Gandhi was addressed simply as Bapu, while Morari Hariyani is known and addressed as Morari Bapu. In Gujarat, the word is also used to address and describe members of Raiput castes who were rulers of princely states in the colonial period, an important cog in the indirect rule system that prevailed in Saurashtra, Kutch and parts of North Gujarat. In contemporary Gujarat, especially in the Saurashtra peninsula where the colonial state was based on indirect rule, the word is also used sarcastically to refer to particularly loquacious persons.

20 Love, or more precisely love of the divine, it is worth noting, is a key element in the Sufi tradition. It is also a central element in bhakti, the devotional tradition of worshipping Ram and Krishna as avatars (incarnations) of Vishnu.

21 There are numerous studies and reports on the 2002 anti-Muslim violence. See for example the reports of investigations by Human Rights Watch (2002) and the Concerned Citizens Tribunal (2002). Several scholars have written about the 2002 pogrom. For example see Nussbaum (2007); Valiani (2005, 2012); and Ghassem-Fachandi (2006, 2012).
toleration, relations between Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat were still marked by suspicion and Muslim feelings of vulnerability. Perpetrators of the 2002 violence lived and worked with impunity, while Muslims lived under constant police surveillance and the threat of police and Hindu nationalist violence. In addition, Muslim concerns and voices were marginalized in a public sphere dominated by Hindu nationalist discourse. Even the leaders of the secularist Congress party, which was in the opposition, professed their commitment to Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) and refrained from endorsing demands for justice for the Muslim victims of the violence. The vernacular media rarely criticized the state’s failures to deliver justice; instead, it argued that the Hindu nationalist government had failed to protect “Hindu interests” such as enforcing the ban on cow slaughter and religious conversion. In other words, the concerns of Gujarat’s Muslims were excluded from the public sphere and being anti-Muslim appeared to be a requirement for participation in public-political deliberations in the state.

22 Until the 1980s, the Indian National Congress had been the dominant political party in Gujarat. Its electoral success was the result of building a coalition that brought together the state’s lower caste, dalit and tribal communities, and religious minorities. See Shani (2007) for a discussion of this coalition strategy and its demise in the 1980s. While the Congress is a self-described secularist party, since the late 1980s, the Gujarat state leadership of the party has included individuals who were former leaders of the Hindu nationalist movement. During my fieldwork, which coincided with the 2007 legislative assembly elections in Gujarat, the party assiduously refrained from making any statements in favor of justice for the victims of the 2002 anti-Muslim violence. Nor did it make any statements in support of the protection of minority rights. In fact, one of the characteristics of political discourse in Gujarat during my fieldwork, was that every major political formation in the state sought to establish its credentials by making anti-Muslim statements or asserting a commitment to representing and protecting “Hindu interests.” One of the local leaders in the Congress party told me that “We know that the Muslims here have no choice but to vote for us… Where will they go? They can’t vote for the BJP. So we don’t bother with them or with their interests” (Bakul Patel, name changed at request of subject, personal interview in Rajkot, September 16, 2007). At a large political rally organized by caste leaders of the powerful leuva Patel community in Rajkot (the state’s fourth largest city) in September 2007, almost every speaker regardless of party affiliation attacked the incumbent Hindu nationalist government for betraying Hindus. On their view, the Hindu nationalist government had failed to deliver on such Hindu interests as enforcing the ban on cow slaughter or supporting the construction of a temple to Lord Rama in Ayodhya. See also Vidya Subrahmaniam’s “The Muslim Question in Gujarat,” The Hindu (Delhi edition), October 9, 2007.

23 My argument on the public sphere in Gujarat is influenced by Talal Asad’s argument that the modern “public sphere is a space necessarily (not just contingently) articulated by power. And everyone who enters it must address power’s disposition of people and things, the dependence of some on the goodwill of others” (Asad 2003:184). This point was also reiterated to me during my fieldwork when the historian Achyut Yagnik kept reminding me that in contemporary Gujarat being anti-Muslim seems to function as a condition for entry into Gujarat’s public sphere and for participation in electoral politics since at least the mid-1980s.
Given the dominance of Hindu nationalist discourse in Gujarat’s public sphere, it was unusual for a figure such as Morari Bapu to announce his commitment to religious toleration in Gujarat. Morari Bapu not only enjoys religious and moral authority amongst Hindus in general, but he also enjoys a large following amongst Hindu nationalists in Gujarat. Over the years, Morari Bapu has described himself repeatedly as a bawa (ascetic) disinterested in politics. And, unlike many other comparable figures in the Gujarati public sphere, he is not a member or leader of a Hindu nationalist organization. Yet on many occasions, he has participated in activities that are central to the Hindu nationalist project in Gujarat. On other occasions, he has been one of the few prominent religious authorities in Gujarat to condemn the violence of the Hindu nationalist movement. Morari Bapu is therefore a complex figure whose public life and career do not lend themselves to a single interpretation. He embodies some of the key tensions and interconnections that are at the heart of my concern in this chapter: namely, the relationship between religion and politics in contemporary Gujarat and the consolidation of a Hindu nationalist hegemony.

With the exception of the Hindu nationalist chief minister Narendra Modi, Morari Bapu is perhaps the most visible figure in the Gujarati public sphere. His visibility, fame, authority and status as the embodiment of piety and devotion are the result of a forty-year career as a reciter and interpreter of the Ramcaritmanas. This life of devotion has transformed him from a reciter known in a small cluster of villages in Bhavnagar district in Gujarat into a figure who enjoys an authoritative status in the religious, cultural and political life of Gujarati-speaking Hindus worldwide. Unlike many other religious notables who play an active role in public life in the state, Morari Bapu is not the head of a particular sampradaya (tradition or community) or of
a monastic order such as the Ramanandis. Rather, he is quite simply viewed as a leader of the Hindu sampradaya (tradition or community) as a whole, and an authority on religious, moral, political and social questions. Many of my interlocutors, who claimed to listen to recordings of his recitals at least once a day, told me that they saw him as embodying many of the virtues of Rama that he narrates and elaborates in his kathas. Journalists, writers, politicians, activists, intellectuals and lay individuals turn to him for religious and spiritual guidance, advice, blessings and endorsements for an array of social and cultural projects and causes. In many instances, his recitals of the Ramcaritmanas attract daily audiences of over a 100,000 devout listeners. City and state officials as well as public resources (police, transportation and public grounds) are often commandeered to provide the bandobast (arrangements) for his recitals and local newspapers and television channels carry reports of each day’s recital and exegesis. His recitals, whether they take place in far-flung rural areas or in major cities are broadcast live and

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24 The Gujarati (and Hindi) word sampradaya is difficult to translate into English. Later in the chapter, I discuss how one particular meaning of the term has been privileged in colonial and postcolonial understandings. Here, I want to point out that Bhagwat Gomandal, a nineteenth century dictionary of the Gujarati language, gives two meanings: tradition and community. In other words, sampradaya describes membership in a specific caste group/community (e.g. the Lohana sampradaya, Bhatia sampradaya) as well as membership in a specific religious group (e.g. the Vallabha Charya or Swaminarayan sampradaya). The latter, it is understood, will have followers belonging to different castes. The word can also mean tradition in the sense of the transmission of authoritative knowledge, discourses and practices from one generation to the next.

25 In March 2007, I participated in a recital, which was held at the Race Course grounds in Rajkot. According to the organizers of the event, it drew audiences of up to 120,000 on some days. The total population of the city was estimated at 1.4 million at that time. These numbers were provided to me by one of the sponsors of the recital and were based on the number of lunches that they served each day to listeners.

26 Since the early 1980s, Morari Bapu has achieved nation-wide if not global fame, as an erudite, innovative and powerful reciter and public speaker. In the late 1980s, he was invited by Ramanand Sagar, the producer of the Ramayana television serial, to provide the introduction to the video tape release of the serial. Sagar’s teleserial was broadcast on Doordarshan, the state controlled television network in seventy eight episodes between January 25, 1987 and July 31, 1988. The broadcast coincided with the Hindu nationalist mobilization to destroy the Babri Masjid (Babar’s mosque) in Ayodhya. On the politics of broadcasting this serial and its wider effects on democratic politics in India, see Rajagopal (2001). Videotapes of the serial were released soon after it stopped airing in 1988. Several of my interlocutors told me that Morari Bapu and Sagar were members of a group in Bombay that gathered regularly to discuss Tulsidas’ Ramcaritmanas in the years before the production and release of the teleserial. Upon returning from field research, I came across Lutgendorf’s (1995) review of the teleserial, where he describes this group as a Ramcaritmanas study circle.
re-broadcasts of them are carried daily on Aastha (the television channel controlled by Baba Ramdev).

In this chapter, I focus on kathas (recitals) of the Ramcaritmanas by Morari Bapu as an entry point to think about the reconfiguration of tradition and religion, the politics of toleration, and the co-imbrication of the Hindu tradition and Hindu nationalism in contemporary Gujarat. My aim in this chapter is to show how discourses and arguments about religious toleration that circulate in Gujarat in the aftermath of the anti-Muslim violence of 2002 have the effect of asserting the power of a Hindu majority over a Muslim minority even as they claim to represent an alternative to the dominance of Hindu nationalist and anti-Muslim discourse. They are, I would like to suggest, ways of making statements about what it means to be Hindu and Indian and of demanding that Muslims (and Dalits) conform to Hindu majoritarian conceptions of what it means to be a Muslim and an Indian. Arguments for religious toleration in Gujarat, I argue, call upon Dalits to identify themselves in opposition to Muslims; they also demand that Muslims demonstrate their loyalty to the Indian nation by embracing saint worship and rejecting other inherited forms of Islam, which are seen as foreign implants and as signs of intolerance and disloyalty to the nation.

Before proceeding further into this discussion, let me briefly specify what I mean by toleration in the context that I am writing about. At the time of my fieldwork, two distinctive understandings of religious toleration informed discussions about Muslim alterity and Hindu-Muslim relations in Gujarat, each with its own genealogy and constituents. The first was the liberal conception of toleration with its genealogy in the colonial project of governing Indian society. Versions of liberal toleration figured prominently in the arguments of secular-liberal and Hindu nationalist activists in the sense that both viewed the Muslim minority as an
incommensurable or backward presence in the nation. The other understanding of toleration is the one articulated by Gandhi in opposition to the project of colonial modernity. Although Gandhi was instrumental in the shaping of the modern Gujarati public sphere in the early twentieth century, his conception of toleration is quite marginal to contemporary debates in Gujarat. Gandhian toleration depends upon the rejection of the demands that liberal toleration makes on subjects; this includes the privatization of one’s own religious beliefs and practices, and the “gratuitous assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one’s own” (Gandhi, 1932). Instead, Gandhian religious toleration depends on the idea of the equality of all traditions, and thinks of all traditions, including one’s own, as incomplete and imperfect.

Liberal toleration, it is by now well recognized, is implicated in the “liberalizing and secularizing” projects of the modern nation-state; an idea that depends upon numerical majorities and minorities and on privatized religion (Scott 2000:283–304). In the colonial period, liberal toleration undergirded administrative practices that sought to elide shared religious practices such as the visitation of Sufi shrines by Hindus and Muslims. Liberal toleration was also central to the production of Hindu and Muslim as rival propositional groups (Veer 1994; Pandey 1993; Chatterjee 1993). For the postcolonial state, the idea of toleration has been essential to its own modernizing and secularizing project and in legitimizing itself as the one assurance against religious nationalist violence.27 During my fieldwork, liberal-secular critics of Hindu nationalism often argued that the movement’s project of making India into a Hindu nation posed a threat to the secular state and hence to a culture of toleration. However, it is important to recognize that the Hindu nationalist movement in its current form is oriented not towards dismantling the secular state in India, but towards establishing the political supremacy of the

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27 The most forceful articulation of this view was put forward by Jawaharlal Nehru. See his *Discovery of India* (1946). For a recent example of an argument along these lines by a historian, see Mushirul Hasan (2008).
Hindu majority by electoral means. In other words, Hindu nationalism puts into question the political and social status of the Muslim minority of India. Morari Bapu’s discourse on toleration, which I examine later in this chapter, drew on the Gandhian understanding of religious toleration. However, as I also show later in this chapter, Morari Bapu’s invocation of Gandhian-inspired toleration can no longer be read on its own terms because of the hegemony of Hindu nationalist discourse in Gujarat’s public sphere. Instead, as I show, his calls for religious toleration were read in a liberal-modernist register by some Hindu members of his audience and by journalists at the recital, effectively placing a disproportionate demand on Gujarat’s Muslims, while re-inscribing the moral superiority of Gujarati Hindus.

In this chapter then, I investigate the circulation of the discourses of toleration in contemporary Gujarat by exploring how the traditional activity of reciting and auditioning the *Ramcaritmanas katha* has been transformed in the modern Gujarati public sphere. By taking the recital as my object of analysis in this chapter, I want to make it clear that I am not arguing that the public performance of the *katha* is a ruse for asserting the power of a Hindu majority. I am not arguing that there are hidden political motives behind Morari Bapu’s recitals such as the one at the sufi shrine in Kutch. Nor do I wish to suggest that the *Ramcaritmanas* has essential qualities that necessarily make it available for the making of Hindu nationalist projects or for the cultivation of Hindu nationalist subjectivities. My argument rather is conjunctural. Because traditional practices such as the *katha* now operate in a discursive field dominated by the conceptual grammar of the nation-state with its notions of religiously marked political majorities and minorities, they have become reconfigured and available for the articulation of Hindu nationalist imaginaries at this particular conjuncture in Gujarat.28 In addition, I argue that this

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28 See Asad (2003) who uses Wittgenstein’s notion of “the grammar of concepts” to think about the relationship and differences between secularism, nationalism and Islamism in the Middle East (189).
reconfiguration of a traditional practice and its insertion into the project of Hindu nationalism in contemporary Gujarat is itself an effect of transformations in notions of *sampradaya* (tradition/community) on the one hand and the violent displacement of prior indigenous understandings of toleration by the colonial state on the other. For this reason, I will be referring to Gandhi throughout this chapter to illustrate these simultaneous transformations and to foreground the specificities of this particular conjuncture.

One of my arguments in this chapter is that we think of the recital of a text such as the *Ramcaritmanas* (and of others such as the *Bhagavatpurana*) simultaneously as a religious, social, and political event. In other words, it is a performance that brings people together to listen to and participate in the reading of a text and to deliberate and engage with religious, social and political concerns. To borrow a formulation from the anthropologist Lara Deeb’s (2006) argument on piety and politics among the Shi’a community in Lebanon, the *katha* is a space where the religious/ethical and the political cannot be readily disentangled from each other. This is not to say that religion determines politics or that politics is religion in disguise in Gujarat; such a formulation presumes that we can readily demarcate one from the other. Rather, the point I want to stress here is that politics or the secular (I include Hindu nationalism in the secular) and religion are co-constituted in contemporary Gujarat.²⁹

My argument, however, is *not* that this intertwining of the religious and the political is new. Indeed, in its traditional form, the *katha* has always been a simultaneously religious, social and political performance. It brought together members of a *sampradaya* (tradition/community) or a traditional kinship or caste network, and functioned as a vehicle for securing the ritual and social status of the *srota* (the principal listener and sponsor). Furthermore, the traditional *katha*

²⁹ This is an argument that I derive from Talal Asad’s work on religion and secularism (1993; 2003). I will explain in greater detail later in this chapter how I adapt his argument to think about Hindu nationalism in Gujarat.
occurred within the context of relations of power and authority which regulated not just the performance of recitals and who could participate, but also shaped the meanings of such performances. For example, the recital of some puranic texts was considered incomplete without the participation of Sudras, the lowest social group in the four fold varna order (Lutgendorf 1991). At the same time, Sudras were forbidden from accessing or hearing the words of the classical Vedic texts, associated with the Brahminical tradition. Put differently, in the katha, religious knowledge and its circulation have never been detached from social relations or from political power and authority; and the same continues to be true today. In contemporary India, relations of power are now structured by the centralizing nation-state, the capitalist market, and electoral democracy and by the discourse of secularism, which partitions social life into public and private domains. Given this, the katha is now situated within newly configured relations of power and made accountable to different notions of religious and political community. One effect of this particular historical conjuncture, I argue, is that the co-constitution of religion and politics has the effect of erasing the distinction between the Hindu tradition and Hindu nationalism or Hindutva. As a result, the performance of a katha by a figure such as Morari Bapu becomes available to his audience as a space for articulating a vision of a unified Hindu community and for elaborating a Hindu self that is distinct from and opposed to the Muslim.

I derive my use of the term co-constituted from Talal Asad’s seminal work on the anthropology of religion and of the secular (Asad 1993; 2003). In Formations of the Secular, Asad argues that “the secular is neither continuous with the religious that supposedly preceded it (that is, it is not the latest phase of a sacred origin) nor a simple break from it (that is, it is not the opposite, an essence that excludes the sacred). I take the secular to be a concept that brings
together certain behaviors, knowledges and sensibilities in modern life” (Asad 2003:25). As I understand his argument, the contemporary understanding of the religious and the secular as representing distinct arenas of human life and activity is itself the contingent effect of modern regimes of power. According to Asad, the boundary between the religious and the secular is unstable and contingent and subject to mutable relations of power; as epistemologies and ontologies, the two are co-constituted by modern power. In a similar vein, I argue that the Hindu religious tradition and Hindu religious subjectivities as well as Hindu nationalist identities are co-constituted in contemporary Gujarat. More specifically, within the space of the katha, but more generally in political discourse in contemporary Gujarat, the Hindu religious tradition is increasingly constituted and understood as that which is not Muslim or Christian.30 In other words, the Hindu religious tradition and Hindu nationalist discourse at this particular conjuncture in Gujarat are being collapsed and made part of another binary: Hindu versus Muslim.

In this regard, it is important to note that in contemporary Gujarati discourse, there is a semantic overlap between the terms Hindu and Hindutva, the Hindi term for Hindu nationalism. In Hindi as well as in Gujarati, the term Hindutva means the state of being Hindu or the characteristics of being Hindu. During the course of my fieldwork, many of my interlocutors

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30 I owe this formulation to Partha Chatterjee. This understanding of the Hindu tradition/community as that which is not Muslim/Christian came to the fore in local political discourse in the debates around the Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Bill which was approved by the Gujarat Legislative Assembly in September 2006. In the bill, Jainism and Buddhism were defined as “denominations of the Hindu religion.” This bill was introduced as an amendment to the original Freedom of Religion Bill which was approved by the legislative assembly in 2003. The 2003 bill required individuals who wished to convert to report and obtain prior consent of the district magistrate. The latter, in turn, was required to determine whether the conversion had occurred freely (i.e. without coercion, without “allurement” and without “fraudulent means”). The legislation also prohibits the conversion of children, women and those belonging to the Scheduled Tribes of Scheduled Castes. Critics of the legislation have correctly pointed out that such legislation is part of the Hindu nationalist movement’s attempts to define the bounds of the Hindu tradition and nation. However, it is worth noting that Gujarat is not unique in this regard. Similar legislation has been passed in several other states well before the Hindu nationalist movement emerged as a significant political force in India (e.g. Madhya Pradesh approved its Freedom of Religion Bill in 1968) suggesting that the practice of defining the Hindu tradition as that which is not Muslim cuts across the secularist versus religious nationalist political divide in postcolonial India.
who were members of Hindu nationalist organizations (some of whom participated in the violence of 2002) rarely used the word *Hindutva* to describe themselves. Instead, they described themselves simply as Hindu. The point that I am trying to make here is not that Hindu nationalism represents all Hindus or that by definition, all Hindus are Hindu nationalists. Rather, one of my arguments in this chapter is that in the context of postcolonial Gujarat, Hindu religious traditions and practices as well as Hindu nationalist mobilization have not only been co-constituted and simultaneously transformed; they have also drawn sustenance from each other through their activities in the democratic public sphere. In the process, what it means to be Hindu has been reconstituted and re-articulated explicitly in terms of an opposition to the Muslim (and to a lesser extent, the Christian) other. One result of this co-imbrication is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to inhabit a Hindu religious identity that is not at the same time articulated in opposition to a Muslim Other. Popular and powerful figures such as Morari Bapu embody and enact this transformation while contributing to it through performances like the katha.

Given that the category religion was essential to the stabilization of colonial power and that religious traditions were profoundly reconfigured by modern power, writing about religious traditions in postcolonial contexts such as India presents numerous difficulties. Often the arguments on tradition revolve around questions of invention or authenticity (e.g., Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). Other scholars such as Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) and Talal Asad (1986) have argued that we move away from ascribing an essence to traditions and instead think of them as discursive spaces and embodied practices that are constituted by argument, debate and

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31 There is a vast literature on the connections between colonial governmentality and religion in South Asia. See for example Cohn (1987; 1996); Dirks (2001); Van der Veer (1988; 1994); Scott (1999).
Asad has also pointed out that traditions do not exist outside of history; they are mutable and their mutability is affected by transformations in relations of power. Thus, for example, while a tradition may not share in the modern conception of time as homogenous and empty, the ubiquity and power of the nation-state has compelled those who wish to speak in the name of tradition to adopt and speak in the conceptual grammar of the modern nation-state. In the particular context of Gujarat, Hindu nationalist politics and the traditional practice of reciting and listening to the *Ramacaritmanas* intersect with each other such that the cultivation of devotional or pious dispositions becomes a site for the articulation of a particular type of political subjectivity.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section I provide a brief description of the influence of the *Ramacaritmanas* on the literary, cultural and religious practices of Gujarat; and situate the career and emergence of Morari Bapu as a religo-political authority within the broader discursive tradition of devotion to Rama in the region. Reflecting briefly on Gandhi’s understanding of the *katha* (recital), my aim in this section is to show how the traditional practice of the *katha* has become public in a new way; and how Morari Bapu has been a key figure in reconfiguring the practice of public recital. If in the early twentieth century, Gandhi imagined the ashram as central to a community grounded in alternative ethics, in contemporary Gujarat, the public recital is central to Morari Bapu’s project of disseminating the ethical message of the *Ramacaritmanas*. In addition, I show how this reconfigured recital has become “infrastructural” to Gujarat’s public sphere; an important site of deliberating and

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32 According to Talal Asad a tradition consists “essentially of discourses that seek to inculcate practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that precisely because it is established has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to a past (when the practice was instituted and from which the knowledge of its point of proper performance has been transmitted) and a future (how the point of that practice can best be secured) in the short or long term (or why it should be modified or abandoned) through a present (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions)” (Asad 1986:14).
debating political, social and ethical questions (Hirschkind 2006). In the second section, I explore how the meaning of both tradition and community were reconfigured by colonial power. This reconfiguration of the meanings of sampradaya, which occurred in the aftermath of the 1857 Mutiny, I suggest, is entangled with the colonial discourses and practices of toleration. In other words, liberal ideas of toleration were not only central to the stabilization of colonial or modern power; this stability was in fact achieved through the privileging of sampradaya as a referent for the Hindu tradition and community as a whole. And, it is this privileging of the notion of a Hindu sampradaya that enables the emergence of a figure such as Morari Bapu. During my fieldwork, many of my interlocutors compared Morari Bapu’s religious politics to the politics of Gandhi. In the third section, I explore this comparison especially as it pertains to their understandings of toleration. In the final section, I provide a brief ethnographic account of Morari Bapu’s recital at Hajji Pir in order to show how liberal and Hindu nationalist understandings of toleration are continuous with and draw sustenance from each other. While the recital was addressed to Hindus and Muslims alike, it is important to note that many of the Muslims who participated in the recital belonged to the pastoral nomadic groups who live on the margins of the state, and whose marginality and vulnerability is compounded by the suspicions of security forces in the area. More importantly, while Morari Bapu’s recital was designed to elaborate a non-liberal conception of religious toleration, one that made equal demands on Hindus and Muslims alike to rethink their relations with each other, it was received and interpreted by many in the audience as a call on Muslims to transform themselves into loyal national subjects.
The *Ramcaritmanas* Tradition in Contemporary Gujarat:

The story of Rama has had an abiding influence on the literary culture and religious practices of Gujarat and Tulsidas’ *Ramcaritmanas*, which is one retelling of the story, can be situated within a broader Hindu discursive tradition (Asad 1986) that includes both Mahatma Gandhi and Morari Bapu. Given that each one of them is situated in and responding to very different historical conjunctures, this might seem like an incongruous comparison. Gandhi was the leader of the Indian nationalist movement and responding to the problems of colonial modernity. He was an incisive critic of the secular nationalist desire to establish a centralized state in India and also a critic of religious nationalism. In contrast, Morari Bapu is not a leader of a political movement and he is situated within and responding to the challenges of a post-Partition national order dominated by centralizing and modernizing states. While he describes himself as an ascetic who has no interest in politics, he enjoys a large following in the Hindu nationalist movement. Yet, despite these differences, the connection between Gandhi and Morari Bapu was often made by many of my Gujarati Hindu interlocutors who saw the latter as continuing the moral and ethical project initiated by Gandhi. In the public imagination and in political discourse in contemporary Gujarat, both are perceived as symbols of devotion and virtue and both are seen as practitioners of a religious politics in which the idea of toleration is central.

Gandhi’s life and politics are characterized by many paradoxes. He was committed to the practice of religious politics, but also argued forcefully that the post-Partition Indian state should be secular. He was a nationalist who led India to independence, but he was also a staunch critic of nationalism in its secular and religious forms. While Gandhi was a critic of both the liberal and of the Hindu traditions, he was differently situated within them and never perceived of himself as operating outside of the Hindu tradition. Daily recitation of the *Ramcaritmanas* was a
central element of the practices of the Sabarmati Ashram and in the articulation of Mahatma Gandhi’s politics. He described Tulsidas’ composition as the finest devotional work ever written. The text was a central feature of the living traditions of India; traditions which he critically reinterpreted through his religious politics. As several scholars have argued, for Gandhi, tradition was a resource for articulating a critique of modernity and his vision of its alternative—swaraj. The latter, he defined not only as independence from British rule, but as self-mastery which combined bodily discipline with the cultivation of a religious and ethical disposition. The ethical ideas that he derived from his readings of texts such as the Ramcaritmanas formed the basis of a profound critique of the central institutions of modernity—popular sovereignty, civil society, the nation-state and secularism and these ideas were also crucial to his elaboration of an alternative politics of swaraj.

In contrast, a figure such as Morari Bapu is enabled by the post-Partition national order in South Asia. Unlike Gandhi, who drew on the Hindu tradition in his critique of nationalism, Morari Bapu interprets the Hindu tradition in a register that draws on rather than departs from the conceptual vocabulary of the nation-state. By doing so, he simultaneously occupies a position of authority within a Hindu discursive tradition and amongst members of the Hindu nationalist movement. Let me explain. With the establishment of a secular and modernizing nation-state after independence, religion came to be as defined as it’s other, an object to be managed, reformed, and limited to the private sphere, in order for Indian society to be made fully modern and to prevent religious violence. Indian secularism, as several scholars have argued, is distinct

33 The literature dealing with Gandhi’s understanding of tradition and its relationship to politics is vast and any inquiry on it must begin with his autobiography and include his voluminous writings on the subject. The most succinct statements on this question are in his Hind Swaraj (1997) and the writings included in The Moral and Political Writings of Gandhi (3 Vols.) edited by N. Raghavan Iyer (1986). My own reading of Gandhi has benefitted from Bhikhu Parekh’s Colonialism, Tradition, and Reform: An Examination of Gandhi’s Political Discourse (1989); Anthony Parel’s (1997) “Introduction” to his translation of Hind Swaraj and especially from the work of Asish Nandy (1982), Partha Chatterjee (1986), Ajay Skaria (2002). I have also benefitted from Kishorelal Mashruwala’s Gandhi Vichar Dohan (1932) available in Gujarati only.
from other secularisms insofar as the state is committed to treating all religions equally and maintaining a “principled distance” from all religious traditions. However, Indian secularism, like secularist discourse in general, assumes that India’s Hindus and Muslims are distinctive and oppositional communities. And, like all versions of secularism it demands of its subjects, primary loyalty to the nation-state. On the one hand, state secularism is viewed as essential for the protection of minority rights and as essential for safeguarding what secular nationalists describe as India’s composite culture. On the other, it is conceived of as essential to maintaining social peace, an idea which rests on the assumption that religious diversity has greater potential for producing violence than religious uniformity. Moreover, institutions and practices we associate with the modern nation-state—democracy, civil society and the public sphere—have been crucial to the rise of religious nationalist politics in India. Even though the Hindu nationalist movement has articulated itself in opposition to Indian state-secularism, in its contemporary form it shares many characteristics with secularist discourse. The BJP, for example, describes the current political arrangement in India, especially the constitutional commitment to affirmative action and the application of religiously defined personal laws as pseudo-secularist and as a corruption of democracy, which it conceives of as majority rule. In other words, the Hindu nationalist movement is more comfortable with the institutional logics of the modern state and seeks to deploy the power of this state in securing the interests of a Hindu majority (Chatterjee, 1998).

More recently, after the serialization of the Ramayana story and of Hindu nationalist mobilization and violence, the Ramcaritmanas has become linked to the politics of identity in
Gujarat (and India). On some accounts it is considered the *ur* text of the movement.\(^{34}\) Of course, as mentioned earlier, there is nothing intrinsic to the *Ramcaritmanas* that lends itself to religious nationalist interpretations. Its availability for political projects is historically contingent rather than inherent. Indeed, there are significant differences between the Hindu nationalists’ and Gandhi’s relationship to and interpretation of this text and of the Hindu religious tradition. For one, Gandhi would have criticized Hindu nationalists for conflating and reading tradition as History. In addition, Gandhi believed that popular sovereignty (i.e. the modern state) enabled new forms of violence on a scale that were unimaginable in traditional society (Gandhi, 1997).

In the case of Hindu nationalism, the very institutions that Gandhi sought to reconfigure and displace (the nation-state, civil society and the public sphere) have been crucial to its success as a political movement. These institutions have also altered conditions within which the activity of reciting and auditioning the *Ramcaritmanas* takes place. More importantly, these very institutions have profoundly shaped the practice of reciting and listening to the words of the text and have made it available for interpretations that conform to the Hindu nationalist understandings of tradition and of the nation.

The story or Rama, or the Ramayana as it is commonly known, has been transmitted orally, in writing, through song and poetry, in dramatic performances (e.g., the *Ramlila*), and more recently through films and television serials. Because the story is so well-known, I will not be reconstructing it here. It is also beyond of the scope of this dissertation to provide an exhaustive history of the Ramayana, Tulsidas’s composition or its performance in recitals and

\(^{34}\) For an account of the mass mediated processes by which this link between the *Ramcaritmanas* and Hindu nationalism was forged see Arvind Rajagopal’s *Politics after Television* (2001).
other genres. As a story it has had a profound influence on narrative and poetic traditions in multiple languages including Gujarati. Since at least the eleventh century, it has had a profound influence on devotional practices especially in north India, and its influence has expanded to other parts of India from the sixteenth century on. Like other discursive traditions (MacIntyre 1981; 1990; Asad 1986), the Ramayana has been constituted by a diversity of interpretations, argumentation and change. While Valmiki’s Sanskrit telling of the Ramayana is considered to be the earliest literary composition in the tradition, there are an “infinite” number of tellings and retellings in multiple languages, composed at different times and in different places. As A.K. Ramanujan has pointed out, although Valmiki’s text has been considered central to the tradition, neither its narrative structure nor the details of the story are shared by these other tellings and retellings.

In the Ramayana tradition, Tulsidasa’s Ramcaritmanas is considered to be “an original retelling” in Hindi (Lutgendorf 1991:3) and one that has had an abiding influence on both writing and devotional practices in many parts of India. Sudipta Kaviraj has suggested that we think of Tulsidasa’s poem, written in the Avadhi dialect of Hindi, as an alternative or subaltern telling that made the Rama story available to an audience previously denied access to classical

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36 A.K. Ramanujan suggests that tellings is more apt than variants or versions, because the latter presumes “an original or Ur-text—usually Valmiki’s Sanskrit Ramayana, the earliest and most prestigious of them all.” See his “Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation” in Richman (1991), pp. 22-49. In the Ramcaritmanasa, Tulsidasa reminds his audience of the infinitude of Rama and of the stories about him. In the Gita Press edition the relevant lines of the stanza (1.32.6) read: “Rama is incarnate in countless ways, and that the Ramayana, though consisting of a million verses, is yet infinite.” Lutgendorf translates these as: “Rama incarnates in countless ways, and there are tens of millions of Ramayanas” (1995:217).

37 See for example, the works of Tagore. In Gujarat, almost every major poet from the 16th century onwards has composed verses that retell the story of Rama in some form or the other. See Umashankar Joshi’s “The Ramayana and its Impact on Gujarati Literature” in V. Raghavan, ed. (1980).
Composed in the sixteenth century, Tulsidas’s poem has been linked by several scholars to the steady expansion of Rama worship in North Indian devotional traditions from the eleventh century onwards (Whaling 1980; Van der Veer 1988; Pinch 1996). Van der Veer (1988), for example, has suggested that the text became central to the tradition and practices of the Ramanandi order, which has been tremendously influential in the continuing development of the Vaishnava tradition of devotion to Rama in North India. Tulsidas, himself, is often referred to as the ideal bhakta or devotee in this tradition and his work is often interpreted as an attempt to synthesize different strands of the Vaishnava bhakti tradition (Lutgendorf 1991:11).

The title of Tulsidas’s poem Ramcaritmanas has been rendered in English as the “Holy Lake of the Acts of Rama.” According to Lutgendorf, the title frames the narrative whose central concern is with problems of human action in the world and the human capacity to discern the reality/divinity of Rama. In Hindi and in Gujarati, the word caritra (from Sanskrit root car, which means to move) means action, practice, conduct, behavior, and character. The word manas (derived from the Sanskrit man which means “of mind and heart”) is meant to convey the cognitive as well as the affective and bodily in the writing, telling and listening of the poem. In addition, the word manas in the title, allegorically links the poem to the Holy lake Manas, the abode of the lord Siva who, according to Tulsidas, first narrated the story of Rama (Lutgendorf 1991:20–21). Presented in a language that is remarkable for its sweetness and power, a language designed to produce a mood of intense devotion in reader and listener alike, the plot unfolds through four dialogs which are used as a key device in structuring the narrative. In addition, Lutgendorf has pointed to the repeated use of words such as kathna (to recite); kahna (to tell) and gana (to sing) throughout and suggested that the text was meant to be transmitted through recitals (38). All of this also suggests that Tulsidas had identified the multiple human
capacities—speech, memory, hearing, affect, and bodily discipline (because of the sheer length of the poem)—that are central to comprehending the meanings of his poem.

The story offers many poignant examples on the challenges and dilemmas of action in this world. Rama, Sita (his consort) and the other characters embody the virtues and failings in their struggles to live and act in conformity with dharma (duty). Lutgendorf suggests that because dharma has often been conceived of as having dual characteristics, Rama as embodiment of dharma can also be interpreted as having a dual character. He suggests that dharma has been “metaphorically compared to a setu, a term connoting both a ‘boundary’—a wall or dam and a ‘connection’ or bridge. The former meaning suggests its restraining, regulating character; the latter its expansive possibilities” (Lutgendorf 1995:256). Interestingly, Morari Bapu has often described his own life and work as dedicated to bringing diverse peoples together through the universal message of Rama. On several occasions I have heard him use the metaphor of the setu to describe the message that he thinks is contained in the Ramcaritmanas. In addition, he has often described the book as the metaphorical brick for the construction of this setu.38 As I show through ethnographic accounts of his recitals later in this chapter, Morari

38 For example, see his recital of the Ramcaritmanas entitled Manas Mahatma II held at Gandhi’s Sabarmati Ashram from September 24, 2005 to October 2, 2005. While I did not attend this recital, during my fieldwork, several interlocutors mentioned it as an example of the visibility and power of Morari Bapu in the public sphere. It is worth noting that the gates of the Sabarmati Ashram, which was the locus of civic life during the anti-colonial struggle, were closed in 2002 when Muslims in Ahmedabad were under attack by Hindu nationalists. But three years later, they were opened to welcome the Hindu nationalist chief Minister, Narendra Modi who has been accused of orchestrating the violence. The recital was sponsored by the owner/editor of Gujarat Samachar, the state’s most widely circulated daily. The Editor’s Guild of India, which prepared a report on the role of the media in the 2002 violence points out that some vernacular newspapers, including the Gujarat Samachar played a central role in abetting the violence against Muslims. See Rights and Wrongs: Ordeal by fire in the killing fields of India (Editors Guild of India 2002).

At the time of my fieldwork, several interlocutors told me that the event was organized in order to resolve tensions between the Gujarat Samachar and the Hindu nationalist movement in the state. After hearing this on several occasions, I purchased recordings of the recital and watched it. On the opening day, a representative of the paper introduced the Chief Minister as “aapna laadila mukhya mantra, je Gujaratna vikas ane bhavishya mate ghantu karyu che” (our beloved Chief Minister, who has done so much for the development and future of Gujarat). In Gujarati, laad is a term of affection used to describe feelings of indulgence, usually towards a child. Morari Bapu responded by lifting his copy of the text and saying: “aa maari eit che” (i.e. “the manas is my brick”) and that he
Bapu’s *kathas* are like the metaphorical *setu*. They can be read as a bridge or causeway, aimed at binding and unifying diverse Indians, especially Hindus, into a unified community. They can also function as a space where the boundary between Hindus and non-Hindus is established, renewed, or elaborated (as in the case of the series of *kathas* that he has performed in support of the Hindu nationalist campaign of *shuddhi*, or purification, in south and central Gujarat). The metaphor of the brick can also be interpreted as an emblem of violence, since the collection of bricks was a central strategy of the Hindu nationalist campaign to build a temple to Rama on the site of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya.

Like many other parts of India, Gujarat has a rich history of narrative and poetic renderings of the Rama story. Versions of the story were incorporated in several Jain texts, and other retellings predate or are contemporaneous with Tulsidas’ composition in the sixteenth century. The medieval poet Bhalan, known for his devotion to Krishna, composed the *Rama bala lila* on the life of the child Rama and it appears that by the mid-seventeenth century there were numerous adaptations and tellings of the Rama story in circulation, some influenced by Tulsidas’ telling and others by Valmiki’s. The *bhakti* poet Akho, whose verses are known for their satire and critique of social practices of the seventeenth century, is said to have written short *aakhyaans* (legendary tales) of Rama. In modern Gujarat, Akho is remembered as one of Gandhi’s favorite poets. He is also remembered as a model of virtue because of a life anchored...
in devotion, service and abstinence. There are also orally transmitted versions of the story, especially amongst the various nomadic and tribal communities of Gujarat. Early twentieth century writers such as Umashankar Joshi mention the Girdhar Ramayana as one of the first and longest poems that they memorized. We also know from Gandhi’s autobiography that in the nineteenth century, many caste Hindu families participated in or sponsored readings and recitals of Tulsidas’ Ramcaritmanas. The predominant mode of reciting and reading the text was in the form a continuous reading of the text over nine or thirty days, with a break at a designated verse at the end of each day. Often family members would join the adept in these readings. In this type of reading there was no exegesis; rather the practice followed the author Tulsidas’ view that the depth and meanings of the text could only be accessed through repeated reading aloud, memorization and listening.

The practice of inviting an exegete for the recital of the Ramcaritmanas, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, is a relatively recent phenomenon in Gujarat; and the practice of sponsoring an exegete to perform a “public” recital in order to promote social and political causes is an even more recent phenomenon. According to the historian Achyut Yagnik, Dongre Maharaj, a highly regarded exegete of the seven day recital of the Gita, performed one of the first such recitals to help the Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda raise funds for faculty salaries during the economic crisis after the Sino-Indian war in 1962. However, these were relatively small gatherings and remained inaccessible to a wider audience because they were

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40 This is the way that members of my family and I were taught to read the text. See also Lutgendorf (1991).

41 On the changing role and place of memory and memorization in modern times, see Mary Carruthers’ fascinating study of memory in medieval times, The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture (1990); on the important pedagogical role of memory in the Islamic tradition see Brinkley Messick’s The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society ((1993).

42 Interview with Achyut Yagnik, January 17, 2011 (Ahmedabad). Several decades later, Morari Bapu was invited to perform a recital at M.S. University in Baroda.
performed in a highly Sanskritized Hindi. In Gujarat, Morari Bapu is a pioneer and innovator of this new mode of reciting the text in public and in support of social causes that can appeal to wider social networks. Since he began his career in 1960, when he performed his first recital in the traditional form of a continuous reading over thirty days, Morari Bapu has to date recited the Ramcharitmanas over 700 times.43

In fact, one could argue that, unlike Gandhi, the public recital has been constitutive of Morari Bapu’s popularity and is one of the primary mediums through which he participates in the public sphere in Gujarat.44 Born in 1946 to a family of modest means in the village of Talgajarda/Mahuva, located near the city of Bhavnagar in peninsular Gujarat, Morari was a local bard who sang devotional songs during religious festivals and recited the Ramcaritmanas in the village temple. In 1966, he became a primary school teacher in the government school. After performing several recitals of the Ramcaritmanas in the vicinity of his hometown, he resigned his post in 1974 because “the call of Ram was far more powerful” than the call of vigyan (scientific knowledge) (Shah 2006: 31). Over the years, hagiographers and devotees have described this move as the beginnings of his transformation from a vargshikshak (school teacher) to a fulltime lokshikshak (teacher of the people). He has frequently stated that his goal is to impart knowledge of Ram to a global audience and to take his “vyas pith” (lit. the seat of the exegete, where the text resides for the duration of the recital) to every corner of the world.45

43 See his official website for the running count: http://www.iiramii.net/ramkatha_fullkathalist.html.

44 Morari Bapu also participates in the public sphere by other means. Since 2010, he has been writing a weekly column in Divya Bhaskar, which has emerged as the second most widely circulated daily in Gujarat. In addition, he is frequently invited to lecture at conventions and conferences organized by professional associations as well as literary societies and on university campuses.

45 This dream has been largely fulfilled. Over the years, sponsors have arranged for recitals on chartered 747 that circumnavigated the earth over nine days, with each day’s performance taking place while the plane was airborne. He has also performed a recital on a chartered cruise ship and two in Tibet at Lake Mansarovar. According to Tulsidas, the Lord Shiva first narrated the story of Rama at the lake. And, he has performed recitals in Brazil, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States and many other countries.
Contemporary recitals, such as those performed by Morari Bapu usually last nine days and presume a discipline on the part of the audience. A recital by Morari Bapu combines different genres of speech and performance. It also effectively combines religious instruction, social commentary, political criticism and entertainment. For at least the past thirty years, he has been accompanied by the same group of musicians who intimately understand his recital style, his moods and rhythms and know exactly when to sing a couplet (doha) from the *Ramcaritmanas* or begin singing *bhajans* and *dhuns* (devotional songs). In fact, depending on the occasion and site where the *katha* is taking place, a recital can include the singing of *bhajans* (some adapted to Bollywood beats), *quawwalis*, folk songs, the *dayro*\(^{46}\) (a humorous style of performance that combines songs, genealogies, jokes and stories that is peculiar to caste-gatherings of Saurashtra Rajputs), poetry readings, political speeches and classical music performances. At his recitals, the text of the *Ramcaritmanas* is never read in its entirety. Rather, the recital is a masterful performance of oratory and song that draws on multiple sources and genres. In this sense, one could think of any given recital by Morari Bapu as inter-textual; a reading and performance that operates in multiple discursive registers. A single stanza or couplet from the poem serves as an “anchor for an improvised verbal meditation” (Lutgendorf 1995: 217-256) that can range across other texts (other epics, Vedic texts, Puranic texts, modern fiction and non-fiction, poetry, folklore), lives of exemplary mythical and historical figures, real life stories of his followers, Bollywood films, and news reports. Morari Bapu’s *kathas*, then can be seen as combining entertainment with religious instruction. Indeed, the *katha*, because it lasts nine days, presupposes discipline on the part of a listener. It is also a space where ethical discipline is cultivated and refined, where individuals are formed and reformed into particular

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\(^{46}\) In Gujarati, the word *dayro* literally means caste meeting of Rajputs. Such caste meetings usually involve bards singing and narrating the lives and genealogies of prominent caste elders, often in a humorous register.
types of religious and political subjects. And, it is a space within which social, political and cultural questions are addressed, elaborated, and critiqued.

In addition to being intertextual and drawing on multiple genres and registers, the *katha* as performed by Morari Bapu is dialogic. There is little doubt that power and authority define the relationship between him and his audience; indeed, he can direct and transform the mood of the audience by his choice of stanza or couplet to expound upon. In the *kathas* in which I participated, I frequently noticed that the mood of the audience would shift depending on the tone of his voice or the choice of a *bhajan* (devotional song). Yet, I would argue that the performance and relationship between Morari Bapu and his audience is dialogical. They are dialogical in the sense that the mood of his audience can also shift and influence the direction and tenor of his performance. But, more importantly, just as dialogue is a literary device that Tulsidas uses to move the plot forward, Morari Bapu uses dialogue and exchanges with his audience to move the recital through its various stages. During the recitals in which I participated as well as the several recorded recitals that I watched, Morari Bapu often reads letters from correspondents and organizes the day’s discourse as a response to these. These dialogic elements, I would argue, challenge the characterization of the traditional relationship between religious authorities and their disciples as monologic, one where disciples are seen as passive recipients of knowledge.

During the anti-colonial struggle, Gandhi’s daily prayer meetings at Sabarmati ashram in Ahmedabad played an important role in the constitution of a nationalist public sphere in the city. The prayer meeting was an occasion to engage in a daily public deliberation of ethical and political questions of the time such as the reform of caste practices, the abolition of the practice of untouchability, textile workers’ rights, the campaign to challenge the salt tax and many other
issues that were central to the anti-colonial struggle. Gandhi had hoped that the ashram, as he conceived of it, would become a central institution in the political life of the nationalist movement, and after Indian independence, in the life of the nation. However, in contemporary Gujarat, the Gandhian ashram has been largely marginalized in daily public deliberations. Instead, the practice of listening to a recital by a person like Morari Bapu has become central to public deliberation in the state. In contemporary Gujarat, the *katha* bears a striking resemblance to the practices of listening to cassette sermons in Egypt that the anthropologist Charles Hirschkind has analyzed. Like the cassette sermon in contemporary Egypt, the *katha* has become “as infrastructural to politics and public reason as are markets, associations, formal institutions and informal networks” (Hirschkind 2006:9).

Since the late 1960s, in Gujarat, the *katha* has become public in multiple senses of the term. As I mentioned earlier, many of Morari Bapu’s *kathas* are hosted in public spaces such as university grounds, town halls, public maidans (or grounds) in city centers, stadiums and sports clubs. Their very location, often in city centers is an invitation to an ever widening array of individuals to attend and participate. Modern *kathas* are sponsored by individuals, corporations, civic organizations, private clubs and temple trusts. In many cases, they are organized to raise funds for philanthropic projects (hospitals, schools, clinics) or social welfare programs or for the construction of new temples. In other words, from being a localized ritual, the *katha* has now become a space for stranger sociability; a space where the reciter addresses a public and a community imagined as Hindu and as distinct and separate from all others. It is a space where what matters are not local and familial bonds but feelings of membership in a larger Hindu religious and political community.
While ethical questions are elaborated and discussed at the *katha*, deliberation about them is not limited the nine days of the performance, in part because they are re-broadcast on cable television and their recordings are readily available in a variety of media (cassettes, compact discs, dvds and now, on the internet). Many of my interlocutors regularly participated in *kathas*. A large numbers of them also insisted that they tried to spend at least one or two hours per day listening to or watching a recording. Often the conversation in their homes would revolve around themes in the day’s exegesis by Morari Bapu and how his interpretations could be related to dilemmas and challenges in their own lives; this included conflicts within the family between siblings and other relatives, and how one comports oneself in social life and with others. The overwhelming sense one gets from these interactions with listeners is of their desire to cultivate their own devotion to god in order to negotiate effectively the challenges of life in this world. The discourses of *kathas* also informed critical discussions about social practices such as dowry and female infanticide.

At the same time, the connections between contemporary politics in Gujarat and Morari Bapu’s *kathas* can sometimes be explicit. In some cases, his *kathas* are connected to Hindu nationalist causes such as the *ghar vapasi andolan* (bring back home), a campaign aimed at “reconverting” the adivasis (tribals) of Dangs district in Gujarat to Hinduism. In October 2002, he recited a *katha* organized by the Hindutva activist Aseemanand to raise funds for a temple dedicated to Rama and to Shabari in the Dangs.\(^\text{47}\) The Rama story has portrayals of his movements through the Dandakarnya forest during exile, and according to Bhil lore, Rama is reputed to have cleansed the forest of the *rakshasas* that were tormenting them. The Rama story also describes the meeting between Rama and Shabari, a tribal woman devoted to him, in the

\(^{47}\) Aseemanand has since been arrested for orchestrating the terrorist attack on the Samjhauta Express on February 19, 2007 in which sixty eight people, mainly Pakistanis and two security personnel were killed.
same forest. According to the story, prior to feeding a hungry Rama, Shabari is said to have tasted the berries and fruits to ensure that they were ripe and worthy of offering to a divine king. Hindu nationalists represent the contemporary Dangs as the actual Dandakarnya forest featured in Tulsidas’ poem. According to Kanungo and Joshi, the recital can be read as an attempt to affirm a “mythical/historical link between Dangs *adivasis*” and Rama and thus to incorporate the former into the Hindu nation (Kanungo and Joshi 2010:287). At this *katha*, which was inaugurated by Narendra Modi, Morari Bapu also called for the institution of a *kumbh mela*—a pilgrimage—in the Dangs. By 2006, the state government had provided infrastructure funds for the development of the Pampa Sarovar, a lake in Subir, the village where Shabari is believed to have lived, so that the *kumbh* could be organized. In February of 2006, the promised *kumbh* was held and Morari Bapu, along with Hindu nationalist leaders including Aseemanand, the Hindu nationalist chief minister Narendra Modi and many others from the movement, inaugurated it.

In a democratic polity where the logic of numbers predominates, politicians are understandably attracted to Morari Bapu’s *kathas* because of the vast audiences that he draws. In some cases, politicians are invited by sponsors of the recital; in others, they take the initiative to participate for at least a day and when they do they are usually invited by Morari Bapu to address the audience. To many an observer, such interactions between politicians and a religious authority such as Morari Bapu appear to be instrumentalist. And, no doubt there is an element of calculation on the part of the politicians in these acts. Not only does the *katha* offer a ready-

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48 The *kumbh* is a gathering of pilgrims on the banks of the Ganges that is held every three years. The call to institute a *kumbh* in Gujarat at the Dangs, to say the least, is highly unusual within the tradition.

49 The RSS and the VHP have created a dedicated website for this campaign. See [http://www.shabarikumbh.org/](http://www.shabarikumbh.org/) [last accessed February 11, 2009].

made audience for politicians, but it also allows them to connect with pious individuals by participating in the performance of piety and devotion. However, in the current configuration of power relations in Gujarat, such interactions, I would suggest, can be understood as mutually reaffirming the relationship between political power and religious authority. The katha in its contemporary manifestation can also be understood as a site and space from where ideas of belonging to a religious and political community are articulated and embodied; where political and social questions are addressed and debated; and where Hinduess as a religious disposition and as a political identity are simultaneously nurtured and cultivated. This reconfigured katha, in other words can be viewed as a site for interpellation and pedagogy; a site where what it means to be Hindu in the present is iterated, enacted, embodied, and put on display.

Let me illustrate what I mean by this through an example. In March 2007, I participated in a recital by Morari Bapu which was held at a public ground located in the center of Rajkot, Gujarat’s fourth largest city with a population of about one and a quarter million. The recital was entitled Manas Valmiki, and was advertised as a performance for the spiritual benefit of the Valmiki Samaj, meaning the Dalit community. Valmiki, as you will recall composed the Sanskrit Ramayana. Narratives about Valmiki represent him as belonging to a sudra caste and as a contemporary of Rama. This katha, which was sponsored by a non-resident Indian family from the United States, was inaugurated by Narendra Modi. While I could not participate in the inaugural day of the recital, I was there from the second day onwards. That evening after the recital had ended, one of my interlocutors told me of an argument between Morari Bapu and some dalits from the community. The incident occurred at the home of Morari Bapu’s host, a leading industrialist of the state:

“Aap Rama katha nathin karva avya, Raj katha karva avya cho.” [You have not come here to tell us the story of Rama, you have come here to tell
us the story of Raj.] These words were being conveyed to me by Deepak. They were not his words. He was telling me about what he had seen and heard earlier that evening at the farmhouse of one of the state’s most powerful businessmen. Deepak had spent the early evening with Morari Bapu, who was now resting from a day of reciting the Ramcaritmanas in the late March heat of Rajkot. Deepak and I had spent the day attending the recital. Even though the temperature by 10 AM under the tent felt like a hundred degrees, the day’s recital seemed to have attracted a crowd of over a 100,000. Today was the second day of the nine day recital. The day had begun with the performance of aarti on the stage where two small idols of Rama and Valmiki had been placed to the right. That day, the aarti was performed by several middle aged men who were described as agevaans (elders) of the Valmiki Samaaj (i.e. the Dalit community). An announcement was also made that for the remaining nine days, the morning aarti would not be performed by the NRI sponsor, who according to tradition would also be the principal listener (srota) of the recital. Instead, this ritual would be performed by leaders of the Dalit community.

According to Deepak, every evening after the recital, Morari Bapu holds an audience for visitors. And, since he had announced at the recital that anyone who wanted to speak with him was welcome to the industrialist’s estate, several dalits had come there to talk to Morari Bapu about their social condition and express grievances. Apparently, the conversation became heated. According to Deepak, they accused Morari Bapu of only recognizing those dalits who were members of the RSS. In addition, they told Morari Bapu that his host was a notorious union buster and funder of the Hindu nationalist politicians. From Deepak [who is not sympathetic to the dalits], I gathered that Morari Bapu listened to the accusations and then asked his Dalit interlocutors to apologize to their host for violating his hospitality. Morari Bapu, I was told, added that the only advice he had for the unhappy Dalits was that everyone had to also learn to forgive past wrongs and to reconcile with Vijaybhai (name changed/the host) and to have faith in Rama that their situation will improve.51

On the third day of the recital, the morning aarti was not performed by dalits from the community. Instead, the sponsor performed the ritual and thus reestablished his place as the principle listener. Instead of the joyous mood of the day before, there was somberness in the air. Word had gotten out to the local press about the prior evening’s confrontation at the farmhouse. One of the local newspapers ran an article describing the incident with the headlines

51 My notes, March 22, 2007 (Rajkot).
The recital had been advertised as an effort to provide spiritual guidance to the Dalit community and to help raise funds for Dalit social welfare. Since I had missed the first day’s performance, I purchased a recording of it in order to learn how the event was presented to the audience. After greeting the audience, Morari Bapu dedicated the recital to the Dalit community and thanked them for the gift they had bestowed on India: the sage Valmiki. Because the earliest literary composition of the Rama story is attributed to Valmiki, he is described as the *adi kavi* (the first poet). It is also believed that Valmiki was an untouchable who was liberated from his status for having written the first poem, the Ramayana. Morari Bapu then told the audience that as a member of the *parampara* (tradition) of Rama *bhakti*, he too considered himself a dalit. After all, he added, the tradition of devotion to Rama had been founded by Valmiki and if it were not for the great poem he composed, his own *vyas pith* (the seat of the reciter) would not have been imaginable. Next he introduced the sponsor, a man of Indian descent who lived in the United States, as someone who was like the Dalits. As an immigrant belonging to a minority, he too had suffered and had to overcome discrimination and prejudice in the United States through devotion to Rama. Dalits, he added, shared in the history of discrimination and prejudice with African Americans and South Asian immigrants; they shared a common experience of suffering and liberation through faith.

If I have gone into these details, it is in order to show how Hindu nationalist politics and Hindu piety are elaborated simultaneously in the space of the *katha*. The politics within this recital can be read in multiple ways. The parallel between the Dalit and the African-American...
experience suggests possibilities for an innovative democratic politics in a state that is notorious for anti-dalit violence. However, this possibility is foreclosed when the Dalit experience of suffering and historical injury is incorporated into the Hindu nationalist vision of majoritarian rule and by the valorization of Hindu nationalist dalits as the ideal religious and national subjects. At this historical conjuncture in Gujarat, the *katha* has become embedded in a modality of power that combines discourses of democracy and nationalist exclusion; it seeks to fashion particular kinds of Gujarati Hindu subjects who are able to recognize themselves in and participate in the Hindu nationalist project of producing a unified Hindu community.

In the next section of this chapter, I explore how understandings of Hindu community and Hindu religious subjectivity in modern Gujarat are linked to the reconfiguration of conceptions of tradition and community during the colonial period. In addition, I discuss how the histories of these conceptual reconfigurations are entangled with the colonial state’s policies after the 1857 Mutiny, which were grounded in liberal understandings of religious toleration.

**Liberal Toleration and the Reconfiguration of Tradition:**

Earlier in the chapter, I used the Gujarati word *sampradaya* when referring to notions of the Hindu religious tradition and community. In this section, I draw on the seminal work of Talal Asad (1993; 2003) in order to explore how a particular meaning of this concept has been privileged in the colonial courts and how this history informs contemporary understandings of the term in Gujarat. According to the *Bhagwat Gomandal*, a dictionary of the Gujarati language compiled in the nineteenth century, *sampradaya* means community as well as tradition. *Sampradaya* refers to community in two senses: one limited and the other all-encompassing. In the first sense, the word refers to social groups such as particular castes (e.g. Lohana, Bhattia,
Vaishnava Vania) or to a particular tradition whose membership might consist of multiple castes who follow the same religious preceptor (e.g. Vallabhacharya, Swaminarayana, Khojas).

Implicit in these meanings of *sampradaya* is the notion that an individual/community must have a tradition. Within individual *sampradaya*, which are best understood as discursive communities, religious and social/secular authority was shared by caste elders and religious preceptors who negotiated correct practice and maintained group boundaries. The second meaning of the term is universal, in the sense that it can be used to describe Hinduism and Islam as *sampradaya*. For example, until the late nineteenth century powerful Gujarati-speaking communities/traditions such as the Vallabhacharya and the Khojas did not understand themselves as members of the broader categories of Hindu and Muslim.

In fact, it can be argued that the privileging of the second meaning of *sampradaya* is entangled with the colonial state’s investments in the liberal discourse of religious toleration that emerged out of the wars of religion in Europe. Toleration discourse, which emerged in full force in colonial India after the 1857 Mutiny, functioned as a license for legal-political interventions which not only enabled the delineation of the religious from the secular domains of Indian social life, but also led to the reconfiguration of the boundaries between Hindus and Muslims. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, colonial courts in Western India treated caste and religion as matters of private belief and evaluated individual sampradaya (such as the Vallabhacharya and the Khojas) in terms of their fidelity to what were construed as the central beliefs of Hinduism and Islam. The effect of colonial policy was the concentration of power and authority in the hands of religious preceptors and figures and the transformation of the self-

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53 Liberal toleration, according to John Locke, was aimed at delineating “exactly the business of civil government from that of religion and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other (Locke 1983:26).” In colonial India, this liberal understanding of toleration was, to borrow the historian Bernard Cohn’s formulation, central in the British attempt to dominate India epistemologically (Cohn 1996: 53).
understanding of particular traditions as sects of the larger categories of Hindu and Muslim.

Liberal toleration, in contrast to indigenous practices of accommodation and tolerance which it displaced, articulated difference in two senses: between religion and the secular and between Hindu and Muslim. This reconfiguration of the meanings of the concept *sampradaya* in the colonial period, I would like to suggest, politicized religion in new ways. The entanglements of liberal toleration with colonial power can also be interpreted as the condition of possibility for contemporary Gujaratis to view figures such as Morari Bapu as representatives and authorities of a unified Hindu *sampradaya* (community/tradition).

Wendy Brown has recently argued that we think of liberal toleration as a discourse of power which presumes that the secular-liberal state and the secularized modern subject are naturally endowed with the quality of tolerance (Brown 2006). As a discourse, it also posits that religion and religious subjectivities are presumed to lack this quality. According to Brown, toleration is a governmental practice that seeks to incorporate and regulate “the presence of the threatening Other within” existing relations of power and simultaneously confers a superiority on those who tolerate that which they find repugnant (2006: 7). In colonial India, tolerance operated as a practice of governmentality designed to incorporate Indians as particular types of *religiously marked* subjects into the modern regime of power. It was crucial to the stabilization and consolidation of a civilizing mission whose foundations had been dramatically weakened by the 1857 Mutiny. The colonial policy of toleration was outlined in Queen Victoria’s proclamation of

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54 The effect of colonial knowledge on contemporary self-understandings of tradition can be seen in the Naveenchandra Acharya’s *Gujaratna Dharma Sampradaya* (The Religious Sects of Gujarat), a publication sponsored by the Government of India and issued by Gujarat University in 1983. The book is treated as an authoritative reference by state administrators, writers and intellectuals, and by university faculties in contemporary Gujarat. For example in the chapter of the Muslim communities of Gujarat, the followers of the Sufi mystics of Pirana, which to this day include members from a multiplicity of Hindu and Muslim castes and who describe themselves simply as members of the *pirana sampradaya* or as *pirana panthis*, are described by the author as being a sect of Islam from their very origins in the fourteenth century. It does not matter to the author that such a classification was introduced by colonial censuses in the late nineteenth century. The tragic effects of these transformations have been poignantly represented by M.G. Vassanji in his novel *The Assassin’s Song* (2007).
has argued, colonial toleration depended upon “the delineation and redefinition of ‘Hinduism’ as a religion rather than as the simple denomination” of the congeries of Indian traditions (2001:150). Colonial intervention in the religious affairs of Indian, despite the proclamation did not cease. Instead, the variety of practices and customs were evaluated against a conception of Hinduism as characterized by a set of core beliefs which had remained constant over time. At the center of this process were practices and institutions such as the census, colonial courts, and the bureaucracy and police. Often these questions were resolved in secular, colonial courts which adjudicated disputes within traditional communities (sampradaya) over questions of reform and correct practice. In such cases, petitioners when approaching courts were compelled to present their arguments in terms that conformed to liberal notions of individual freedom or injury. Furthermore, adjudication of such disputes by colonial courts entailed parsing traditional practices in terms of the enlightenment opposition between the religious and the secular. It is through these legal-political interventions that indigenous discursive traditions which were responding to the dramatic social changes introduced by colonialism came to be assessed in relation to conceptions of a ‘pure’ Hinduism and a ‘pure’ Islam. Each in turn was seen as representing rival propositional truths. In other words, the conceptions of religion and of toleration in the Indian context were mutually dependent and involved.

One of the effects of the colonial discourse of toleration with its privileging of individual conscience was the emergence and growing importance of new conceptions and understandings of religious community in colonial and postcolonial Indian society. The multiplicity of traditions, with their diverse authorities and ways of being were in effect reduced to being sects of rival religious communities, each driven by their own propositional truths. For example, the
Vallabhacharya, a Krishna-worshipping devotional community with a large following in Gujarat, used terms such as *sampradaya* (community/tradition) and *parampara* (tradition) in their self-description. By the late 19th century, they came to be viewed as a sect within the broader category Hindu (Shodhan 2001). Put differently, toleration which was identified with colonial power and the colonial public sphere became the middle ground, the space that was essential to keeping ostensibly rival communities apart from each. In this process, to borrow Talal Asad’s formulation, belief came to be construed as both “a privilege (the subject’s ability to choose her belief) and a danger (belief’s incitement to violence and intolerance) (Asad 2011:36–57).

In what follows, I engage with the work of Talal Asad on the reconfiguration of the relationship between belief and practice in modern discourses about religion. In addition, I engage with literature on colonialism and religion in India to explore how the reconfiguration of religion into belief has been central to the politicization of religion. In particular, I focus on Amrita Shodhan’s insightful study of the Aga Khan and Maharaja libel cases. Both these cases have been regarded as being of signal importance in the history of colonial era religious reform. The former dealt with a dispute within the Ismaili community over the status and authority of the Aga Khan and the latter with the practices of the Maharajas (the spiritual leaders) of the Vallabhacharyas, a powerful devotional community with deep roots in Gujarati society. At the center of the dispute were questions of correct practice and of the authority to reform (change) and enforce correct practice within the community. Through a discussion of these works, my aim is to show how toleration depended upon reconfiguring Indian discursive traditions such as the Vallabhacharya, and their insertion into categories such as Hindu and Muslim, each characterized as rival and static.
The historian of religion W.C. Smith has argued that terms such as religion and its plural, religions, are modern Western concepts (Smith, 1963). By the late eighteenth century, religion was no longer understood to mean the highly technical and specialized practices of Christian monastic orders. Rather, it had come to signify beliefs, doctrines and scriptures. Smith also argues that religions (e.g. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, etc.) were now understood as discrete entities. In a departure from Smith’s nominalist argument, Talal Asad has proposed that religion is not only a modern concept, its conception as a distinctive domain of social life emerges simultaneously with a new conception of a the secular (Asad 1993, 2001, 2003). The meanings and functions of religion and of the secular, he argues, should be understood in relation to specific cultural and historical contexts and to mutable relations of power. In addition, he argues, the two are co-constituted over time.

In his *Genealogies of Religion*, Asad articulates an incisive critique of anthropological conceptions of religion as exemplified by the work of Clifford Geertz. He argues that the Geertzian conception of religion as an ensemble of symbolic meanings expressed in rituals and doctrines and bringing about transcendental dispositions in individuals, is an attempt at producing a universal, transhistorical definition (1993). Asad argues that this search for a universal definition hinges upon the notion that religion has an essence and that it occupies “a distinctive space of human practice and belief which cannot be reduced to any other;” and is autonomous from other domains of human activity such as science, economics and politics (1993:27). On his view such a conception of religion elides the variety of social and historical processes which have shaped religious traditions, practices and experiences in different times and places. He also suggests that such a conception extricates religion from relations of power. According to Asad, this conception of religion is itself the product of a specifically European and
post-Reformation history. He adds that the medieval relationship between truth/knowledge and power was dramatically altered in the aftermath of the Reformation and with the emergence of new forms of power (modern state) and knowledge (modern science). For early Christian authorities such as Augustine, disciplinary power (including violence) was central to the production of religious knowledge and experience. The medieval Christian Church, which was an ensemble of institutions and disciplinary technologies, was the locus for the production of religious and practical knowledge as well as a site for the production and perfection of disciplinary techniques. The church was understood as the space within which individuals could be formed into religious subjects through instruction and training in bodily and mental disciplines. Power, in other words, was the condition of possibility for the individual and collective experiencing of religious truth (35). In the medieval context in other words, belief and practice were attached to each other, with the former emerging out of disciplined immersion in the latter.

In the post-reformation era however, the rise of the modern state and of new epistemologies reversed the relationship between practice and belief and heralded the confinement of religion to ever more restricted domains. Not only was belief understood as preceding practice, but the Christian church’s role as the site for the production of practical and religious knowledges and disciplines became marginal. Instead of the church, the rational and autonomous individual came to be perceived as the locus of knowledge, and the rule of law (modern state) as the site of disciplinary knowledge. This impoverished view of religion as belief, it can be suggested, conforms to liberal and enlightenment accounts which conceive of the individual as rational, autonomous and self-choosing. Instead of the Church, it is the autonomous individual that is privileged as the source of knowledge and understood as either
willingly submitting to or being the unwilling (unwitting?) victim of a particular religion. In enlightenment discourse then, religion is conceived of as a set of propositions which individuals could either give assent to or reject. If in the medieval past, the Church had been the locus of knowledge and discipline and of the constitution of individual subjects and their belief through instruction in proper practice; now belief was seen as residing in the mind and came to be viewed as constitutive of the subject. For liberal and enlightenment thinkers, belief appears as the willed or coerced submission to the truth-claims of a religious tradition; as propositions which are cognitive; outside of the relations of power which are constitutive of subjects.

According to Asad, the Christian church abides by the modern conception of religion, insofar as it gives precedence to belief over practice and sees the former as producing the latter. However, he adds that this reconfiguration of the relationship between power and knowledge and the concomitant emergence of a cognitivist understanding of religion does not enable us to see the conditions and processes which give rise to particular sets of beliefs in individuals. Asad adds that this cognitivist understanding of religion “is a product of the only legitimate space allowed for Christianity by post-enlightenment society, the right of individual belief;” and that, this in turn depends upon the view that religion as individual conviction should not threaten the authority of the modern state and of related discourses such as economy, politics, civil society (1993:45).

In Formations of the Secular, Asad further elaborates this critique by exploring what is construed as religion’s opposite: the secular. On Asad’s view, the secular is an epistemic concept, one which is “conceptually prior to the political doctrine of secularism” (2003: 16). The secular, he stresses, is neither “continuous with the religious,” nor is it “a simple break from it.” Instead, he suggests that we think of the secular as “a concept that brings together certain
behaviors, knowledges and sensibilities in modern life” (25). Asad’s primary concern is not with the empirical fact that secularism is a characteristic political arrangement of modern, liberal states or that there are varieties of secularism (i.e. French laïcité, American separation of church and state, or the Indian doctrine of equal treatment of all religions). Rather, Asad views the secular as an organizing category; one which is historically and culturally contingent and central to modern power’s disposition of bodies and things. The secular, then, can be seen as a discourse and a set of practices which enable certain types of subjectivities and agencies and disable others.

Bernard Cohn has argued that British rule in India was not only about territorial conquest and expansion. Colonialism was also about epistemological mastery, a process that involved apprehending and translating Indian society and culture into terms that were familiar to British officials (Cohn 1996, 53). The colonial state drew upon Enlightenment conceptions of religion, the secular and of community in articulating an array of governing technologies of rule and, to use the words of David Scott “altered the conditions of the lives of non-European peoples in ways that obliged them too to reconstitute themselves as members of one exclusive “religious” community against another” (Scott, 1999: 56, emphasis in original). Modes of representation such as the census became central to colonial administration and, as several historians have argued, these had far-reaching effects which continue to resonate into the postcolonial period in terms of how individuals conceive of themselves (Dirks 2001; Kaviraj 2010). Colonial modernity not only effected the reconfiguration of religious and cultural identities, it also politicized them and called upon Indian subjects to think of themselves as belonging to distinctive religious communities and also to numerical majorities or minorities.
In the colonial discourse of toleration, the reconfiguration of terms such as community and religion played a central role. British rule worked on the assumption that Indian society consisted of pre-political religious communities. It also assumed that religious traditions in India were unchanging. In his seminal history of the concept of communalism (i.e. politicized religious identity), the term used by the British to describe relations between Hindus and Muslims in India, Gyanendra Pandey has shown how prior understandings of community which were rooted in village, locality, and caste and characterized by socio-economic relations of mutual dependence, were displaced by notions of belonging to wider categories such as Hindu and Muslim (1990). Colonialism, Pandey argues fundamentally altered prior conceptions of time and of space. In particular, he examines in detail how colonial historiographical and sociological knowledge, as well as practices of categorization, led to the transformation of heterogeneous communities of North Indian weavers (the *julaha*) into a singular caste in North India. Previously, these North Indian weaver groups had conceptions of community that were rooted in the locality, village or the *qasbah*. These ideas of community were anchored in relations of economic exchange and interdependence. The commonality of interests between various groups within the local society also informed their conceptions of community and tradition. However, in colonial accounts of local riots, the *julaha* came to be represented a unified, bigoted and violent caste and were folded into the broader category of Muslim. Through a close reading of colonial narratives of local conflicts in Mubarakpur, he shows how local social and economic relationships and local understandings of community were radically altered by changes in relations of power as a result of colonial rule. For instance he examines in detail the Mubarakpur riot of 1813 and of the dispute of 1877 between local groups in Mubarakpur over the construction of a Shivalaya (shiva temple) inside the home of a local money lender. In both instances, community leaders sought to
resolve the dispute in keeping with local traditions and tried to resist colonial attempts to impose a solution (ch. 3). He also argues that the agency of the colonial state in creating the conditions for violence was written out of these accounts; instead, the local riots and disputes, such as the one over the Shivalaya, came to be represented in terms of a primordial hatred between two monolithic and homogenous communities: Hindu and Muslim.

Pandey’s critical reading of the colonial archive sheds light on how prior understandings of community and of tradition were displaced by colonial practices of categorization. These practices depended on an understanding of Indian society as constituted by two monolithic and unchanging communities, Hindu and Muslim. Such representation not only elided diverse ways of being and posited inherited tradition as a problem to be managed and overcome, but were also shared by nationalists. According to Pandey, these representational processes transformed understandings of community. However, Pandey also acknowledges that representations and categorization alone do not suffice in explaining how religious publics came to be constituted. He suggests that his account deals “only tangentially” with the problem of the relationship between “caste and the politicized religious community” (69). In other words, one can reformulate Pandey’s question as: how were local discursive traditions such as that of the julaha reconfigured and incorporated into the broader category of religion? More precisely, what other practices of governance lead to the reconfiguration of Indian discursive tradition into the broader category of religious community? And finally, what conceptions of religion and of the secular did these governance practices depend upon?

Despite the promise of non-interference, the reconstituted colonial state that governed India after the 1857 Mutiny continued to intervene in religious affairs. Nicholas Dirks has argued that the reformist discourse that characterized the pre-1857 colonial state, gave way to an
ethnographic discourse. From 1857 onwards, detailed anthropological knowledge of Indian society became central to the stabilization of colonial rule and the state presented itself as the guardian of Indian traditions (Dirks 2001).

Colonial courts, for example, not only adjudicated disputes which occurred within various Hindu *sampradaya* and Muslim *jamaats* but also became sites of authoritative knowledge about Indian traditions, while simultaneously elaborating new conceptions of public and private, secular and religious. One of the effects of these colonial interventions was the privileging of the idea that Indian society was constituted of religious publics. Colonial discourse, especially after 1857, sought to balance two seemingly divergent understandings of religion. On the one hand, religion was conceived of as a matter of private belief. On the other hand, colonial discourse viewed Indian society as governed by immutable religious laws, and thus viewed religion as a key object in the maintenance of social order. In light of this, the colonial judicial apparatus played a central role in not only demarcating Hindu from Muslim, but also sought to delineate the religious from the secular.

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55 According to Dirks (2001: 41), the understanding of caste in the works of colonial officials and Orientalists such as Dubois, Malcolm and others privileged textual knowledge and focused on the ritual aspects of caste. By the latter part of the 19th century, this attitude was displaced by one that viewed caste in ethnographic/sociological terms and the census operations which collected this data became crucial to governance. It is worth noting that in the case of Gujarat, the empirical/ethnographic details about castes and communities seems to have been privileged during the pre-1857 years and displaced by understandings of castes & *sampradaya* as part of the broader category Hindu. Colonial courts began to view caste/communities in terms of their fidelity to the prescribed rules found in classical texts and therefore began to govern them by religious laws. See for example Alexander Kinloch Forbes’ account of caste in *Ras Mala, or Hindoo Annals of the province of Gooserat in Western India*, 2 Volumes ([1856] 1878). Forbes, who was a collector and judge in Gujarat from 1840 to 1864, went on to establish the Gujarat Vernacular Society (a predecessor to the many literary and educational initiatives that followed in 19th and early 20th century Gujarat) defined caste as a local social group/community which enforced rules of conduct on its members (Forbes, Vol 2 [1856] 1878/1924: 229-53). Such regional variation and specificity, though, does not undermine Dirks’ overall argument that the discourse on caste and tradition became crucial to the stabilization of colonial power in the aftermath of the 1857 Mutiny.

Forbes’ account is largely based on *Jnatinibandh*, (An Essay on Caste) written by his assistant Dalpatram Dahyabhai. Dalpatram had done the research at the behest of Forbes and in 1851 it received the Vernacular Society’s award for the best monograph on native society. Dalpatram, of course, is also one of the leading modern poets of the Gujarat. I discuss their collaboration in greater detail in Chapter IV on the idea of Gujarat (i.e. Gujarat’s *asmita*).

56 *Jamaat* is the word that various Islamic communities of Gujarat use to define themselves. For example, the Khoja *jamaat*, Memon *jamaat*, Bohra *jamaat*, etc. It should be noted that the word was also commonly used until the early twentieth century by members of non-Muslim castes such as the Lohana when they spoke of their own corporate bodies.
When disputes arose within sampradaya (communities) and landed in the courts, they were usually about the correct performance of rites and who had the authority to define and enforce these practices. However, because the colonial state had a policy of “non-interference” in religious matters, these disputes were usually adjudicated in form of disputes over community property. In many such cases, the courts drew upon a modern conception of ritual as a type of symbolic action which was expressive of belief and whose meaning could be interpreted by members of the community. Medieval Christianity, as Talal Asad has pointed out, distinguished between ritual and rites. The former was understood as a manual or instructions for the proper performance of the latter (1993: 56-58). In addition, he argues that the erasure of this distinction between the two and the shift in the meaning of ritual “from what is literally a script…..to behavior, which is itself likened to a text” is part of the broader historical movement in which religion comes to be understood as a matter of individuals holding correct beliefs rather than of correct practice. On his view, ritual came to be detached from social and political authority and was now viewed as a type of symbolic behavior; a behavior that is communicated to and interpretable by members of a community. In other words, rituals and rites, whose correct performance was seen as central to the cultivation of religious/moral dispositions, came to be viewed as secondary to correct belief. This privileging of belief rather than practice informed the approach of the colonial courts in the Maharaja Libel Case and Aga Khan cases amongst others and were constitutive of new understandings of religious community and of religious publics.

Amrita Shodhan (2001) in her study of the Maharaj Libel and Aga Khan cases has suggested that the colonial courts played a central role in producing these new understandings of religion and the secular by marginalizing questions and debates about practice that were characteristic of sampradaya and jamaats (or of discursive communities and traditions). Instead,
the courts privileged doctrinal beliefs that were to be found in key texts. While this privileging of belief made it possible to demarcate boundaries between various groups, and thus made governance easier, it had the effect of producing homogenous and monolithic religious communities or publics. Shodhan adds that the colonial state readily intervened in religious matters effectively reorganizing the social and political bases of religious as well as political authority within communities (2001: 191-193). In other words, not only did the colonial state play an authoritative role in the production of religious truth, it reconfigured the relations of power and processes of change within discursive traditions. In addition, she argues that the two cases illustrate how colonial jurisprudence transformed the self-understanding of these religious communities (ch. 3).

According to Shodhan, the colonial courts adhered to the English common law “rule of non-interference in religion” except in those cases pertaining to questions of civil rights and to civil disputes (usually over the disposition and use of collective property) within religious communities. When such disputes came up for adjudication the courts “had to remain judicially ignorant of religion” and not examine “religious information as to its meaning” (2001: 34). These judicial rules, which were rooted in the British experience of religious strife, also drew upon the Lockean understanding of Christian sects as voluntary associations. In contrast, colonial power viewed Indian society as made up of religious communities that were governed by immutable doctrines and laws which could be accessed in key foundational texts. Even though it was acknowledged by colonial authorities that Hinduism and Islam were not organized religions, the courts applied a Christian church-sect model in interpreting disputes within traditions such as the Khojas and the Pushtimargis. In both the Khoja and Maharaja Libel cases, the core of the dispute was about differing interpretations of correct practice and also about who had the social and
political authority to regulate the affairs of the community. However, these arguments within traditions over practice were assessed by the courts in terms of their fidelity to core doctrinal principles or beliefs. And, the courts relied on expert knowledge of key texts in determining this. According to Shodhan, the combination of textual fetishism and the marginalization of practice effectively meant that secular courts were the arbiters of religious truth.

The Aga Khan case involved a dispute between Sunni and Shia followers of the Aga Khan over questions of how he exercised his authority and correct practice. After moving to Bombay in 1848, the Aga Khan had begun reforms aimed at removing “incorrect” or “lax” practices amongst his followers. Tensions were further exacerbated by the Aga Khan’s demands for higher financial contributions from his followers. Both his Sunni and Shia followers attempted to gain control over community resources including the jamaatkhana (community/prayer hall). While neither side prevailed, the case ended up in the courts as a civil dispute over the control of communal property. In adjudicating the case, the court decided to first determine the ‘true’ identity of the khojas. The central question that the court addressed was whether the khojas were originally Sunni or Shia and whether the various witnesses could prove to the court their true identity by performing it (2001:100-107). According to the court, the answer was to be found by assessing the historical record, located in Orientalist texts. On the court’s view, these texts (or expert knowledge) would provide an authoritative account of the Islamic tradition, of the khoja tradition, and authoritative conceptions of Sunni and Shia. This textual fetishism resulted in the elision of contemporary practice within the community and privileged an understanding of the khoja as Shia Imami Ismaili (84). Not only did the findings of the court marginalize the Sunni khojas’

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understanding of themselves, but it also consolidated the authority of the Aga Khan as the undisputed religious leader of the khoja community.

The Maharaja Libel case pertained to a dispute between reformist caste members and one of the maharaj’s (spiritual leader/guru) of the Vallabhacharya or the Pushtimargi, a self-described Hindu community. The Vallabhacharya are a devotional community whose practices centered on the worship of the child god Krishna. The tradition was established in the sixteenth century in north India by a Telugu Brahmin teacher and his male descendants inherited the title of maharaj and presided over a network of temples all over north and western India. In Gujarat, the Pushtimargis attracted sizeable followings amongst the Bhatia, kapol, lohana and kanbi (patidar) castes. Within the Pushtimarg sampradaya (i.e. Pushtimarg tradition/community), caste authorities or elders played an important role in regulating religious practices including the activities of the maharajas, the spiritual guide or gurus of the community. The maharajas, in turn participated in the overall regulation of the social affairs and functioning of the caste. In other words, both the maharaja and caste authorities shared in and reaffirmed each other’s powers in the regulation of the religious and temporal affairs of the sampradaya as a whole. In the nineteenth century, several reformist members of the community in Bombay began “criticizing the Vallabhacharya maharajas for licentious, tyrannical and immoral behavior” (120). Often, these critiques were made in public settings and published in the reformist press; in one article, reformers accused the maharajas of “sleeping with the wives and daughters of devotees and of preaching heterodox doctrines” (121). The reformers had hoped that by publicly criticizing the maharajas, they could mobilize caste members in the project of reform. In 1861, Jadunath Maharaj filed a libel suit against reformers. According to Shodhan, the courts once again relied upon “a classical textual definition of a religious group” and of Hinduism. According to her, the
court no longer understood caste “as a political space of debate, dispute, hierarchy….which was present in the public,” but as the marker of individual identity (118). On the court’s view, as an organ of the state and as the instrument of the public, it had absolute sovereignty in adjudicating civil conflicts and in serving the public interest. And, caste, which had functioned as a locus of power in regulating the affairs of a community, would henceforth be restricted to the private domain. By establishing its absolute writ over matters of public interest, the court effectively marginalized caste elders from governing the religious affairs of the community and established the maharaja as an absolute authority governing the affairs of the pushtimargis (117-118).

According to Shodhan, by stripping caste from religious authority, a discursive tradition such as the pushtimargi was redefined as a sect of a larger Hindu religious community whose affairs since time immemorial were governed by spiritual heads. Hinduism itself was understood as a religion characterized by fixed doctrines and beliefs. The process of delineating religious communities also depended upon secularizing the public sphere by limiting caste and religious authority to their proper place and evacuating the public arenas so that the colonial state could perform its role as the guardian of toleration.

I have gone into these details of colonial history in order to show how the liberal discourse of toleration was implicated in the delineation of the public from the private and of the religious from the secular in colonial India. In addition, this colonial discourse of toleration depended upon a conception of the Hindu and the Islamic not as discursive traditions constituted by internal debate, contestation and change, but as distinct, rival and fixed communities of belief. This, as I have argued, reconfigured the terrain on which religious traditions operated in postcolonial Gujarat. By this, I do not mean to suggest that the colonial discourse of toleration was necessarily adopted in the post-colony. After all in the context of Gujarat, both Gandhi, who was a critic of
liberal conceptions of toleration, and Morari Bapu, who reproduces many of its assumptions, are heirs to this legacy. In what follows, I will reflect on some of the key differences and similarities between Morari Bapu and Mahatma Gandhi’s conceptions of toleration in order to further illustrate this point.

Two Contrasting Ideas of Toleration:

In January 2011, I travelled to Ahmedabad to gather additional materials for this dissertation. I had gone to meet Saral, a friend, who is also a writer, literary critic and Dalit rights activist and who has written extensively on Gujarati politics. Over the course of a wide-ranging conversation, the discussion turned to the presence of prominent religious authorities like Morari Bapu in the public arenas of Gujarat. I asked him: “Morari Bapu chela challis varshthi katha ane pravachan kari rahya che. Eni asar shu? [Morari Bapu has been performing recitals and giving lectures for the past forty years. To what effect?]” I want to quote at length from his reply:

It is not clear to me what kind of ethical impact his kathas and pravcahans have on our society. He says that he wants to promote social harmony and toleration. Some of my friends propose that we engage him in conversation, because they feel that he is a moderate figure. Many of them feel that he has done a lot for promoting literature [sahitya mate ghanu saru kaam karyu che] and they also feel that we should engage him because of the sadbhavna parva’s [summit of religions] that he has started sponsoring. I have wondered for some time what this is all about. You see, some of his upper class clients had no qualms looting stores during the 2002 violence. Other clients did not seem to have problems with the killing of Muslims. They seem to be able to live with themselves. And yet others, and these are educated, upper class people….they circulated a petition at his katha in

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58 This is a reference to widespread looting of Muslim-owned businesses in the posh C.G. Road area of western Ahmedabad, in which members of Ahmedabad’s elite participated. Saral is not differentiating between those who participated in the looting and those who are members of elite clubs such as the Karnavati, which sponsored the recital that he is referring to.
2007 at the Karnavati club (a private club in Ahmedabad). The petition demanded that the dredging of the Palk straits should be stopped because it would destroy the ancient remains of the bridge to Lanka built by Rama and his army. Others say that he is moderate figure and we should really work with him to bring about a change in public discourse here in Gujarat. But, what are the beliefs that are being promoted and to what effect? *Hu nathi maanto ke Bapu vahem ane andhshradha felave che.* [I am not saying that he is spreading vahem (superstition) and andhshradha (blind faith)]. But, I still wonder what type of *dharma* [meant as ethics] is being promoted here? We [Gujarat] have a model that we can turn to for guidance on politics…..we don’t need to look to Europe or know English for a model and vision of justice. We have to just read a fragment of Gandhi’s autobiography in Gujarati or a fragment of an account of his work in the face of Hindu-Muslim violence. Was his life about summits, *padyatras* (rallies) and gatherings of a few elites? Or was it about cultivating relationships of mutuality, of equality through a long process of immersion in the life of the people and through bodily sacrifice (i.e. Gandhi’s ascetism)?

Several days later, I had gone to the offices of *Phulchaab* in Rajkot. *Phulchaab* is one of Gujarat’s oldest newspapers and part of the *Janmabhumi* group, whose papers and magazines are well known for giving a space to Gujarati writers and intellectuals. *Phulchaab* was founded by the anti-colonial writer Jhaverchand Meghani, whose works on the ‘folk’ literature of Gujarat enjoy canonical status. For several years now, the paper and its sister publication have featured almost daily reportage and editorials on the work of Morari Bapu. I had gone to the offices of the paper to ask the editor if I could read through their back files and gather articles that the paper had done on Morari Bapu’s *kathas*. In the course of our conversation, as I described my

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59 The *katha* that is being referred to was organized by the Karnavati club to honor the memory of the writer K.K. Shastri. Shastri was also a Sanskrit scholar, former head of the Gujarat Sahitya Parishad and state president of the VHP. His role as apologist for the violence of 2002 and his racist views of Muslims have been analyzed by Martha Nussbaum in her *Clash Within* (2007). At the recital, which was entitled *Manas Maruti* (another name for Hanuman, Rama’s simian devotee), Morari described K.K. Shastri in terms of Narsinh Mehta’s poem *Vaishnava janto*. The poem was Gandhi’s favorite and is widely regarded as a statement on the ideal Vaishnava Hindu subject as one who dedicates his life to the suffering and the weak.

60 The quote is based on my notes from the conversation and a transcription of it. Interview with Saral Patel, Ahmedabad, January 11, 2011. Translation from Gujarati mine.
research project he said: “You know, I think besides the work he has done on the Ramayana, on literature and in promoting dharmikta (devotion and piety) in society, you should also look into and write about how much he has done for social harmony and tolerance in Gujarat. *His efforts to promote social harmony make him the Gandhi for our time.*”

These contrasting views of Morari Bapu’s life and work are not surprising. Some of my interlocutors felt that his religious politics were dangerous and threatening. Morari Bapu’s role in causes that are central to the Hindu nationalist mobilization in Gujarat led many to argue that there was no difference between him and the movement on the question of religious minorities. In contrast, other interlocutors viewed Morari Bapu as an heir to the political legacies of Gandhi, who actively sought to end the genocidal violence of the Partition and opposed the idea of Partition. They often reminded me that despite considerable personal risk, Morari Bapu had spoken out against the violence of 2002 and that his arguments were similar to those made by Gandhi during the freedom struggle. For example, at the height of the assault on Gujarat’s Muslims in 2002, Morari Bapu led a peace rally and meeting in Rajkot where he reminded his audience that Gujarat’s Muslims were born of the same soil, and as Indians, worthy of equal treatment and respect. Several weeks after the rally, he told a prominent journalist that the perpetrators of the violence knew “nothing about religion.” They had forgotten that one of the

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61 Conversation with Kaushik Mehta, editor of Phulchaab, Rajkot (January 20, 2011). Italics added for emphasis.

62 I use the word risk advisedly. At the height of the violence against Muslims it was dangerous for opponents of the Hindu nationalist movement to speak out without fear of retaliation. For example, Medha Patkar, who had travelled to Ahmedabad to provide support to Muslim victims and to organize peace groups was attacked within the premises of the Sabarmati Ashram which Gandhi had established in Ahmedabad and which had been his home for fifteen years.

63 See Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* (1997) for a similar mode of argumentation.
lessons of the *Ramcaritmanas* was “param dharma shruti bidit ahimsa. In other words, ahimsa [non-violence] is param dharma [the first ethical principle].”

How then, are we to understand these seemingly contrasting views of Morari Bapu? Do we read Morari Bapu’s interventions in the public sphere in Gujarat, and especially his arguments for religious toleration, as a ruse for the Hindu nationalist project? Alternatively, can we interpret Morari Bapu’s public statements and their reception as reflective of the broader historico-political context in which they unfold? Here, I would like to suggest that arguments about tradition and religious toleration are made and circulate in a discursive field in which the meanings of these concepts have themselves become reconfigured. In other words, toleration talk in contemporary Gujarat circulates in a discursive arena that presumes that Hindus and Muslims are rival and distinctive *sampradaya* (tradition/community) and that Hindus as the numerical majority are also morally and politically superior to Muslims.

While there are similarities between Morari Bapu’s and Gandhi’s arguments for religious toleration, the former’s views circulate in a discursive field in which the liberal-secular understanding of toleration as the sufferance of a minority by a majority is becoming increasingly common, especially in urban Gujarat. There are also significant differences between Gandhi and Morari Bapu that it is significant to note. For one, they are situated differently in time; the former was responding to the challenges of colonial modernity while the latter is operating in a context dominated by the politics of Hindu majoritarianism. Gandhi and Morari Bapu also occupy a distinctive place within the Hindu discursive tradition. Gandhi was a political leader of a nationalist movement who sought to transform modern politics through a religious and social practice that was ascetic. In contrast, Morari Bapu is perceived by Hindus

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64 See for example his interview with Amrita Shah entitled “Those who did this know nothing about religion…” in the *Indian Express*, April 14, 2002. I thank Amrita Shah for sending me a copy of the transcript.
and Muslims as a leader of the Hindu sampradaya (tradition/community). In addition, Gandhi was critical of the liberal understanding of toleration because the word itself “may imply a gratuitous assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one's own, whereas ahimsa teaches us to entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as we accord to our own, thus admitting the imperfection of the latter” (Gandhi 1932). Instead of liberal toleration, he proposed an alternative conception by using the phrase sarva dharma sambhavna (or equality of all traditions/religions); an idea that depends on the recognition that all religious traditions “constitute a revelation of Truth, but all are imperfect and liable to error. Reverence for other faiths need not blind us to their faults. We must be keenly alive to the defects of our faith also, yet not leave it on that account, but try to overcome those defects” (Gandhi 1932). Sarva dharma sambhavna was one of the virtues required of members of the ashram, which Gandhi established in Ahmedabad after his return from South Africa and which became a key site for the elaboration of his critique of liberal modernity. In other words, Gandhian toleration not only depends upon a non-hierarchical relationship between traditions, it also rejects the privileging of the secular over the religious that liberal toleration depends upon.

Gandhi’s views on toleration were part of his rejection of the political doctrine of secularism. On his view, not only had the Hindus and Muslims of India lived together for

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65 Wendy Brown has made a similar point about liberal toleration albeit in a different context and at a very different time. While Brown’s argument offers valuable insights on the politics of liberal toleration, it does not address ideas of religious toleration that are grounded in a different historical conditions and experiences such as those that prevailed in India. See Wendy Brown’s *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (2006).

66 For Gandhi ahimsa is not only non-violence, but also equality. The quotation is from Gandhi’s *From Yeravda Mandir* (1932) available online at [http://www.mkgandhi.org/yeravda/yeravda.htm](http://www.mkgandhi.org/yeravda/yeravda.htm) (Last accessed January 19, 2011).

67 The eleven virtues/vows of Gandhi’s ashram were satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence), brahmacharya (abstinence), asvad (control of the palate), asteya (non-stealing), aparigraha (non-possession), abhaya (fearlessness), ashprushyata nivaran (removal of caste prejudice), bread labor (manual work), sarva dharma sambhava (toleration) and namrata (humility). The vows are described in Gandhi’s *From Yeravda Mandir* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Trust, 1932). The book is also available online at [http://www.mkgandhi.org/yeravda/yeravda.htm](http://www.mkgandhi.org/yeravda/yeravda.htm).
centuries, they had elaborated their own conceptions of toleration in the context of political regimes and a social order that were not secularist (Gandhi 1997). According to Gandhi, liberal politics and secularism were not only intolerant but a form of violence because of the demand that people abandon inherited traditions and ways of being in order to participate in the modern public sphere. In contrast, post-Reformation Europe had witnessed the rise of the nation-state, of universal suffrage and the institutionalization of new techniques of government that were “based on new styles of classification and calculation, and new forms of subject-hood” (Asad 2003: 24).

Secularism and toleration, in other words, were key discourses in the management of populations, of statistical majorities and minorities and of religious conflicts and in the legitimization of the nation-state in Europe.68

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68 My reading of Gandhi’s politics of toleration draws on earlier interpretations by Ashis Nandy (1982, 1998), Partha Chatterjee (1986) and Ajay Skaria (2002). It is also partially similar to the argument that Akeel Bilgrami has made in a recent essay that engages with Charles Taylor’s call for a radical reinterpretation of secularism. Bilgrami criticizes Taylor for eliding the specific historical contexts, especially the differences of historical experiences with regard to the relation between religion and politics in Europe and India which give rise to particular understandings of secularism as a political arrangement. In the essay, Bilgrami argues that “it should be possible to say, as Gandhi did, that where such a trajectory had never occurred as it had in Europe, no such repair [i.e. secularism] was needed. It was his view that religions had long pervaded the political life of India but it was within an ethos of quite unself-conscious pluralism, a syncretic religious culture, within which politics was conducted in scattered loci of power, with no highly centralized state seeking to legitimate itself by creating the wrong basis for unity by a self-consciously constructed feeling among its citizens. A unity which was instead an outgrowth of a rooted and syncretic culture within which diverse religions were, without too much strain, in any case relatively tolerant of each other, required no artificial measure and policies, no doctrinal formulations of modernity, under the name of secularism. Whatever the other shortcomings of such a culture, there was nothing measurably damaging of this specific sort to repair, and to impose secularism on one’s people under these circumstances would be a mimicry of its colonial masters, a form of cognitive slavery. So it seemed to Gandhi. And, in fact, his greatest anxiety was that the eager modernizers around him in the Indian freedom movement which he led would fall into a form of thinking in which the post-Westphalian European path to modernity, conceived via this new form of state, was seen as compulsory for India as well.” See Akeel Bilgrami’s “Secularism: Its Context and Content,” an SSRC Working Paper (2011) available at http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Secularism_Its_Content_and_Context.pdf. [Accessed October 21, 2011].

While I find Bilgrami’s critique of Taylor compelling, I am puzzled by his use of the category “syncretic” in characterizing Gandhi’s understanding of Indian religious traditions. Syncretism is usually defined as the reconciliation or melding of irreconcilable elements. In addition, as Peter Burke has argued, syncretism’s history is entangled with Reformation arguments about cleansing European society of practices that were deemed to be un-Christian or irreconcilable with Christianity (Burke 1978: 207-243). In contrast, Gandhi’s argument was that there was nothing inherent in Hinduism or Islam, which he understood as two distinctive but equal traditions of India, which made them prone to conflict and that conflicts between Hindus and Muslims that had arisen in modern times could be attributed to the policies of the colonial state. Instead, for him secularism and liberal toleration were forms of violence which depended upon individuals giving up on what was essential to them: their tradition. See Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj for an early statement of these views.
On the surface, Gandhi’s views and contemporary Hindu nationalist views on the relationship between religion and politics (and on toleration) appear to be similar because they both challenge the public-private distinction on which secularist discourse depends. However, the contemporary discourse of toleration, which Hindu nationalism in contemporary Gujarat participates in, operates on the liberal register by positing a hierarchical relationship between Hindus and Muslims of the state. Thus, while Morari Bapu’s arguments for religious toleration are similar to the Gandhian understanding of toleration, they circulate in a discursive field in which only Muslims are expected to set aside inherited forms of tradition in order to prove their worth as members of the Indian nation.

For the Love of Rama:

In order to more concretely illustrate the reconfiguration of traditional practices and religious identities in Gujarat, let me now turn to the example of the *katha* with which I began this chapter. By focusing on a key figure in the Gujarati Hindu public, I hope to illustrate how practices such as the *katha* are being transformed in ways that are intertwined with the Hindu nationalist project, where the Hindu tradition is posited as more capacious and tolerant than the Islamic. What I find particularly interesting about this example is the way in which it invokes and appropriates “syncretic” practices as antidotes to Hindu-Muslim violence in ways that are similar to secular liberal discourses about the tolerance and pluralism of Indian society.

At the end of September 2007, I was invited by friends to travel with them to the *dargah* or tomb of the *sufi* mystic Hajji Pir on the India-Pakistan border in the Kutch district (*Figure 1.1*). The friends were going to participate in a recital of the *Ramcharitmanas* by Morari Bapu. This was to be the last in the series of *kathas* of Hindu religious texts which had been organized at various
dargahs all over Kutch district, and which some newspapers reported were sponsored by prominent Hindu and Muslim families of the area. I had been reading news reports about these recitals in the Gujarati newspapers for several weeks and wondered what had precipitated such events.

The recital at Hajji Pir was to last nine days; and at the end of each day, the sponsors had invited Indian and Pakistani musicians to perform different genres of South Asian devotional music. However, due to the tensions between India and Pakistan, the Indian government had refused visas to the Pakistani musicians. From the press reports, I had gathered that the event had been sponsored by a leading political family of the state; several of the men of the family occupied important positions in the state unit of the two dominant political parties in the state: the Hindu nationalist BJP as well as of the Congress party. In Gujarat, it is not unusual for members of an extended clan to belong to both parties. In addition to the Hindu sponsors, the papers had announced that a prominent Muslim businessman had agreed to pay for a public kitchen which would feed all participants for free for the whole nine days. According to the sponsors, the event was designed to promote Hindu-Muslim understanding and unity.

A day before the Hajji Pir recital that I attended in 2007, Morari had announced at a press conference that the katha was his message of love “to all my Muslim brothers and sisters here and across the border in Pakistan. My wish is to bring this message everyone here in India; but my ultimate wish is that I can take the message of Ram to Islamabad. If I could, I would replace every brick that Hindus and Muslims have hurled at each other and replace them with the word Ram carved on them. For me Ram is love; devotion to him can lead us to true love for each other.” While Morari embraced love and friendship in the press conference, the reference to bricks with the word Ram refers to the history of anti-Muslim violence and the Hindu nationalist
campaign to destroy the Babri mosque in Ayodhya. The collection of such bricks had been a central part of the Hindu nationalist campaign of the 1980s and 1990s to build a Ram temple at the site of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, which they destroyed in 1992.

The combination of Morari’s popularity and the location of Hajji Pir’s shrine on the strategic frontier with Pakistan and next to a Border Security Force base required sponsors with cultural and financial resources as well as political connections. In this case, the katha was sponsored by a leading Congress politician, the local BJP Member of Parliament and a prominent Muslim businessman from a city in the district. The organizers had arranged for a large tent to accommodate an audience of some 25,000 people (Figure 1.2). They had also arranged for electric generators, mattresses and tents for overnight ‘guests’ as well as transportation for those who wished to attend because the nearest villages and urban settlements were at least fifteen to twenty kilometers away. All of Morari’s recitals are recorded on professional grade digital video cameras by a private crew employed by his family trust. These recordings are controlled by the family, and sold to a TV channel owned by the Japanese conglomerate Sony, which arranges for satellite uplinks at all of his recitals. At Hajji Pir, the sponsors had made provisions for all of this and there was a satellite transmission truck so that the event could be broadcast live. In addition they had made provisions for drinking water, a free kitchen to feed the audience and arrangements for them to stay overnight. On the first day of the recital, when I reached Hajji Pir, I was told by one of the sponsors that they had already served over 20,000 meals.

The lives of many of South Asia’s sufī mystics, their personal histories, their activities, their followings and fortunes, and the histories of the shrines built in their honor are bound up with state-making projects of the pre-colonial era. Two of the most well-known such shrines are
Chishti dargah at Ajmer and the shrine of Baba Farid in Punjab. In Gujarat, the shrine known as Sarkhej Roza outside of Ahmedabad, commemorates the sufi master and spiritual guide of the Sultans that founded the city. Because of the close associations between these sufis and imperial power, their lives are well documented. In the case of Hajji Pir, there is little information available in the historical record. The information that is available can be gleaned from local memories and hagiographies which circulate in pamphlet form. Aspects of his biography, as I show below, lend themselves to appropriation by Hindu nationalists. According to one such hagiography, Hajji Pir’s sacred lineage is unknown and he left behind no male successors who inherited his spiritual powers. Hajji Pir, we are told, was born in Multan (in present-day Pakistan); he acquired the appellation Hajji after completing the pilgrimage to Mecca at the age of 12. As a child, he acquired a reputation for piety; he would frequently wander off with the family’s buffaloes into the forests, lost in prayer and contemplation. At some point, he is said to have experienced a revelation which called on him to travel to Kutch to spread the message of Islam. Like other saintly figures, miraculous powers are attributed to Hajji Pir; one such miracle being the creation of a lake in the Kutch desert. One of the hagiographies also mentions the story of a Hindu land-owner who prayed that the saint endow his cows with milk in order to test his powers. The pir granted the wish, but on the condition that the landlord convert to Islam. However, the landlord did not convert and Hajji Pir cursed his village, which was raided by bandits who made off with the cattle of villagers. A widow in the village, who had lost her cattle in the raid pleaded with the saint that she had lost her livelihood and Hajji pir, a mere boy, rode off to rescue the cows and was martyred in the ensuing battle. Hajji Pir’s biography is part of the conversion narrative of the pastoral nomadic jatts that live in the region around the shrine and until recently were the majority of worshippers at his shrine.
According to the anthropologist Farhana Ibrahim (2010), since 1965, the state has tried to secure the frontier by a combination of security and development measures including sedentarizing the nomadic jatts, who are mainly Muslim. These security measures included the transfer and settlement of a community of Sikhs to the area after the 1965 war with Pakistan. The Sikhs had been displaced from east Punjab by the violence of the 1947 Partition and now live in a village near Hajji Pir. She has also argued that Hajji Pir’s religious significance has declined amongst the local population which has become increasingly drawn to reformist/Islamization movements. Today, the shrine and the urs or festival celebrating the death of the saint (when a saint becomes united with God) are managed by caretakers, the state and a committee made up of followers in cities as far as Rajkot and Bombay.

For the entire duration of the recital, Morari was housed in a specially constructed cabin on the farm of the sarpanch/leader of the Sikh community, who told me in a conversation at the end of the recital that he had agreed to play host because he “wanted the jatts to become true Indians and less kattar (hardcore Muslims).” But, he wondered if any of the “jatts would understand the message that Bapu was bringing to them…..maybe it is too late, they have been smuggling and obeying orders from the other side (Pakistan) for too long.”

On the first day, before commencing with his recital, Morari went to the dargah to pay his respects to Hajji Pir and as he put it “to seek his blessings.” The caretakers of the shrine, who live in the village, had organized a turban ceremony at the dargah. The turban ceremony is an important part of the sufi tradition in South Asia, especially in those shrines where the original pir designates a successor, usually a son or another male from within his family. The turban ceremony is symbolic of the transmission of the spiritual powers of the original saint to designated heirs, who, once anointed take on spiritual responsibility for the pir’s clients. Hajji
Pir, who we are told was martyred when rescuing the widow’s livestock, left behind no hereditary or designated heirs. Therefore, there has been no turban ceremony at the shrine. But now a turban ceremony was organized. It seemed as if the ceremony was not just a display of the hospitality of the caretakers, but a ritual welcoming of a living saint in the court of the dead saint. The entire event seemed to be experienced by the followers of Morari who were there as a symbolic transfer of Hajji Pir’s miraculous powers and grace to a living saint—who is a Hindu.

In an important essay on the rifai, a sufi cult in southern Gujarat, Peter van der Veer (1992) has shown that while Hindus participate in the rituals of the main shrine, they are always located at a distance from the center, defined as the pir’s grave and the living body of his successor. In these rituals the boundary between Hindu and Muslim is maintained and respected. Here, however, it seemed as if the turban ceremony not only blurred this boundary, but established Morari as a spiritual authority who could speak to and address Muslims about the proper way to be Indian and Muslim.

On the first day of the recital, Morari narrated the life-story of Hajji Pir as exemplary of the “love of God”. The story of the pir’s martyrdom while rescuing the widow’s cattle was an act “of selfless service to fellow man.” By doing this, Hajji Pir had “liberated himself from darkness and transcended his dharm (religion)” a capacity he argued “can only come from true love of God”. Hajji Pir through his devotion had “destroyed the mental Lanka” (a reference to Lanka the kingdom of Ravana as the domain of ignorance and spiritual darkness). Over the course of the day, Morari also narrated the life story of his host, Kartar Singh, the leader of the Sikh community which I have just mentioned. Kartar Singh, he told the audience, had lived a life of suffering. Having been displaced from his home in Pakistan, he had “overcome this suffering in Narra by immersing himself in devotion to the Sikh Gurus and serving his country in
a dangerous area. He expressed his piety by building a beautiful Gurudwara (Sikh temple) in the village so that all his people may be close to God.”

An hour after the first day’s recital had ended, there was a massive thunderstorm. The heavy rains flooded the field where the recital tent was located and the winds destroyed part of the tent (Figure I.3). One of my informants, who is a devout follower of Morari and who had travelled with me from Ahmedabad, told me that the rainstorm was a “miraculous blessing”; just as Hajji Pir had brought water to the desert in his time, he was now greeting the “arrival of a mahatma to his domain with the gift of water for the people.” As a result of the rainstorm, that evening’s concert which was to feature Ustad Sultan Khan, the sarangi maestro, and a speech on India’s pluralist culture, by the Bollywood actor turned secular activist Tom Alter, had to be cancelled. Alter, who had arrived just after the rainstorm, seemed visibly upset by the mess and told me that this “was an opportunity lost to spread the message.”

Anilbhai, who had accompanied me, had close ties to *Kutch Mitra, Phulchaab* and *Janmabhoomi*, three of the oldest and widely read Gujarati newspapers. He told me that he had come to Hajji Pir for a couple of reasons. For one, he was committed to going everywhere Morari went in Gujarat because that was the only “way to understand the Ramcharitmanas and to understand who Morari Bapu is and how important his message is for all of us.” He added, and I will quote him at length here:

Everytime, I listen to Morari Bapu, I come to a deeper understanding of the manas (the text); a deeper understanding of life, of god, of what it means to be a good and just person. Like Tulsidas (the author of the text) said, we can only learn by repeated listening and so I listen to him all the time; I try to at least spend one or two hours each day at home listening to a recording or a live broadcast of Morari Bapu. But more importantly, I think we are blessed to have someone like Morari Bapu…..after Mahatma Gandhi he is the greatest Gujarati. Now, I think that Gandhi if he had picked his successor in Gujarat, then it would have to be a person like Morari Bapu. He is the one person who is true to Gandhiji’s
principles…..if anyone has embodied them then it is he. You know, that when the 2002 Godhra incidents happened and then the violence broke out in Rajkot (an industrial city), I went with him on a peace march to the Muslim areas. We (our newspaper) had called on Muslims to stay calm in the face of the violence; we were afraid that they would retaliate and we organized a peace march and Morari Bapu immediately came to Rajkot to join us. It was extremely courageous of him to go into a Muslim neighborhood in Rajkot. After the peace march, our newspapers published an editorial asking Muslims why none of their leaders had come forward and condemned the killing of Hindus in Godhra? This was a good thing, because the next day prominent Muslims in Kutch and other parts of Gujarat published statements of condemnation. Till then they had stayed silent.

When I told him that I found it rather puzzling that his newspaper thought it fit to organize a peace march calling on Muslims, who were the victims, to maintain calm and condemn the violence, rather than address Hindus who were the perpetrators, he replied by saying that I had “forgotten about how many they (the Muslims) can kill if they decide to rise up….remember in the 1985 riots they fought back in Ahmedabad and there were stabbings everywhere; and the bombings in Mumbai after 1992.”

After the recital, I had a brief conversation with the editor of the Kutch Mitra, the newspaper that Anilbhai is associated with and the most widely circulated daily in the area. From him, I learnt that his paper had published several editorials calling on local Muslims to demonstrate their commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity and in fact it was their paper’s initiative which brought Morari Bapu to Hajji Pir. Invoking the same trope as Anilbhai, he said to me “He (Morari) has shown great courage by bringing his message here. This is a dangerous place….you don’t understand the situation here….the border area is now full of Muslims who have become wahhabis; who as you know are kattarwadis (extremists). They work with the smugglers and there is a lot of infiltration going on from Pakistan and they are part of the ring; they always look outside for everything. Of course, please don’t misunderstand me; not all
Muslims are like that, as we are finding out now at this katha. Until now we had only heard stories that there were moderate Muslims, but now even I am amazed to find out that there are some who are so moderate that they would organize a Hindu katha at their shrines. I think it is a great gesture to us all and for communal harmony.” The irony of course is that this is a Hindu editor, who demands from a minority which feels threatened, an expression of loyalty to the community and to the nation by professing a type of faith that Hindus like him find more palatable. Implicit in the message of Morari’s katha and in my subsequent conversations with others was the contrast between those Muslims who condone or oppose saint worship. The latter represent an incommensurable and unabsorbable difference, a type of subject whose loyalty to the nation is suspect, while the sufi and his followers are “tolerated” because his/her identity is hybrid and therefore worthy of belonging to the Indian nation conceived of as a Hindu nation. The symbolism of the turban ceremony at Hajji Pir in which Morari Bapu was designated as the metaphorical successor of the Muslim saint should give us insight into what characteristics make a good Muslim from this perspective, namely the willingness to submit to the “love of Ram” and be grateful for the tolerance of a Hindu majority.
Figure I.1: The dargah of Hajji Pir in Kutch. The mattresses were left out to dry after a rain storm the previous night. September 2007. Photograph by author.
Figure I.2: Morari Bapu’s *Ramcharitmanas* Katha at Hajji Pir, September 2007. Photograph by author.
Figure I.3: Parts of the tent at Hajji Pir were damaged due to heavy rains and thunderstorms, and had to be dismantled. September 2007. Photograph by author.
Chapter II
In the Asylum of Truth: Planning, Heritage and Violence in Ahmedabad

Introduction:

“I am convinced that there really isn’t any difference between us. Our ancestors were originally Hindu and we are Gujarati like you. We are vohras (i.e. Daudi Bohra) and you are lohanas (two caste names) and originally we Bohras were Hindus. Our ancestors were probably from a caste similar to yours. Our mother tongue is the same and many of our customs (rit-riwaj) are similar. I do believe that we are the same people and that there is no difference between us.” Justice A.N. Divecha was sharing with me his understanding of the history of the Bohra community, its traditions, and its social practices. Throughout our conversation he insistently reminded me of the shared heritage of his community, the Daudi Bohras and of lohanas, the Hindu caste to which my family belongs. We were sitting in the living room of his house in the Muslim ghetto known as Juhapura in southwestern Ahmedabad. Although the judge and his wife had been living there for several years, the sparse furnishings conveyed the impression that they did not quite feel at home there. The temporariness and austerity of the room were magnified by the

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69 Bohra (Vohra in Gujarati, meaning trader) is the name of a Muslim community of Gujarat, which is divided into Sunni and Shi’a branches. The latter in turn are divided between the Daudi (dawoodi) and the Alavi. Due to its proximity to the Arabian Peninsula and due to its place in the Indian Ocean trade networks, Gujarat is home to some of the oldest Muslim communities of India. I want to stress, once more, that like the Hindus of Gujarat, Muslims are neither socially homogeneous nor politically united. I therefore use the term Muslim, in this chapter and in the dissertation as a whole, as a discursive category that includes within it diverse communities and individuals that are divided by caste (jamaats), historical experience, class and doctrinal differences. In India, Gujarat’s Muslim population is considered one of the most diverse in terms of the number of jamaats (communities) or castes. For an early historical and sociological account of the many Muslim communities of Gujarat, see Satish C. Misra’s Muslim Communities of Gujarat: Preliminary Studies in their Social History and Organisation (1964). On the Bohras, see Sh. T. Lokhandwalla’s “The Bohras: A Muslim Community of Gujarat” (1955) and Ashghar Ali Engineer’s The Muslim Communities of Gujarat (1989). Engineer’s study of the Bohra, Memon and Khoja communities of Gujarat is not unproblematic because it inadvertently reproduces the colonial distinction between indigenous (those who converted to Islam) and non-indigenous (those Muslim who migrated from outside). This privileging of indigeneity was a key element in colonial strategies of rule and influenced subsequent religious and secular nationalist views of the Muslim communities of India.
unfinished walls with their single coat of primer and the minimalist furniture. The only adornment in the room was a colorful tapestry with an embroidered image of the kaaba (Islam’s most sacred site in Mecca) that hung on the wall directly behind the judge. When he noticed that I had looked at the tapestry a few times, he paused and switched from talking about growing up in a traditional Bohra household to describing the life that he led with his wife in Juhapura. It was as if my glances at the tapestry had become an incitement to justify the presence of representations of Islam’s holiest site in their lives:

You know, we are not like the people here. Many of them think that we are not real Muslims because our customs are different from theirs. I am a Vohra [Daudi Bohra] and my wife is a Khoja and so we have to put this picture of the kaaba to show them that like them we are also Muslim, so that there are no problems. Because of my work [in the judiciary], we have moved around a lot and lived and worked with all types of people. We never thought we would be living like this, next door to people who are suspicious of us and who want to know who we are and what we are doing here. We put this picture [of the kaaba] so that we do not have to spend every day worrying about our safety. Many of these people think that we are not real Muslims and some of them are extremists. If you look outside, there is nothing; there are no roads, there are no gutters and when it rains there is mud everywhere and no place to walk.

My wife and I are both religious. But, we are also secular because we believe that all faiths are equal. When I was young, we [my family] used to go to your village, to Virpur, to Jalarambapa’s jagya [shrine of a Hindu saint]. We have been there many times and eaten food from the kitchen there. No one stopped us. I think that he was a great man, like the sufi pirs [warrior-mystics], he did not discriminate against anyone.

I had first met the judge in January of 2007 when a cousin had introduced us to each other.

Several weeks later, the judge had invited me to join him for tea and we were sitting in the living room of his house in Juhapura. As the judge finished talking, a sense of melancholia settled over the room and we sat in silence for a while. Justice Divecha’s insistence about our shared
linguistic and cultural heritage and his desire to reclaim his own Gujaratiness had taken me by surprise. In theory, the word Gujarati describes a community defined by a shared connection to the western Indian state of Gujarat and by a common language: Gujarati. However, during my fieldwork, I very rarely heard my Hindu interlocutors describe Muslims as Gujarati. Even the few Hindus that I knew had Muslim friends or acquaintances did not describe them as Gujarati, a term that they reserved exclusively to describe fellow-Hindus or Jains. This was also true of my Muslim interlocutors in Juhapura, an area that my middle class Hindu neighbors in the adjacent locality of Prahladnagar referred to as mini-Pakistan. In the early stages of my fieldwork, I did not understand how deeply sedimentend this identification was until I noticed that several of my Muslim interlocutors in Juhapura reacted with surprise when I described them as Gujaratis. The judge’s comment about our shared cultural and linguistic heritage had therefore come as a surprise. It had also left me with ambivalent feelings. I could not help but worry that claiming Gujaritiness for the judge, at this particular conjuncture, seemed to hinge upon identifying with Hindus and required a distancing from fellow Muslims. That he thought it necessary to mention that Bohras “were originally Hindus” only accentuated this feeling.

In the local English-language press and in the scholarly literature on contemporary Ahmedabad, Juhapura is described as a Muslim ghetto (Thomas and Jaffrelot 2012:43–80; Jasani 2007:431–456; Mahadevia 2007:341–389). When Juhapura was first established in 1973 to house families displaced by a flood, city planners imagined it as an area befitting a modern Indian city; home to a community that would mirror the religious, cultural and economic diversity of Ahmedabad. Today however, it is an exclusively Muslim area; in addition, unlike the adjacent and exclusively-Hindu areas of western Ahmedabad, all of the signs of deliberate neglect by the municipal government are visible in Juhapura. The majority of the area’s streets
and roads are unpaved, there are no sidewalks, and the sewage and drainage systems are inadequate. In addition, Juhapura lacks essential infrastructure and services such as safe drinking water, garbage collection, fire stations, bank branches, ambulance services, public transport, government public schools and public health clinics.\textsuperscript{70} During the monsoon of 2007 and 2008 when I did my fieldwork there, large parts of the area would get flooded and the resulting stagnant pools of water served as breeding grounds for mosquitoes, leading to higher rates of influenza and cholera among adults and children in the area.

Juhapura’ population dramatically increased after the anti-Muslim pogrom of 2002. During the pogrom of 2002, large bodies of Hindus carried out a systematic assault on Muslim lives and properties in Ahmedabad. As a result several thousand Muslim families from Ahmedabad and other parts of central Gujarat permanently relocated to the area hoping to live in a more secure environment. According to one newspaper report, the Muslim population of the area had grown from about 50,000 in 2001 to over 100,000 by the end of 2002. In 2007, when I met the judge at his house, over 250,000 or close to half the Muslim population of 594,000 of the greater Ahmedabad area, lived in Juhapura.\textsuperscript{71} The high rate of growth suggests that Juhapura’s population has not expanded as a result of normal growth rates, but rather due to a combination of Hindu nationalist violence and widespread prejudice. Indeed, Muslims regardless of their 

\textsuperscript{70} At the time of my fieldwork between 2006 and 2008, not one of the major Indian banks operated a branch in the area. Bankers claimed that this was because of “criminal activity” in the area. See \textit{Times of India} (January 11, 2004). In fact, nationalized banks (i.e. government owned banks) promised to open branches only after the Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee Report (2006) on the socio-economic status of Muslims in India pointed out to that Muslims did not enjoy equal access to banking and credit. See \textit{Indian Express} (March 6, 2008).

\textsuperscript{71} According to a report in the Ahmedabad edition of the \textit{Indian Express}, over 50,000 Muslims of Ahmedabad had moved to Juhapura between March 2002 and July 2002. See “Heard of a Place Called Juhapura?” \textit{(Indian Express}, July 2, 2002). The figure of 250,000 is based on an interview with an Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority (AUD\textsuperscript{A}) official (name withheld upon request), March 18, 2007. These numbers are based on the 2001 census. Since then, a census was conducted in 2011 and it is likely that the Muslim population of Juhapura has increased due to the normal growth rates and accelerated urbanization. Rubina Jasani (2007) in her study of Islamic piety in Juhapura claims that by 2007 the population of Juhapura was 250,000 and that it was 50,000 before 2001. See also Thomas and Jaffrelot (2012:43–80) for these numbers.
class, caste or sectarian affiliations are now compelled to live in the ghetto of Juhapura despite the flagrant inadequacies of its infrastructure.

Until February 28, 2002, the first day of the pogrom, the Divechas had lived in an apartment in one of the Muslim-owned cooperative housing societies in Paldi, a leafy, upper middle class area of western Ahmedabad. On that day, a large group of young men, including several from the neighborhood, attacked their building, ransacked it and set fire to the Divechas’ apartment. The Muslims of Paldi were amongst the first to be singled out by the violence. Like many Gujarati Muslims of the city, it was the violence of the pogrom that forced the Divechas to move out of their homes and relocate to Juhapura, where they felt both marginalized and isolated. Due to deeply sedimented prejudice amongst middle class and caste Hindus, Muslims are denied access to residential (and in many cases, commercial) properties in most areas of western Ahmedabad. For the Divechas, and for many others that I got to know, living in Juhapura was not a choice and in fact only aggravated their sense of vulnerability and anxiety. In part, this is because they have little in common with their neighbors, many of whom are poorer Gujarati Muslims or Urdu-speaking migrants from north India. Other neighbors, who are Sunni and active in Islamic reform and piety movements, are suspicious of the Divechas Bohra and Khoja practices. The Divechas’ sense of vulnerability was further compounded by the Hindu nationalist movement’s ability to continually generate violence and hostility towards Muslims of the city. In addition, the constant police surveillance of Muslims also produced an

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72 Throughout my fieldwork in Ahmedabad, I was repeatedly told by friends and interlocutors that although it was illegal to discriminate on the basis of religion, Muslims were prevented from either buying or renting properties in most of western Ahmedabad. Co-operative housing societies in several areas of western Ahmedabad, for example, found ways to exclude Muslims by using a whole range of criteria. The most common were clauses in their bylaws limiting membership to vegetarians. One of the better known cases of exclusion is that of Sanchetna, the NGO run by Hanif Lakdwala, which had to relocate its offices because Hindu neighbors “objected” to their presence in a Hindu locality. See Teesta Setalvad’s “Face to Face with Fascism” in Communalism Combat, April 2000 available online at http://www.sabrang.com/cc/comold/april00/co-story.htm [accessed March 12, 2012].
atmosphere of suspicion within Juhapura itself. As a result, otherwise innocuous gestures such as asserting belonging to Gujarat or affirming an Islamic religious identity through the display of symbols had become politically fraught with new anxieties.

I open this chapter with the story of the Divechas because it poignantly highlights some of the connections between Hindu nationalist violence, Ahmedabad’s (and Gujarat’s) Indo-Islamic heritage, spatial reorganization, and Muslim dispossession that are the focus of this chapter. Indeed, it was the 2002 pogrom that made it impossible for the judge to continue living in his old neighborhood of Paldi. And, it is the same violence that makes it difficult if not dangerous for him to continue claiming a shared cultural and linguistic heritage with non-Muslim Gujaratis, as he did during our conversation. In addition, if in the logic of Hindu nationalism, all Muslims are alike, and thus belong together and apart from Hindus, Justice Divecha’s account serves to complicate these assumptions by highlighting the depth of injury, dispossession and marginalization that resulted from his relocation to Juhapura and the violent partitioning of city spaces in Ahmedabad in the wake of the 2002 pogrom. I also find it interesting that a material object such as a tapestry of the kaaba in Mecca in the privacy of one’s home could become the locus of so many discrepant emotions. As a symbol of Muslimness, it asserts belonging to a community under assault in contemporary Gujarat. At the same time, however, the tapestry represents another layer of dislocation within the Muslim community itself, a layer that remains invisible to most non-Muslims.

When I interviewed the judge, the preservation of Ahmedabad’s Indo-Islamic architectural heritage and the question of the city’s religiously partitioned spaces were entangled with the restructuring of the city’s public spaces and infrastructure being orchestrated by the Hindu nationalist controlled state and municipal governments. Like the urban renewal programs
underway in other Indian cities, the one in Ahmedabad has conformed to the neoliberal practice of emphasizing middle class consumption and leisure. Indeed, the consolidation of the Hindu nationalist movement’s political power in Gujarat in the 1990s has coincided with the hegemony of neoliberal discourse in India. Neoliberalism’s privileging of individual choice and responsibility and its emphasis on good governance and economic rationality have proved to be hospitable terrain for the Hindu nationalist movement to articulate its exclusionary politics without appearing to violate the principles of group and minority rights enshrined in the Indian constitution and to distinguish itself from the secular nationalist Congress. Scholars of Hindu nationalist violence in Ahmedabad have suggested that the two major episodes of anti-Muslim violence orchestrated by the movement in the 1990s helped to further sediment the religiously partitioned spatial order of the city (Nandy et al. 1997; Breman 1999; 2003; Ghassem-Fachandi 2012). It is in this context of Hindu nationalist violence and neoliberal restructuring of the city that a civic movement to preserve the architectural and cultural heritage of the historic or walled city have overlapped with the reorganization of Ahmedabad along neoliberal lines. On the view of these conservationists, the medieval Indo-Islamic architecture of Ahmedabad and its traditional residential neighborhoods should be protected because of their historic importance as well as their potential for generating income for residents of the old city. For some of these groups, the architecture of the city also symbolizes the composite and secular culture of the city (and of India) and its preservation is an important part of the struggle for justice and recognition for Ahmedabad’s Muslim communities. Heritage preservation, in other words, is treated by these civil society groups as both an alternative and an antidote to the Hindu nationalist project that has woven itself into the fabric of the city.
In this chapter, I would like to challenge this Hindu nationalism/heritage dichotomy by suggesting that the campaign for heritage preservation is entangled with both Hindu nationalist and neoliberal logics, and that it contributes to the ongoing marginalization of Ahmedabad’s diverse and heterogeneous Muslim communities. Put differently, I will suggest that contemporary efforts at heritage preservation are not only compatible with the project of Hindu nationalism, but in fact themselves participate in the ongoing marginalization of Ahmedabad’s Muslims. In addition, I will argue that both the neoliberal restructuring of the city under the direction of the Hindu nationalist government and heritage conservation are continuous with practices of urban planning that were articulated in the late colonial period. Indeed as I will show, in the early twentieth century, both the colonial state and anti-colonial nationalists began to view the historic walled city as diseased and violent, and both participated (albeit, on unequal terms) in restructuring the city in the name of order and security. One effect of this restructuring was the displacement of the historic or walled city of Ahmedabad and its ways of living by newly developed areas in the West. I further argue that it is through the violent displacement of traditions of urban living in the old city that the objects we recognize today as Ahmedabad’s “architectural and cultural heritage” or the city’s “Indo-Islamic architectural heritage” were constituted. Heritage and Muslim marginality, I am in other words arguing, have been co-constituted in the modern history of Ahmedabad. Thus, to posit them as oppositional is to elide their historic imbrication. It is the history of this co-imbrication that this chapter seeks to illuminate. My hope in this chapter is to show that Muslim marginalization in the city of Ahmedabad cannot be understood through an exclusive focus on organized violence. Rather, the depth of Muslim injury, I argue, can only be understood by paying attention to other modalities
of power that operate through the intersecting logics of spatial organization, neoliberal
development, and heritage preservation.

Until its incorporation into the colonial state and the introduction of modern textile mills,
the urban spaces of Ahmedabad’s were contained within the fort walls that were completed by
the Sultanate and were limited to the eastern banks of the Sabarmati River. Since the late
nineteenth century, the city has expanded dramatically and outgrown the medieval fortifications,
which had fallen into disrepair by the eighteenth century. In 1942, after a period of political
contestations between the colonial state and Indian nationalists, the fort walls were demolished
and only the twelve gates were retained for aesthetic purposes. According to Yagnik and Sheth
(2005; 2010), the dramatic transformations in the political and economic domains of the
nineteenth and twentieth centuries are inscribed in the urban landscape of contemporary
Ahmedabad, and the city now comprises of three distinctive areas. Each of these areas was
developed at distinctive moments in the city’s history and each is marked by distinctive
morphologies, sensibilities and cultures. On their view, the first city is the medieval or historic
city, which residents refer to simply as the sheher (or the city) in Gujarati or the historic or
walled city in English. As I discuss later in this chapter, until the early twentieth century when
political and cultural life in the city came to be dominated by the Indian nationalist movement,
the walled city was considered to be the politically and culturally preeminent zone of the city.
The second consists of the working class and industrial areas which developed from the middle
of the 19th century onwards in areas to the east of the walled city in order to accommodate the
modern textile industry and the working class communities that labored in the factories.
Members of Ahmedabad’s industrial working class were newly urbanized migrants from other
parts of Gujarat and the majority belonged to artisanal Muslim and Hindu castes. The third zone
consists of the areas on the western banks of the Sabarmati River, which were opened up for
development after the first bridge across the Sabarmati was built in 1870. This is the area whose
cultural and political importance has increased since the early twentieth century in part due to the
fact that new civic institutions that were established by nationalist elites were built there. Today,
the western city is connected to the walled city by seven bridges and is home to Gandhi’s
*satyagraha* ashram. University and college campuses, including the campuses of the Indian
Institute of Management and the Indian Space Research Organization are located there. The
architecture of the new city includes the austere high modernist buildings designed by Charles-
Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), Louis Kahn and their Indian acolytes as well as garish
buildings typical of neo-liberal India. Unlike the working class areas and the walled city, most
of western Ahmedabad has superior infrastructure, broad avenues, and gated communities where
Hindu middle and upper middle classes mainly drawn from upper caste groups live, and where
shiny new shopping malls cater to their desires. It also includes the Muslim ghetto of Juhapura,
where I met the Justice Divecha, with whose story I began this chapter.

In an attempt to map out the making of these three areas and to historicize the
marginalization of Muslims in Ahmedabad through urban planning, heritage preservation, and
organized violence, this chapter is divided into five main sections. In the first section, I provide
a brief account of the organization of urban space and the understandings of religious and
political community that shaped the morphology of the city in medieval Ahmedabad. In doing
so, I provide a critical reading of how traditional ways of urban living have been interpreted in
the literature on Ahmedabad, in order set the stage for the second section which describes the
transformation of the walled city and its society under colonial rule. In this section, I show how
the reorganization of the historic or walled city leads to its displacement as the locus of cultural
and political life by the new, planned areas on the western banks of the Sabarmati. I also show how this restructuring provides the framework for the subsequent partitioning of city spaces along religious lines. I argue that it is in the context of the decline of the old spatial order that Muslim communities became marginal in the political and cultural life of the city and that the walled city became perceived as a site of violence and disorder. In the remaining three section, I examine the incidents of heritage preservation that I witnessed during my fieldwork to show how they contribute to the marginalization of Muslims in the city; I also use these examples to illustrate the continuities between colonial urban planning and the contemporary restructuring of the city along neoliberal and Hindu nationalist lines. I end the chapter by telling the tragic story of yet another material object (the screens that adorn Sidi Said’s mosque in Ahmedabad), which not unlike the tapestry hanging in the judge’s living room, is symptomatic of the depth and layers of Muslim injury in contemporary Gujarat. I also use the story of the screens to suggest that heritage is predicated on a prior loss and that violence is therefore one of its conditions of possibility.

**Space and Power in Medieval Ahmedabad:**

Located in the central part of Gujarat, Ahmedabad was founded by Ahmed Shah in 1411 on the eastern banks of the Sabarmati River as the new capital of the Sultanate of Gujarat (see Figures II.1 & II.2). The foundation of the city was blessed by the Sultan’s spiritual preceptor Ahmed Khattu, a *sufi* (warrior-mystic) whose piety and knowledge of the *shari’a* had earned him the title of
Figure II.1: Ahmedabad in 1917. Source: Yagnik and Sheth (2010)
“Asylum of Truth.” According to Engseng Ho (2006), the establishment of the Sultanate was part of a state formation process that straddled the Indian Ocean region from Arabia to Southeast Asia.
Asia. In this transcultural network which was built by traders, warriors, and religious adepts, Gujarat’s role was “grounded by its own dominance in textile production” and served as “a natural fulcrum, a linking node for exchange between” Arabia and Southeast Asia (Ho 2006:102).⁷³ In contrast to the politics of the modern state which privilege indigeneity, political and cultural life in the Sultanate (and in its successor state, the Mughal Empire) drew sustenance from the “incorporation of foreigners in positions of rule and influence” (Ho 2006:101). Due to its central location in a transcultural network that facilitated the circulation of commodities, peoples and knowledges and its own strength as a major center of textile production, medieval Ahmedabad was described by travelers as an emporium city where a large variety of goods were traded (Barbosa 1918 [1518]). During the rule of the Sultans and then under their Mughal successors, Ahmedabad was a major center for textile production, for banking and trade in commodities such as saltpeter and indigo. It was also an important center for religious learning; attracting sufis and adepts from Yemen, Turkey, Ethiopia and elsewhere, many of whom rose to prominence in the regime because of their religious and military knowledge. Furthermore, the city was an important center for artistic and aesthetic innovations influenced by a multiplicity of traditions. Amongst the key figures in the establishment of this transcultural network were Sayyids from Hadhramaut (Yemen), who claimed descent from the Prophet Mohammed. In Ahmedabad, they played a central role in the religious, political and economic life of the city. Some were teachers as well as traders, and helped establish mosques, libraries and hospices.⁷⁴

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⁷³ The Sultanates of Gujarat and of Melakah (Malacca) were established in 1407 and 1409, respectively. In 1411, Ahmed Shah shifted the capital of the Sultanate to Ahmedabad from the port of Cambay (today’s Khambat). Malacca is now a UNESCO world heritage site. Ahmedabad’s application to UNESCO does not mention this connection between the two cities.

⁷⁴ On the mobile networks that connected Yemen to India and Southeast Asia see Engseng Ho’s Gravest of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean (2006). For a brief account of the Hadhrami Saiyyids in Ahmedabad, see Omar Khalidi’s essay “Saiyyids of Hadhramaut in Early Modern India” (2004). The tombs of Abdallah ibn Shaykh al-Aydarus (1513-1582) and his son Muhi al-Din Abd al-Qadir al-Aydarus (1570-1628) are
Its location in central Gujarat near the ports of Cambay (today’s Kambhat) and Bharuch also transformed Ahmedabad into a major center for the trade and production of commodities such as textiles (fine silk and cotton), spices, and indigo. Within the city, sufis, warriors, traders, scribes and artisans from places as far apart as Yemen, Abyssinia, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and central Asia shared the city with bankers, traders and artisans belonging to various Hindu, Jain and Muslim castes such as the Khojas, Memons, Bohras, Chippaas (printers), and Julahas (weavers).

After Ahmedabad’s foundation ceremony in 1411, the first site to be constructed was the royal citadel at Bhadra which included royal residences, a court and a royal mosque. Unlike the colonial state which dramatically altered the political and economic conditions on which the social and religious life of Indian subjects was grounded, the Sultanate did not radically alter the preexisting social order. Although individual Sultans ruled on the basis of a commitment to upholding the Sunni tradition, their ability to rule depended on the military services of foreigners and the cooperation of locals. Hence, they remained largely disinterested in uprooting the preexisting social order. This investment in ruling in a manner continuous with prior regimes was expressed in the architecture of Sultanate era Ahmedabad. For example, the royal citadel in Ahmedabad, which was recognized as the ritual and political center of Ahmedabad (and of the universe), borrowed its design and name from the citadel at Patan, the erstwhile capital of the Sultanate.

75 Ahmed Shah and his successors in the Sultanate were Sunnis. Like other sovereigns of their time, the legitimacy of the Sultans at least amongst fellow-Sunnis depended on a commitment to upholding or restoring correct Muslim practice. The Gujarat Sultans, for example, engaged in periodic campaigns against Shi’a groups such as the Ismaili Khojas and Bohras with the sanction of Sunni ulema. In relations with Bohras, who were a powerful merchant group, the emphasis appears to have been on finding ways to “convert” and incorporate them into the dominant Sunni tradition. See Misra’s Rise of Muslim Power in Gujarat (1963).
Caulukya (Solanki Rajput) kings who had exercised sovereignty over the region for many centuries (Raychaudhuri 1997:16–17). This act of appropriation by the Sultanate could have been a way for it to signal to its subjects that like their predecessors, the new sovereigns were invested in political and cultural continuity. According to Raychaudhuri, the organization of space within the medieval walled city was based on a cosmological scheme derived from the Islamic as well as Jain and Hindu traditions, and the citadel functioned as its ritual and political center (1997:16–24; 2001:677–726). The medieval city’s spatial organization incorporated sovereign and subject alike within the spaces of the walled city. However, the highest cultural value was attached to the city’s core near the royal citadel and the residential areas nearest to the core were occupied by the dominant Hindu and Muslim merchant communities. The subject population, made up of heterogeneous Muslim and Hindu castes and occupational groups, lived in proximity to each other in quarters or divisions known as puras named after prominent Muslim and Hindu notables who had established them.

One of the distinctive features of the walled city in Ahmedabad lies in its architecture and spatial organization. The organization of space appears to have been inspired by the

76 The similarity in design and structure was noted by Ali Muḥammad Khan in his Miraat-i-Ahmadi, a Persian chronicle of the Sultanate. According to Khan “[t]he citadel at Patan built by ancient Hindu Rajas has the same form and similar turrets; and contained a temple dedicated to the goddess Bhadrakali” (ʻAlī Muḥammad Khān 1965:6). However, unlike the Patan citadel, the one in Ahmedabad did not have a Bhadrakali temple. The temple that exists today (located near the east gate of the citadel) appears to have been added on in the nineteenth century when the city came under Maratha control. Ratnamanirao Bhimrao in his Gujaratnu Patnagar Amdavad (Ahmedabad, Capital of Gujarat), (1929:320) also notes the similar design of the Patan and Ahmedabad citadels and reminds his audience that the Bhadrakali temple might have been constructed during Maratha control of the city.

77 For example, in the walled city the areas known as Jamalpur, Kalupur and Dariapur, were named after their founders. This convention also applied to settlements in the vicinity of the walled city on both the western and eastern banks of the Sabarmati. Usmanpura, where Gandhi established his ashram is named after Malik Usman, a sufī patronized by Sultan Muhammad Begada. Isanpur, where the dargah of Malik Isan stood until it was destroyed by a large mob during the pogrom of 2002, is named after Malik Isan, another religious notable. M.N. Pearson, in his Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat (1976), notes that during the reign of Sultan Mohammed Begada, there were probably 360 to 380 such puras in Ahmedabad and its surrounding areas. Each pura was anchored around the palace and mosque built by the founding nobles, and like the walled city, “all kinds of inhabitants lived” (i.e., artisans, religious adepts, warriors, merchants) in these areas (Pearson 1976:63).
architectural traditions of Indian towns and Middle Eastern cities, which were organized into quarters, each inhabited by a different occupational group. This spatial order, which emerged over a period of time after the establishment of the city, appears to have been equally a product of design as of historical chance and is linked to the development of the city as a major center for manufacturing and trade in the medieval period. Within the walled city, space was divided into quarters known as *pols* and *wads* which contained within them houses inhabited by merchants and artisans (see Figure II.3). Unlike neighborhoods of modern cities which are categorized by their functions, space was not divided on the basis of a public versus private distinction. The household was the space for domesticity and also the space where manufacturing and trading were carried out. Many of these *pols* continue to survive to this day, albeit in altered form. According to a survey conducted by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation in 2001, there are still 500 *pols* inside the walled city (AMC 2001). The historical record is unclear about the origins of this particular urban form. However, Yagnik and Sheth refer to property sale documents from the early sixteenth century and suggest that some *pols* date back to the reign of the Gujarat Sultans and were constructed in order to house the merchants and artisans that were drawn to the city (2010:92).

The word *pol* is derived from the Sanskrit root *pratoli*, meaning a gate/entrance to an enclosed space. Traditionally, each *pol* or *wad* consisted of clusters of houses that were

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78 Maganlal Vakhatchand, who was associated with the Gujarat Vernacular Society and wrote a history of Ahmedabad claimed that the first *pol* known as the Mahurat *pol* (auspicious time) was commissioned by Sultan Ahmed Shah (Vakhatchand 1851). Vakhatchand had also served as the secretary of the town “wall committee” and of the Municipal Commission, both of which were precursors to the establishment of a formal municipal government in Ahmedabad. Ratnamanirao Bhimrao, in his *Gujaratnu patnagar, Amadavad* (1929) claims that the *pols* date back to the Sultanate era. S.C. Misra, a historian of medieval Gujarat suggests that Muslim neighborhoods during the same period were also referred to as *mohalas* (neighborhoods) (see Misra 1981:80–90).
organized along a main street, branch alleys and dead end streets.\textsuperscript{79} Inside the \textit{pol}, the houses, which were often three and four stories high, were tightly packed together and faced on to the street (i.e. looked inwards). \textit{Pols} were secured by a wooden gate that was closed every night and a \textit{polio} (or guard) was assigned to monitor entry and exit. Each \textit{pol} was named after the self-governing caste or occupational groups that lived in it. Property inside the \textit{pol} was traditionally held in common and the right to inhabit a house was restricted to members of the caste. For example, there were pols inhabited by vessel-makers (\textit{Kansarani pol}), sugar merchants (\textit{Khandwalani pol}), silk weavers (\textit{Kadva Kanbini pol}), and so on. The core area of the city around the royal citadel and the \textit{Jamaa masjid} (the main mosque) were recognized as Muslim. In other words, in medieval Ahmedabad, caste and occupational groups were distributed in their own spaces and the categorization of areas of the city as exclusively Hindu or Muslim would have made little sense because the primary cultural and social identifications of the residents of the walled city were with their caste or occupational groups.\textsuperscript{80} Although they are now inhabited by multiple castes, even today \textit{pols} and \textit{wads} bear the names of the original caste and

\textsuperscript{79}There are numerous works that deal with the architecture, spatial organization and traditional forms of urban sociality in the \textit{pol}. My own discussion of the architecture and organization of space inside the \textit{pol} is based on books by Ratnamanirao Bhimrao (1929), Jayanti Dalal (1990[1948]), Kenneth Gillion (1968), Harish Doshi (1974), and the \textit{Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Vol IV, Ahmedabad} (1879). In addition, I have drawn on articles by Vivek Nanda (1991:26–36) and Vivek Pramar (1984).

\textsuperscript{80} I do not mean to suggest that categories such as Hindu or Muslim did not matter in medieval times. Rather, these labels did not have the same political significance as they do today and caste was the primary social identity. For example, the walled city had (and still has) \textit{pols} named after various groups such as the \textit{Khoja, Bohra, Chhippa, Ghanchi} (Muslim groups) and \textit{Patel, Desai, Nagar, Vaishnava Vania}, and \textit{Ghanchi} (Hindu groups). The \textit{Ghanchi}, or oil pressers, are distributed between Hindus and Muslims. Ironically, this is borne out by the city surveys of 1824 and 1825 conducted by the British, who had taken formal control of the city in 1817. The surveys, which were organized for the purpose of raising taxes from residents, classified households by caste and religion. In later censuses, castes and communities were grouped under the meta-categories of Hindu and Muslim. These colonial practices of enumeration, it is now recognized, are implicated in the emergence of politicized Hindu and Muslim religious identities (e.g. see Cohn 1996). However, these early statistical records can also be read for their insights into the social and spatial organization of the city prior to its transformation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In these surveys, walled city areas such as Khanpur, Mirzapur, Shahpur, and Dariapur are described as consisting of Hindu as well as Muslim households. See \textit{Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Volume IV: Ahmedabad} (1879), pp. 318-320. Today, of course, many of these are identified as exclusively Muslim areas and Hindus who lived there have moved to other parts of the city.
occupational groups such as the Bohra, Chhipa, Ghanchi, Momin (Muslim groups) and Patel, Desai, Nagar, Jhaveri, Ghanchi (Hindu groups) that lived in them. In addition, the structures of political authority that governed the medieval polity and the city’s inhabitants related to Ahmedabad’s spaces on the principal of caste and occupational differences and not on the principle of religious differences as we understand them in the present.

The organization of space inside the pol appears to have mirrored on a smaller-scale the spatial order of the walled city as a whole. Just as the citadel functioned as the ritual and political center of the city as a whole, “houses and streets inside the pols also seem to have been arranged” around a symbolic center that usually consisted of a square or common area (Raychaudhuri 1997:23). In many cases, a shrine dedicated to the community deity was placed in the square and the houses closest to the square were occupied by the pol panch (head of the pol) and by elders and other notables of the community. We get a sense of the ritual and cultural importance of the center of the pol from Harish Doshi’s account of the organization of social life in the pols in the 1960s and 1970s. Although Doshi’s account has its shortcomings (it is based entirely on fieldwork in pols inhabited by Hindu castes), his observations on communal life and on the architecture and organization of space are pertinent to my argument. According to Doshi, houses that were located closest to the center of pols, near the square or the shrine were reserved for caste elders and also fetched higher prices on the market (Doshi 1974:11). In many respects, this privileging of the center mirrored the rest of the city, where pols located closest to the citadel—such as those in the Khadia ward were considered to be of the highest cultural and social value and occupied by the banking and trading castes and communities of the city.

The design and architecture of these quarters in the walled city—the construction of high rear walls without windows, cellars inside individual houses, the use of timber and brick walls,
the narrow streets and alleys, the use of large gates which would be closed at night or in times of 
social unrest, the practice of hiring guards (polios) to monitor entry and exit—has led to the (in 
my view reductive) suggestion that the pol in its current form might have emerged in the late 
seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Mughal control over the region was in decline.  
Due to the large quantities of opium, indigo, silk, saltpeter, textiles, grains and other 
commodities that were stored in Ahmedabad and the wealth of its merchants and bankers, the 
city was a favored target of bands of bhil and koli raiders. The city was also a major target of the 
Marathas, who carried out several raids on the city throughout the 18th century before conquering 
it. Such functionalist interpretations of the architecture and of the spatial practices of the pol 
were not uncommon in colonial histories of Ahmedabad. The authors of the Gazetteer of the 
Bombay Presidency (1879), for example, claimed that the fortified design of the pol was a 
response to the uncertainty and insecurity that prevailed before the British took control of the 
city in 1817.

Colonial representations of Ahmedabad have also shaped how scholars and writers in 
subsequent decades have written about the city. For example, Harish Doshi reiterates these 
functionalist interpretations by characterizing the architecture of the pol as “a curious mixture of 
approach and defence with dead walls at the end of the street” and that “neighbourhood living in

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81 See for example, the Gujarati writer Jayanti Dalal’s memoir Sheherni Sheri (1990 [1948]), and Ratnamani Rao 
Bhimrao’s Gujaratnu Patnagar (1929). Dalal, who grew up in one of the pol’s of the city writes that the design of 
the pol was meant to “protect residents from natural and manmade disasters” (1990 [1948]:11–12). Harish Doshi’s 
Traditional Neighborhood in a Modern City (1974), which I have already discussed above, also makes a similar 
argument. Most authors who have written about the walled city appear to have drawn on the Gazetteer of the 
Bombay Presidency and other colonial sources for historical information to argue that the architecture of the pols 
should be understood as a response to violence that preceded colonial rule (Ch. VII). This view is uncritically 

82 In the historiography of Ahmedabad, the period of British rule is most often described as one of prosperity and 
stability and the period immediately before it as one of decline and decay. Although there is little doubt that the 
Marathas coveted the city for its wealth and did engage in plunder and violence, these accounts conveniently 
absolve the East India Company troops of engaging in plunder as well. In fact, the eighteenth century is marked by 
a period of intense competition and collaboration between the East India Company and the Marathas for control over 
the manufacturing and trade of Gujarat.
the form of *pol* was thus developed in the city to meet a social purpose. With the city walls in a dilapidated condition, thieves and burglars posed a constant threat to the city dwellers” (Doshi 1974: 36 & 75). That the British East India Company had a hand in the collapse of the Mughal Empire or that Warren Hastings had forged an alliance with the Gaekwad in order to contest their common rival, the Peshwas, are elided in these accounts. These functionalist claims, in other words, were self-serving and central to the justifications for colonial conquest and rule. As I discuss later in this chapter, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the same spatial order that was characterized as a protective measure came to be perceived by the colonial state as a hindrance and threat to its powers of policing and surveillance of Ahmedabad. More importantly, this understanding of the architecture and spatial order of the city provided the justification for British plans to reorganize city spaces in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Here, my aim is not to deny the possibility that the peculiar architecture of the *pol* in Ahmedabad may well have emerged in response to the vicissitudes of political instability before the establishment of British rule in India. However, I want to point out that this emphasis on security not only forecloses the possibility that the architecture of the *pol* was a reflection of deep-rooted traditions of urban living in Ahmedabad, but also feeds into narratives about the redemptive powers of colonial rule.

As I had noted earlier, with few exceptions, each *pol* in precolonial Ahmedabad was inhabited by members of a single caste or occupational group. The only exception were a few mixed caste *pols*, where small numbers of barbers (*hajaams*) and washermen (*dhobis*) were allowed to live because they provided services to the dominant caste. Social and religious life within the *pols* was governed by a council or *panch*. The *panch* levied a tax on all members that was used to pay for the maintenance of common areas and for communal property. The funds
were also used for the upkeep of the pol’s water well and the temple, mosque or shrine. The panch maintained discipline within the pol and had the power to sanction individuals who violated caste rules (e.g., Doshi 1974:60 & 121). Since property within the pol was considered communal, the panch also set the price or rent for each of the residences. While all male-members of the caste that resided in a pol were members of the panch, it was usually controlled by elders and notables. In the case of mixed caste pols, the panch was controlled by members of the dominant caste (Doshi 1974; Yagnik and Sheth 2010).

Before proceeding to a discussion of the reorganization of Ahmedabad’s urban spaces and their effects on local society under colonial rule, I want to provide a brief account of the mahajan and the panch. Both of these were social institutions or corporate bodies that played a crucial role in trade and manufacturing and in the organization of social, religious and political life of the city during the medieval period. The collective bodies of Hindu upper caste communities, many of whom were dominant in banking and trade, were known as mahajan, while artisanal groups were organized into bodies called panch. Although there are no studies dedicated exclusively to the origins and evolution of these corporate bodies, scholars writing about society and trade in Gujarat have suggested that mahajan and panch in some form have existed before the establishment of the Sultanate. With the emergence of Ahmedabad as a

83 For example, if a resident of a pol died, then everyone residing there was required to participate in the funeral and in other post-funeral rites.

84 Although there is no single work dedicated exclusively to the organization and evolution of guilds in Ahmedabad, the topic has been explored by numerous authors writing about other aspects of social and political life in the region. In this section, I have drawn on the discussions of guilds and mahajans in Edward W. Hopkins’ Indian Old and New (1902), especially Chapter 7; Ratnamanirao Bhimaroa’s Amdavad, Gujaratni Patnagar (1929) especially Chapter 37; Kenneth Gillion’s Ahmedabad: A Study in Indian Urban Indian History (1968); M.N. Pearson’s Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat: The Response to the Portuguese in the Seventeenth Century (1976) and Farhat Hasan’s State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, 1572-1723 (2004). In addition, I have drawn on articles by Shirin Mehta (1984:173–185; 1988:175–189), Makrand Mehta (1981:123–134), and Satish Misra (1981:80–89) in order to gain an understanding of the functioning and role of mahajans. For an account of the role of mahajans in other parts of Gujarat see Howard Spodek’s article on business communities in Saurashtra (Spodek
major center for production and exchange under the Sultans and its centrality as a source for
finance and credit during the Mughal rule, these corporate bodies appear to have played an
increasingly important role in shaping political and cultural life in the city. This is not to suggest
however that mahajans and panch were unique to Ahmedabad. Indeed, similar organizations
played a crucial role in other cities and towns of Gujarat throughout the medieval and colonial
periods.

Several historians have suggested that the mahajan and panch were occupational guilds
centered primarily with the economic activities of their members (e.g., Pearson 1976; Mehta
1984; Mehta 1988). Conversely, Ashin Das Gupta has insisted that these were a type of
cultural institutions whose main concern was with regulating the social and religious practices of
their members (Das Gupta 1984:27–40). However, as Douglas Haynes in his remarkable history
of the emergence of a nationalist public in Surat has suggested, such characterizations hinge on
an understanding of the economy and of culture as distinct domains of human activity and ignore
the evidence of how “commercial and social preoccupations interpenetrated and reinforced each
other in the culture of high-caste Hindus and Jains” and other communities of Gujarat (Haynes
1991:60–61). Given that caste and occupation were frequently identical, these corporate bodies
were also caste associations that had the power to regulate not only economic activities but also

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85 Pearson, for example, describes the mahajan as analogous to guilds in Western Europe and as concerned
exclusively with “regulating such matters as prices, adjudicating disputes within the occupation group, and
representing its members in disputes with other mahajans” (Pearson 1976:123). Ironically, the inadequacy of
Pearson’s characterization of the role and function of the mahajan is made clear by the examples of two sixteenth
century merchants that he mentions: Virji Vohra, the head of a mahajan in Surat and Shantidas Jawahari (Jhaveri),
the nagarshet of Ahmedabad. Both were not only powerful merchants, but also religious heads of the Jain
communities of Surat and Ahmedabad and it was in their dual capacity as merchants and religious notables that they
negotiated directly with the Mughal emperors Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb respectively (1976:126).
the social and religious practices of their members. The head of the *saraaf mahajan* (banker’s guild) was also the leader of the Jain community in the city; while the head of the cloth merchants’ *mahajan* served as the spiritual guide of Vaishnavites. In addition, the Jain and Vaishnavite *mahajans* levied a cess on trade that was used to support religious institutions; the former supported the local *panjrapole* (animal shelters, usually for cows), while the latter used the levies to support local temples. In addition, *mahajans* and their leaders enforced rules of endogamy and correct ritual practice on their members.

From the time of the Sultanate, the diverse groups of traders, bankers, and artisans that gravitated towards Ahmedabad were each organized into their own corporate bodies. Alexander Forbes, who compiled the *Ras Mala* and is discussed at length in the final chapter of this dissertation, notes that several prominent Hindu and Jain merchant groups were closely allied with the Sultans (Forbes 1878:318–324). The associations of traders and bankers were known as the *mahajan*, while each of the artisanal groups had its own organization known as the *panch*. In Ahmedabad, for example, there were *mahajans* for merchants dealing in raw cotton, cloth, silk, sugar, grains, timber, and brocade. The bankers had their own *mahajan* known as the *saraf mahajan* and along with the *mahajan* of the textile merchants, were considered to be the most powerful, wielding significant influence over the political, religious, and economic life of the city’s inhabitants. Similarly, artisanal groups such as printers, goldsmiths, silversmiths, weavers, threaders, tile makers, roof-makers (*chapparbandhs*), oil pressers (*ghanchi*), tailors and carpenters had their own *panch*. The heads of the *mahajans*, whose status was hereditary, were known as *sheth*; while the leaders of the *panch* were known as *patel*. Both organizations played a central role in the regulation of trade and manufacturing activities. The *mahajan*, had the power to fix the price of goods and services and to determine and enforce holidays. In some
communities—such as the Jains and Vaishnavites who cultivated frugality as a virtue—working on holidays was considered a sign of greed. The mahajan and the panch, or rather the sheth and the patel, had the authority to represent members in negotiations with other mahajans and panches. The mahajan enforced the rules of the collective body and punished transgressors by levying fines or in more extreme cases, expelling them from the community—an act that resulted in social death. The relations between panch and mahajan were unequal because artisanal castes and their guilds were considered to be politically and socially inferior to the castes engaged in trading. However, because the artisanal groups were organized into panch, these communities were able to negotiate with and resolve disputes with trader mahajans on a relatively equal footing (e.g., Misra 1981). When disputes between individual traders and artisans arose, they were usually resolved by negotiations between the sheth and the patel and the agreements were considered binding on all members of their respective communities.

These types of organizations were not peculiar to self-described Hindu communities of Ahmedabad. Several of the Muslim communities of Ahmedabad were organized into jamaat, a type of association that was analogous in many ways to the mahajan. Precolonial Ahmedabad’s (and, in fact, Gujarat’s) Muslim population was diverse in ways that are hard to imagine in a political context that has been dominated by religious nationalist discourse. The Muslim communities of Ahmedabad were divided into two broad types: groups of “migrants” such as Afghans, Turks, Arabs, Persians, and Habshis or Sidis (former slaves from Ethiopia) who were prominent in the Sultanate and Mughal states; and communities such as the Memons, Khojas, Bohras (SUNNI and Shi’a), Chippaas, and Momins, who claimed descent from castes that had converted to Islam before the formation of the Sultanate. Historically, the relations between these communities were fraught with tensions and it would be erroneous to claim that the
Muslims of Gujarat ever acted in concert as a unified religious or political community. For example, the *Bohras* and *Khojas*, who played an important role in the trade networks that linked Ahmedabad to the wider Indian Ocean economy, had at various times been targets of prosecution by the Sultans, who relied on Sunni religious adepts to legitimize their authority.\(^\text{86}\) It is the latter group of Muslim communities—the *Bohras*, *Memons*, *Khojas*, and *Chippaas*—that were organized into *jamaats*. For many of these communities, the *jamaat* functioned as an institutional mechanism for building group solidarity and for defining and maintaining boundaries with other Muslim and non-Muslim groups alike.

It should also be noted that these types of corporate bodies were not unique to Ahmedabad. In fact, there were powerful *mahajans*, artisans’ *panch* and *jamaats* in other major trading centers of Gujarat such as Surat, Cambay, and Baroda and in the small towns and villages of Gujarat. In Ahmedabad (and in other trading cities in the region), however, the *mahajans* were more deeply entrenched and powerful, playing a crucial role in the circulation of goods, providing credit to the Sultanate and to their Mughal successors, financing the local military economy, and regulating the flow of communal life in the urban centers. More significantly, their power and authority were rooted in relations of gift and exchange with the Sultanate and the Mughal states (Hasan 2004:40–49). Over time, the role of *mahajans* evolved and due to a long history of conflict and collaboration with medieval sovereigns, they begun designating a preeminent member of the community as the *nagarsheth* (the chief merchant of the city). By the eighteenth century, Hasan writes that the *nagarsheth* and *mahajans* of bankers and merchants of Ahmedabad (and other centers) were not just intermediaries that participated in structuring

\(^{86}\) On the prosecution of the *Ismaili Khojas* and other Shi’i communities, see Satish Misra’s *Muslim Communities in Gujarat* (1964).
relations between the Mughal state and local society, but shared “in the privileges of imperial sovereignty in their individual” and “corporate capacity” (Hasan 2004:45).\(^{87}\)

More recently, scholars who have examined the incidence of Hindu nationalist violence in the postcolonial period have attributed the increasing frequency and intensity of such violence in Ahmedabad to the decline of *mahajan* (Varshney 2002; Berenschot 2012). In these accounts, the *mahajan* is described as a “civic institution” that played an important role in mediating between state and society. I discuss their arguments regarding the diminishing role of the *mahajan* in greater detail in the next chapter. For now, I want to point out that this characterization of the *mahajan* as mediator hinges upon a view of state and society as discrete and oppositional entities and of caste as the quintessential form of civil society in India (cf. Dirks 2001). However, the *mahajan*, as I have suggested above, was a social as well as a political and religious institution, whose powers were at one time derived from its location in a form of state characterized by a layered and fragmented sovereignty. It is with the incorporation of Ahmedabad into the colonial state and the subsequent transformation of its economy and its urban spaces that the powers of the *mahajan* were reconfigured and limited to the regulation of caste or community traditions and practices, which were defined as purely internal and private matters.

In the wake of the British conquest of Ahmedabad in 1817, the role of the *mahajan* and of the *panch* in the regulation and flow of communal life in Ahmedabad was gradually, but substantially, altered. The incorporation of the city into a modern state, characterized by an absolutist form of sovereignty and a historically unprecedented capacity to intervene in the social

\(^{87}\) For example, Kushalchand Jawahari (Jhaveri), the *nagarsheth* of Ahmedabad, assisted the Mughal governor of Gujarat in collecting a cess from the *mahajans* of the city’s powerful merchants and bankers.
life of colonized subjects, effectively limited the powers of institutions such as the mahajan and the panch. In Ahmedabad, these traditional centers of power and authority, which derived their legitimacy in part from their relations with the Sultanate and Mughal states and which had structured social relations between diverse communities and defined how residents inhabited and moved through city spaces, were gradually displaced by modern institutions such as law courts, a modern police force, and a municipal government. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the increasing regulation of social and religious practices by colonial courts not only redefined the powers of corporate bodies such as the mahajan and the panch, it also engendered new conceptions of religious and political community. In Ahmedabad, these traditional institutions were displaced by new Hindu and Muslim elites, whose power and authority were derived from links to the colonial state and from their success in a capitalist economy centered on the mass production of cheap cotton. Social identities and relations between Ahmedabad’s diverse Hindu and Muslim castes and communities were further altered by a newly urbanized and rapidly expanding industrial working class, and by colonial attempts to address the accompanying problems of crowding by the application of modern techniques of urban planning. As I discuss in the next section, the reorganization of Ahmedabad and its transformation into a modern city were marked by competition between an emergent nationalist movement and the colonial state. Amongst the questions at the center of these contestations were the status of the city’s Indo-Islamic architectural heritage and the place and location of its diverse Muslim communities.

Modernizing Ahmedabad:

In his memoir Sheherni Sheri (The Streets of the City), the Gujarati writer Jayanti Dalal offers a vivid account of the daily rhythms of social life in the pols of Ahmedabad. Dalal had grown up
in one of the *pols* in the walled city in the early twentieth century and his memoir was published in 1948, a year after independence and the Partition of India. Dalal’s memoir is notable because it is one of the few accounts from the early twentieth century that describes how a traditional way of life that was associated with *pols* of the walled city in Ahmedabad was displaced by social and political upheavals of the early twentieth century. From about 1915 onwards, the walled city and the *pols* inside became the terrain over which the Indian nationalist movement and the colonial state waged their moral and political battles. In the process, not only did the nationalist movement establish its dominance over political, cultural and social life in the *pols*, but the spatial organization and architecture of the entire city of Ahmedabad was dramatically altered by state intervention. According to Dalal, at one time *pol* life provided “for the welfare and prosperity of people in the community. [In the pol] social relations were unlike those today; there was an intense intimacy between individual residents and hence the individual’s welfare and wellbeing were the responsibility of the entire *pol*. That was in the glorious era of the *pol* when the social fabric was at its healthiest. In the *mahajan*, the *pol panch* was respected and its voice, although faint, was heard in the courts of kings. In the old days, the *pol panch* was engaged in an exercise in self-government and in novel exercises in democracy which were disturbing to some……and, the decisions of the *panchayat* were enforced using methods that are not comparable to the methods of today” (Dalal 1990 [1948]:12).

From Dalal’s account, we get the sense that the design and architecture of the *pol* house, the flow of social life and the authority of the community (represented by the *panch* or *pol* council) were interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Before its spatial order was reconfigured by the modern state, houses in the *pol* were built on a plinth (platform) that was raised a few feet higher than the street and the main door into the house was located several feet back on this
platform. This design effectively created an elevated, verandah-like space (not always covered) that protruded out in the front of the house. In Gujarati, this space at the front of the platform is called the *otla* and until the early twentieth century many of the houses inside the *pols* of Ahmedabad had one.\(^8^8\) Traditionally, the *otla* performed multiple functions in the daily life of a household and of the community as a whole. It was an architectural feature of the *pol* house that blurred the distinction between the private and the public domains; as a space, it performed multiple functions in the daily life of the family and of the neighborhood as a whole. During the day, the *otla* was frequently used for conducting trade and exchange. At other times, the *otla* (especially, one outside the house of a caste elder) could be the site for the *pol panch* to meet, deliberate and exercise its authority in the community. In other words, the *otla* played a crucial role in maintaining order and discipline within the *pol*. To understand the range of functions of the *otla*, it is worth quoting Dalal at length:

> At the center of communal life and of the street was the *otla*.....it is like the throne of King Vikram,....this inanimate and humble object called the *otla* contains within it a record of the wisdom and the flow of life of the community. It can be a place for rumination, reflection and meditation; and it can also be the place for expressing anger and abuse. For those who like to speculate, they can spend months on end sitting on the *otla* wondering whether it is possible to survive the horns of an angry bull by slipping in between them! For some people, the *otla* is a place of inspiration and for others, their *karmabhumi* (site of action). In the morning, it is the place for ruminating while cleaning ones teeth with a *dattan* [chewing stick]. It is a site for the collective reading of the daily newspaper. Of course, if is better if the paper is read by others before the owner receives it, because after it arrives at the *otla* the only certainty is that it will leave as waste (*pasti*)! Later in the day, the *otla* becomes a shop. And after that it functions as the public hall of the queen of the household (*striaarajno diwan-e-aam bani jay che*). At other times it is the location for a game of cards and enjoying the warmth of the sun in the winter....... But the true identity of the *otla* is only revealed in the evening......and at night. Then it is transformed into the parliament of the community (*janpad*, meaning country); news of events in the street, news of the city, and news of great, dramatic events from all over the world.

\(^8^8\) This style of architecture is not unique to the *pols* of Ahmedabad and was in fact common to the design of houses all over Gujarat.
come to the otila to be debated and dissected. At this time, regardless of the age of those who might be there, the otila takes precedence. There is in fact no limit to the self-confidence and arrogance that can be unleashed by the otila. Those who sit on the otila feel authorized to give advice to anyone and everyone and to find fault with others. That is the significance of the otila; that most humble and the lowest part of the street [because it is not inside the house itself] and of community life. At one time it must have been the parliament of the community, but today in our age of ignorance and irresponsibility, it is the parliament [panch] of the vaghris [a caste considered to be unruly and uncouth by upper castes] (Dalal 1990:109–108).

Without doubt, Dalal glosses over the inequality and violence that enabled the traditions of the pol. Furthermore, his anxieties about the intrusion of mass politics and the nationalist movement into the pol are conflated with his anti-Dalit prejudice. Indeed, at the time it was not unusual for upper caste residents of the walled city like Dalal to claim that they were Gandhians or nationalists and simultaneously hold deeply prejudicial views about Dalits and Muslims. Nevertheless, Dalal’s memoir is interesting for the ways in which it highlights the changes in the political and social life of the walled city that accompanied the transformation of the spatial order of Ahmedabad in the three decades before his memoir was published in 1948. During this period, and as I hope to show below, the ways of life that were associated with the pol were dramatically reconfigured by social and economic forces that seemed remote and uncontrollable. In the process, space inside and outside the walled city was reorganized and reclassified along modern lines; and new infrastructure (roads, sewers, piped water) was constructed inside the walled city. The agents of these changes included both colonial officials and the leaders of the anticolonial nationalist movement. Indeed, throughout this period, the colonial state and the anticolonial nationalist movement, which had won municipal elections in 1917 and 1924, confronted each to control and direct the project of modernizing Ahmedabad.
The historian Sidharth Raychaudhuri has argued that from the early twentieth century onwards, especially after the arrival of Gandhi in Ahmedabad, urban planning and the reorganization of Ahmedabad became one of the principle arenas through which the Indian nationalist movement established its hegemony over the city’s political and cultural life (Raychaudhuri 1997; 2001). According to Raychaudhuri, nationalist leaders had initially opposed the colonial state’s plans to reorganize the city. However, after securing their control over the municipal government in 1924, they implemented several major town planning schemes that had been formulated by the colonial government in order to establish their power over the city. In this section, I provide a brief historical account of the reorganization of Ahmedabad that was pursued by the colonial government and the nationalist movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Amongst the major transformations brought about by the colonial state and the nationalist movement was the conversion of the western banks of the Sabarmati River into the new political and cultural center of Ahmedabad. This had the effect of marginalizing the old walled city that the Gujarati writer Dalal described in his memoir and that I discuss in Section One. It also had the effect of displacing older understandings of community that prevailed in Ahmedabad with new conceptions of Hindu and Muslim as rival political communities. Dalal’s memoir, in other words, can be read as a lament about the traditional modes of communal living that had already begun receding into memory by the time he published his book in 1948. This forgetting, I will suggest, was both aided and made possible through technologies of urban planning and discourses of hygiene, security and order; and it created the conditions of possibility for the making of a city segregated on the basis of religion while setting the stage for further marginalization and violence against Muslims in postcolonial Gujarat.
These spatial and political changes had their antecedents in the latter half of the nineteenth century; and so it is with these antecedents that I begin this section. The city of Ahmedabad was irrevocably transformed by the development of a modern textile industry and by the colonial state which sought to address problems associated with the rapid expansion of the textile mills by reorganizing the city. Precolonal Ahmedabad’s artisan-based production system, which had specialized in calico prints, fine silks, cotton-silk blends and kinkhab (a type of brocade that was favored by Sultanate and Mughal elites as a marker of their social status), had already been declining throughout the eighteenth century because of the collapse of the Mughal Empire and the rise of Surat as a rival center for production. Due to a combination of economic decline and political uncertainty, the population of the city had also decreased in the eighteenth century. The decline accelerated after the British East India Company banned all trade between the city and Yemen in 1820. The traditional industry was finally displaced as the main driver of the local economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when a new generation of entrepreneurs, from the same castes and communities as the traditional elites, established modern textile mills to mass produce cheap cotton fabrics. Within two decades after the first modern textile mill began production in 1861, economic and social life in the city were dramatically transformed. Due to the mills, the population of the city began to expand

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89 Although precise numbers are not available, Gillion notes that in 1817, the year Ahmedabad was conquered by East India Company troops, the population of the city was 80,000. He suggests that this number was probably much lower than during the city’s peak under the Sultanate and the Mughals (Gillion 1968:53).

90 The story of the decline of the traditional textile industry is far more complex and so I only mention it in passing here. For a variety of reasons, Ahmedabad’s status as a major center for manufacturing and trade had been declining since the 18th century. For one, the port of Cambay had suffered from problems of siltation and had been eclipsed by Surat. In addition, the Indian Ocean trade had come under threat from the Portuguese and then the British. Finally, Ahmedabad’s fortunes were tied to the Mughal state and it too was under attack from the British East India Company and the Marathas.

91 On the formation of textile mills, see Makrand Mehta’s The Ahmedabad Cotton Textile Industry: Genesis and Growth (1982).
rapidly. The expansion of the mills also transformed social and political hierarchies in the city. At the top, a new generation of business and professional elites drawn from the Vaishnava Vania (i.e., bania), Nagar Brahmins, Patidars, and Zorastrians (Parsi) communities began to challenge the older and well-established Jain banker and merchant families. The effects of the rapid growth of the modern textile industry, however, were more visible in the growth of the population of artisanal and subaltern castes residing in Ahmedabad. The mills attracted large numbers of migrants from other towns and villages of Gujarat, who became part of a rapidly growing industrial working class population. The majority of them were members of Hindu and Muslim artisanal castes and occupational groups; after arriving in Ahmedabad, they lived in caste-specific pols and wads inside the walled city or in the newly developed mill areas of Saraspur, Gomtipur and Kalupur which were located to the east.

From the perspective of the colonial state, the rapid expansion of the mills and the growth of the city’s population created a set of problems that if not remedied would threaten its control over the city and disrupt the mill industry which was one of its sources of revenue (Raychaudhuri 1997). In contrast to the older generation of European travelers who had admired the architecture of the walled city and its impressive fortifications, colonial officials charged with governing Ahmedabad began perceiving the walled city as a source of crime, disease, and

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92 In 1851, a decade before the first mill began operating, the population of the city was 97,048 (Gillion 1968:53). In 1872, about a decade after the first mill began operating; the population of Ahmedabad was 116,873 and by 1891 it had grown to 144,451. For the twentieth century, the population figures were as follows: 181,774 in 1901, 213,727 in 1911 and 274,007 in 1921. All figures from L. J. Sedgwick, Census of India, 1921, Vol. IX, Cities of the Bombay Presidency, Part I, Report (Poona, 1922), Part A, p. 3, 63 and cited in Raychaudhuri (2001:677–726).

93 The first mill was established in 1858 by Ranchodlal Chotalal, a Nagar Brahmin. However, the mill only started production in 1861. In the precolonial era, Nagar Brahmins played an important role in the Sultanate and Mughal state as scribes and functionaries. Under British rule, many of them joined the colonial bureaucracy while others took to business.
disorder.\textsuperscript{94} In part, this shift in perception was connected to changes that had occurred after Ahmedabad’s insertion into the colonial political economy. In 1830, the East India Company had taken over a vast tract of land in Asarwa in the north of the city and established a large cantonment there. By the time the mills were being established, most British officials lived in the cantonment or in the more spacious Shahibaug area. In contrast to the well-ordered, clean and open spaces of the military cantonment, the fort walls, the \textit{pols} with narrow streets and alleys full of tightly packed houses, and indeed the entire city, were seen by the British as obstacles to the circulation of air, the entry of light and the movement of bodies. On their view, the morphology of the city was not only an obstacle to the efficient movement of goods and bodies; it was also a threat to security and hindered policing and surveillance. In addition, the “insanitary” practices of the natives, who lived in “filth and squalor” inside the walled city and in Saraspur and Gomtipur (two suburbs where the mills were located), led colonial officials to view the entire walled city as a site of malignance and moral degeneracy. A captain in the British army who was sent to Ahmedabad in 1869 to photograph its medieval architecture wrote that “I do not think there was so dirty a town in the world in these days, it beats Naples and that is bad enough.”\textsuperscript{95}

In fact, making Ahmedabad safe for British rule and dealing with the problem of filth and sanitation inside the walled city appear to have been the main priorities of British officials after they captured the city in 1817. Resolving these two problems also provided the framework for recruiting allies from amongst the city’s banking and merchant communities in order to govern the city. In 1831, a Town Wall Committee that included the \textit{nagar sheth} and the \textit{kazi} of

\textsuperscript{94}For an admiring account of Ahmedabad under the Mughals, see the French physician Francois Bernier’s \textit{Travels in the Mughal Empire, A.D. 1656-1658} (1916).

\textsuperscript{95}Quoted in Gillion (1968: 120).
the city as its members was constituted and charged with raising revenue and supervising the repair of the medieval fortifications of Ahmedabad (Gillion 1968:110–111). According to Gillion, the Committee was the predecessor for more formal institutions of municipal government that were created after the 1857 Mutiny. After the repairs were completed in 1842, the Committee continued to function and supervised the construction of fort walls to enclose and protect two nearby settlements (Saraspura and Vitalpura); they also organized the removal of garbage inside the city, maintained roads, etc. By 1856, the Committee had morphed into the Municipal Commission which consisted of “14 government officials” and “16 non-official members, the leading Hindu, Jain, Muslim and Parsi” residents of the city, with real power resting in the hands of the official members. Gillion has interpreted the inclusion of natives in municipal institutions as a sign of the civic commitments of Ahmedabad’s elites and of the British commitment to let “the people have their own way” (112). Regardless of the intentions of the colonial officials, I would like to suggest that the practice of selecting individuals as representatives of the “Hindu” and “Muslim” communities had the effect of displacing older conceptions of community that were grounded in caste and occupational status. In the next century, this practice was institutionalized in the form of separate electorates, and further contributed to the sedimentation of the idea of Muslim and Hindu as separate and unified political communities; it also set the ground for the first instance of religious nationalist violence in Ahmedabad—namely, the riots that occurred in 1941 and 1946. Much of the commission’s work focused on improving sanitation, constructing a water supply and drainage network, widening existing road lines and building new roads through the walled city. In 1864 and 1871, the fortifications were modified and two new gates—Prem Darwaza and Panchkuva Darwaza—

96 For a history of municipal government in Ahmedabad see Boman-Behram (1937) and Gillion (1968), especially Chapter 4, pp 105-153. Gillion’s account, although it is highly problematic for a number of reasons, provides important details on the history of municipal government in Ahmedabad.
were added to enable the flow of bodies and goods to the new train station in Kalupur. However, with the rapid expansion of the textile mills, problems of sanitation and overcrowding only became more acute. By the end of the century, the colonial administrators of Ahmedabad, like their contemporaries in the Egyptian city of Cairo, embarked on a project to reorganize and open up urban space in a manner that “conformed with prevailing medical and political theory” (Mitchell 1991:65).

One of the major factors haunting the restructuring of Ahmedabad was the specter of the Mutiny of 1857. After the Mutiny, the colonial state had used “punitive measures” to restructure the old neighborhoods of cities such as Lucknow and Delhi, destroying parts of them in order to facilitate surveillance and control of the population (Glover 2008:58). At the same time, however, colonial officials were anxious that interfering in traditional localities and quarters of Indian cities could lead to further resistance. In the Mutiny of 1857, Ahmedabad had remained on the periphery and important members of the city’s Hindu and Muslim elites, including the nagar sheth, had offered their wealth and services to the East India Company in suppressing the revolt. Even so, colonial officials were suspicious of the local Muslim population and sought to find ways to improve surveillance and control of the walled city. Thus from 1880 on, the colonial state began to devise and implement plans to restructure the walled city in order to

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97 Ahmedabad was not the only city to be reorganized in the 19th century by the colonial state. Lucknow, Lahore, and Delhi were also restructured by the colonial state. For an account of the urban restructuring of Lucknow see Veena Oldenburg’s The Making of Colonial Lucknow, 1856-1877 (1984); for Lahore see Glover’s Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City (2008).

98 Gillion observes that in 1857, the nagar sheth and 21 other merchants and bankers of the city provided funds to hire a guard of 400 Rajputs to police the city (1968: 113). In addition, he writes that in order to foreclose insurrection by local Muslims, the East India Company recruited 2000 of them into an auxiliary force (113). Another notable supporter of the British during the mutiny was Bechardas Ambaidas, a patidar, who founded the Bechardas Spinning and Weaving Mill in 1867. Before he started the textile mill, Bechardas had worked in the East India Company army. He had also been selected as member of the Municipal Commission; and during the 1857 Mutiny, had helped with the suppression of the rebellion.
address the problems of overcrowding and hygiene by “opening it up” and making it “more amenable to surveillance” (Raychaudhuri 1997:60).

In the early stages, the reorganization of the city focused on improving sanitation; it also focused on categorizing and fixing space inside the walled city, including individual *pols*, as either public or private. An equally important component of the reorganization was the construction of new streets and the widening and improvement of existing road lines so that enclosed parts of the walled city could be more readily accessible. According to Raychaudhuri, colonial officials turned to the city surveys that had been conducted in 1868 and 1882 in order to distinguish private from public property (1997:61). One of the problems with these new classificatory schemes was that traditional practices connected to the use of property and conceptions of space inside the *pol* were far too complex to be captured by distinctions such as public versus private property. Nevertheless, under the new system introduced by the colonial state, all space inside the *pol* was carved up into discrete plots of land or survey numbers; and if a house stood on a particular survey number, then that house and the land underneath it were classified as private property; in contrast, a vacant lot was classified as public property. This technique allowed the state to designate any vacant space or passageway between two adjacent lots as public property. It classified such a space as either a public street (if the owners were different) or a private street (if the owner was the same person). This classificatory scheme was bolstered by laws, such as the Land Acquisition Act; and it was used to take possession of contiguous pieces of land inside the walled city, which enabled the construction of continuous and straight road lines within it. One effect of these interventions was that structures such as the *otla*, which the author Jayanti Dalal had placed at the center of social life in the *pols*, could now be more easily classified as encroachments onto public property. As discussed earlier, this was
possible because the *otla* occupied the space in the front of the house and usually protruded out a few feet from the main entrance. These interventions by the colonial government into the *pols* enabled the construction of several new roads in the walled city area such as Jordan Road (in Dariapur), Oliphant Road which connected Ellis Bridge to Astodia gate (now known as Astodia Road, discussed in the next section) and Richey Road (now known as Gandhi Road). Colonial interventions in the *pols* and attempts to raise taxes to pay for these programs of restructuring generated significant opposition by residents—opposition that was mobilized by a new generation of politicians and business elites who wanted to establish their hegemony over the city. In addition, as I show in the final section of this chapter, these colonial era laws and practices were later to be used by municipal governments as precedents to justify urban reorganization programs in the present.

After these initial efforts, the colonial state began to develop more comprehensive and systematic proposals in the form of new town planning schemes designed to modernize Ahmedabad during the first two decades of the twentieth century. In accordance with these plans, the walled city and land in its immediate surroundings to the east and on the western banks of the Sabarmati River were incorporated into municipal limits. Given that most of this land outside the walled city was classified as agricultural, laws were introduced to facilitate the process of converting it to non-agricultural uses and for developing it in the framework of modern town planning principles. In addition, the government introduced new regulations mandating that from now on space in the entire city (the new areas and the walled city) had to be organized and developed in conformity with zoning regulations and guidelines.

From the nineteenth century onwards, Ahmedabad’s elites played a crucial role in stabilizing colonial rule as subordinate partners in municipal institutions. According to Gillion
(1968) and Raychaudhuri (2001), in 1910 when the colonial state announced new plans to reorganize the city, Ahmedabad’s elites (including some members of the Municipal Board) were divided into two broad camps: those that supported restructuring the city and those who were invested in the traditional spatial order of the walled city. \(^{99}\) In 1910, the government dismissed the Municipal Board and replaced it with a Committee of Management that began to push through the restructuring of the city’s spaces. The following year, the municipal limits of the city were substantially extended by the colonial state to encompass areas outside the walled city such as Gomtipur, Rajpur-Hirpur, Asarwa, Rakhial, and Behrampur where the textile mills and working class chawls (quarters) were located, and Shahibaug (excluding the military cantonment) and Ellis Bridge, where the industrial elite and new professional class were building homes. The inclusion of these areas was justified on grounds of regulating construction (which was deemed to use “insanitary methods”) and ensuring public health (Raychaudhuri 1997:70).

To pay for the cost of reorganization, the colonial government increased the water tax and residential water connection fees in 1911 and then followed it up with a house tax and octroi in 1914. By 1913, the combination of interventions to reorganize the city and tax increases resulted in protests in the form of meetings and petitions organized by a new generation of Ahmedabad’s elites; this included figures such as Kasturbhai Lalbhai and Ambalal Sarabhai

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\(^{99}\) As I noted earlier, participation of local elites in municipal affairs had been encouraged from the beginning by the British in order to secure their control over the city. The first such effort was in the form of the Town Wall Committee. These arrangements were institutionalized after the 1857 Mutiny, when the colonial state began to incorporate native elites into structures of rule in order to forestall resistance. In 1856, the wall committee was replaced by the Municipal Commission and in 1873, after Ahmedabad was constituted as a Municipality, the Commission was replaced by a Municipal Board comprised of official members and non-official (i.e., selected native members). From 1883 onwards, the non-official members were elected by limited franchises. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, local elites (including those who were members of the board) were split over restructuring. Amongst those who favored it were Ranchoddal Chottalal (the nagar brahman founder of the first textile mill) and Raman Nikkanth and L.M. Wadia (two Anglicized professionals). Opponents of the government’s scheme were a disparate group that included the nagar sheth, Becharda Ambaidas Lashkari (the patidar, ex-soldier, who had fought on the side of the British during the 1857 Mutiny and then founded the second textile mill in Ahmedabad), and the Padshahi Diwan Mirza Nawab Ali, amongst others. See Gillion (1968:120–142).
The prominence and authority of some of these individuals, especially the politicians amongst them, had been aided by the limited franchise introduced in 1883 to elect representatives to the Municipal Board. In the past, the limited franchise and the practice of appointing select notables from upper caste communities had served the colonial state well in containing resistance to its policies. Like the older elites, this new generation of professionals and industrialists were also from upper caste communities and were beneficiaries of the colonial political economy. However, unlike their predecessors, they were united by their opposition to colonial policies including the policy of restructuring the walled city; furthermore under the leadership of figures such as Sardar Patel, Gulzarilal Nanda, Shankerlal Banker and Bhulabhai Desai, they had organized an oppositional alliance that included new business elites and middle classes and the leaders of the upper caste pols. By tapping into the accumulated grievances of these constituencies, they were able to generate support for protests against the plans to restructure the city and for their campaign to gain control over municipal government. Due to the protests, in 1915 the colonial authorities disbanded the Committee on Management and the Municipal board was reconstituted. A significant number of these new local politicians were elected to the Board and two years later, Sardar Patel himself was elected.

The contests over the implementation of these new town planning schemes coincided with the arrival of Gandhi in Ahmedabad who established his satyagraha ashram at Kochrab, in

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100 On Patel’s life and early career in city politics, see the valuable books by Narhari Parikh (1978) and Devavrat Pathak (1980); and on the life of Kasturbhai Lalbhai, see Dwijendranath Tripathi’s Dynamics of a Tradition: Kasturbhai Lalbhai and his Entrepreneurship (1981).
Gandhi’s arrival in the city marked a dramatic shift in the political and cultural life of the city on multiple levels. By the end of the decade, most of the new elites had joined the Congress and were actively engaged in key organizing political campaigns initiated at the ashram. Patel had emerged as a powerful and trusted political organizer of the nationalist movement and would go on to play a central role in the Bardoli and Dandi satyagrahas. In the city, Gandhi and Patel forged an alliance between disparate and often conflicting groups in order to establish the political and cultural hegemony of the nationalist movement. Initially, the political strength of the nationalist movement rested on the alliance between industrialists, the powerful merchant and bankers’ mahajans, and the leaders of upper caste communities in the pols of the walled city that had been put together by Patel. With the establishment of the Textile Labour Association in 1920, the nationalist movement began the process of disciplining and incorporating the textile mill workers of Ahmedabad into this alliance and managed to establish itself as the sole mediator between the new business elites and an increasingly militant working class. More importantly for our purposes, by the time the government introduced new and comprehensive plans to reorganize the city in 1920, the nationalist movement had been in control of the municipal government for a year and was in a far stronger position to challenge the moral and political authority of the colonial state in Ahmedabad.

101 After his arrival in Ahmedabad, Gandhi established the satyagraha ashram at Kochrab (in Paldi) in 1915. At that time, Kochrab was a village on the western Banks of the Sabarmati and the area had just been incorporated into the municipal jurisdiction of the city. Gandhi’s ashram was eventually shifted to its current location on the banks of the river. Today, Kochrab is part of the neighborhood of Paldi, the neighborhood where Justice Divecha lived. Gandhi and Patel were the principal architects for securing the nationalist movement’s hegemony over Ahmedabad’s politics by building institutions such as the Gujarat Vidyapith and the Majoor Mahajan (Textile Laborers Association) that incorporated the city’s diverse communities into the nationalist struggle. For a detailed history of the rise of nationalist elites in city politics, see Gillion (1968) and Raychaudhuri (1997; 2001). Patel also served as mayor of Ahmedabad. On Patel’s seminal role in Ahmedabad’s politics, see Devavrat Pathak’s Sardar Vallabhai Patel: From Civic to National Leadership (1980).

102 This is not to imply that there were no tensions between workers and the nationalist politicians. On the Textile Labor Association, see Sujata Patel (1987) and Jan Breman (2004).
One of the central and most contentious issues in the colonial state’s plans to reorganize the city was the status of the fortifications that had been built by the Sultanate. Earlier, I mentioned that after the East India Company took control of Ahmedabad, the reconstruction of the wall was the first major project undertaken by the colonial state. Now, in the twentieth century, the existence of the wall itself had become the main object of contention between residents of the city who viewed it as part of their urban tradition, nationalist elites who claimed to defend tradition, and the colonial state. Colonial officials were convinced that the fortifications were the main reason for congestion and for the prevalence of disease and malignancy in the walled city. In 1915, the government in Bombay had approved the Town Planning Act in order to address the problems of overcrowding and public health in Ahmedabad and to provide the government with a legal and regulatory framework to carry out the reorganization of the city through the implementation of new town planning schemes. The Act included new zoning laws that were used to regulate the use of land by classifying it as either commercial or residential and attributing higher value to commercial property. It also set limits on allowable population densities in any given area and gave considerable latitude to municipal governments to appropriate land for “public” purposes and encourage conversion of agricultural lands into planned urban developments, or what came to be known as town planning schemes. In a society where the boundaries between commerce and domestic life were porous, the Town Planning Act was also meant to create boundaries and spaces that could be more readily policed by the colonial state.

That same year, the colonial state sponsored the Scottish urban planner Patrick Geddes to visit Ahmedabad (and five other cities in Bombay Presidency) to suggest ways of improving
conditions in the city. The report that Geddess produced on Ahmedabad was indicative of what Tim Mitchell has described as a “particularly European concern with rendering things up to be viewed” (Mitchell 1991:2). After acknowledging that “of the squalor of the industrial age, Ahmedabad was one of the ruder examples,” Geddes recommended that the government conduct a comprehensive survey of the city and display its findings in a museum in order generate support amongst residents before proceeding with the reorganization of the city (Geddes 1984 [1915]:76–86). Geddes cautioned against a radical reorganization of the city, and especially of the walled city. Instead, he suggested that the government deal with the problems of industrialization by carefully implementing town planning schemes in the empty spaces of the walled city and on land in the immediate surroundings. He also argued for the selective conservation of Ahmedabad’s medieval architecture. According to Geddes, the medieval fortifications were one of the unique features of Ahmedabad and he urged the government to find a balance between preserving the wall and the need to reduce crowding and improve light and ventilation in the city. In particular, Geddess wanted to preserve the intricately carved gates that adorned the walls. Preserving the gates and the remnants of the wall, he argued, would also have the benefit of opening up spaces near some of the medieval buildings and would allow for the proper display of mosques such as Rani Sabrai’s mosque (discussed below) that stood in close proximity to the wall and were now surrounded by crowded quarters (Geddes [1915] 1984). According to Geddes, his approach would have the benefit of maintaining historical continuity with the social and architectural traditions of Ahmedabad while strengthening bonds

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103 For details of Geddes’ recommendations on the six towns, see his Reports on the Re-planning of Six towns in the Bombay Presidency, 1915 (Geddes 1965 [1915]). The other five towns were Thana, Bandra, Surat, Nadiad, and Baroda. Geddes was also consulted on the reorganization of Madras (now Chennai), Dacca and Lucknow.

104 There were twelve gates at the time when Geddes visited Ahmedabad. However, two of them—Prem Darwaza and Panchkuva Darwaza—were built in the mid-nineteenth century to improve access to the railway station in Kalupur.
between people and their city by instilling a sense of awe and pride for the city amongst residents. In addition, partially removing the wall would open up the city and organically (re)connect it to the surrounding countryside.

Of course by the time Geddes prepared his report, the continuity of the lived traditions and of the aesthetic and architectural practices in Ahmedabad had already been disrupted by the project to modernize the city. These disruptions were not just limited to the reorganization of city spaces that I have already described; they also included the colonial state’s understanding and treatment of the city’s past. For example, the Bhadra citadel no longer enjoyed the exalted political status it had under the Sultans and their successor regimes, the Mughals and the Marathas. In every one of these precolonial regimes, the citadel had functioned as the political and symbolic center of the city; the place where the authority of the sovereign was displayed. By the time that Geddes was making his recommendations in the name of continuity and historical preservation, it had been reclassified as a public space. In much the same way that the reorganization of the walled city made it available for inscription with the colonial state’s vision of modernity, the architecture of the Sultanate was likewise inscribed with an anachronistic vision of Islam and its local traditions. Take the case of the Muhafiz Khan mosque, which was repaired by the Public Works Department in the late nineteenth century at the same time that the pols were being re-surveyed and opened up. Khan, who was a notable in the court of Sultan Muhammad Begada, had risen from the rank of faujdar of Ahmedabad to wazir. Like many other men of status of his time, he had commissioned the mosque as an expression of his piety. The mosque, located near the Delhi gate in the walled city, is decorated with intricately carved stone minarets, windows, screens and stone panels on interior balconies. It is also reported to have had a finial comprising of a brass plate with carvings of a pipal leaf or a pipal tree (ficus
Religiosa or the Bodhi tree). Representations of the pipal also make an appearance in the famous screens of the Sidi Saiyyad mosque (discussed later) and in carvings in other mosques in Gujarat. In the precolonial era, it appears that multiple religious traditions in Gujarat used to adorn religious sites with the pipal as a way of representing and celebrating the divine. However, in the late nineteenth century, the Public Works Department replaced the original finial. James Burgess, the director-general of the Archeological Survey, upon seeing the repair work that had been done on the Muhafiz Khan’s mosque remarked:

The finial was originally a brass plate in the form of the pipal leaf; but when the Public Works department, under Major Cole’s direction carried out the repairs and restoration of the mosque, about twenty year ago, a metal crescent was supposed to be the proper symbol—thus forgetting altogether that at the date then ascribed to the mosque, the crescent had hardly been used even by the Turks. For it is well known that it was not adopted by them till some time after the overthrow of the Byzantine empire……It had previously been the symbol of Byzantine sovereignty, and it was only after that adopted by the Turks, and generally spread over the countries held by them; but it is still unknown to the Muhammadans of India, except as a foreign ensign, unconnected in any way with their religion (Burgess 1905:80–81).

Burgess was, of course, being polemical when he claimed that the Muslims of India had no connection to the rest of the Islamic world. However, his emphasis on the specificity of the Islamic tradition in Gujarat (and India) was central to defining the architectural heritage of India in the late colonial period; a project that would influence the nature of Indian secularism in the postcolonial period.105 The question of Ahmedabad’s architectural heritage and the continuity of its traditions would, as I discuss below, also become central in the political contests to reorganize and modernize the city in the final two decades before independence.

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105 As Director-General, Burgess supervised the publication of the Archeological Survey of India (New Imperial Series), a twenty volume series that catalogued buildings and sites of architectural and historical importance; thus producing an encyclopedia that defined India’s architectural heritage.
A year after Geddes completed his tour of India (1916), A.E. Mirams, the Consulting Surveyor to the Government in Bombay presented the City Wall scheme to the government. The scheme was part of “a comprehensive plan” for reorganizing the walled city that included demolishing the fort wall and replacing it with a ring road, widening the road connecting Delhi Gate to Astodia Gate, building two new markets, acquiring some plots of land for buildings and creating open public space (Raychaudhuri 1997:80). The project would have entailed the displacement of a sizeable number of people from residential quarters that were located adjacent to the wall. In 1919, Mirams revised the scheme and included a proposal to construct Relief Road, a new artery to connect the Bhadra citadel area to the train station in Kalupur and Richey Road and to “open out the highly congested and insanitary areas in Kalupur and Shahpur wards,” both located inside the walled city and both with significant numbers of poor and working class residents (Ibid 1997:82). In 1920, when the government recommended to the Municipal Board that it implement the Relief Road and City Wall schemes, nationalist politicians led by Patel rejected the proposals. In part, their opposition was based on the fact that the construction of Relief Road would displace members of the Hindu upper caste communities that lived in the areas where the road was to be carved out and thus would antagonize the very constituency they had mobilized in order to secure their power. At the same time, the nationalist movement had begun a campaign to gain control of municipal schools as part of the broader non-cooperation movement; and implementing the reorganization plan would have undermined the fragile alliance that its own power depended upon.

The nationalist opposition to the reorganization plan forced the government to suspend the Municipal Board in 1922 and replace it with a Committee on Management that was charged with pushing through the project (Spodek 2011). In 1923, after the Committee on Management
announced that it would implement the Relief Road and City Wall schemes, Patel and other politicians in the city organized a series of large-scale protests. Confronted with an impasse, the state organized fresh elections for the Municipal Board in 1924, which the nationalists won, and Patel returned as the president of the Municipal Board. The nationalist victory had been assured in part by the terms of the limited franchise that Patel had helped define during his previous term in office after the 1917 municipal elections. At that time, the colonial state had announced plans to broaden the scope of the limited franchise in order to promote greater autonomy in local government and to defuse support for the nationalist movement in urban centers in India. Patel and his colleagues, who were in control of the important subcommittees of the municipality in 1918, had taken advantage of this opening by ensuring that the franchise was extended, but only to their main constituents, “the property-holding, tax and rent-paying sections and the salaried middle classes” who would be eligible to vote in a newly created general ward and also in their respective local wards (Raychaudhuri 2001:692). In other words, the electoral system that the nationalist elites designed awarded middle class and upper caste Hindus, who constituted the majority of the propertied and rent-paying class, the right to vote twice; and in the 1924 elections, the nationalists gained control of the municipality.106

The nationalist elite’s electoral success did not mean that their claims to represent the population went uncontested. In fact, their electoral triumph in 1924 masked tensions between various constituents of the Indian nationalist movement in Ahmedabad and especially between the business elites and an increasingly militant working class of the city. Since the late nineteenth century, the demand for labor in the textile mills had resulted in a rapid increase in the

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106 According to Raychaudhuri, the gerrymandering of the electoral wards was crucial because a significant number of the salaried employed in the mills and the railways were, like Patel, also patidars. Of the 60 seats (48 elected and 12 nominated), Congress won 34 of 38 non-Muslim seats. In addition, 6 out of 10 Muslim councilors who were elected had pledged their support to the Congress.
population of Ahmedabad. By the 1920s when the elites took control of the municipal government and began to reorganize the city, mill workers and their dependents, almost all of whom belonged to subaltern castes, made up about half of the city’s population. Most of the workers were new migrants from villages and settlements in the vicinity of Ahmedabad and had been recruited by *mukkadans* (jobbers) to work in the mills. In the city, they formed a diverse and heterogeneous community made up of Hindu and Muslim castes such as the *vankars*, *vaghris*, *dheds*, *kanbis* (Patidars), *chippaa*, *kolis*, *chamars*, and *julahas*, amongst others (Spodek 2011:55). Muslim castes accounted for a significant proportion of this working-class population; along with the some of the *koli*, they were employed in the better paying positions as weavers, while the *vahgris* and *dheds* were engaged in lower paying jobs as spinners and framers. In the city, members of these diverse working class communities lived in proximity to each other in *chawls* and tenements located in the eastern periphery of the walled city or in the suburbs to the east of the fort walls (e.g., Saraspur, Gomtipur, Asarwa). By all accounts, living conditions in these working class neighborhoods were abysmal and working conditions in the mills oppressive (Gillion 1968; Breman 2004; Basu 1996). The *mukkadams* (jobbers) continued to exercise control over the workers because of their role as mediators between mill owners and laborers and as enforcers of discipline in the workplace. In addition, *mukkadams* played a crucial role in the *chawls* and tenements, providing loans, guaranteeing access to housing and offering protection to individual workers. The combination of poor work and living conditions resulted in increasing labor militancy, which the nationalist elites under the leadership of Gandhi addressed by forming the *Majoor Mahajan Sangh* or the Textile Labor Association (TLA). The TLA, in keeping with Gandhian ideas of self-discipline and service, emphasized the virtues of moderation, discipline, and co-operation in weekly meetings of workers. In addition, the nationalist leadership
emphasized compromise and collaboration rather than confrontation with mill owners and committed the TLA to resolving disputes over work conditions and wages through arbitration rather than strikes. Although nationalist elites and colonial officials both recognized that the problems of the walled city, and especially the poor living conditions in the working class areas, were products of the unregulated expansion of the mill industry, ameliorating these conditions remained peripheral to the reorganization plans that were prioritized by the nationalist movement after its electoral triumph in 1924. Many of the tensions between workers and the nationalist elites came to the fore in the wake of the floods of 1927, when the relief committee led by Patel denied aid to the working class communities whose chawls and tenements had been devastated. In fact, it can be argued that just as the nationalist movement’s electoral success depended on the exclusion and subordination of the Hindu and Muslim working class population, its vision of urban modernity was conditioned on relegating these same groups to the spatial margins of Ahmedabad.

After establishing their dominance in the municipality, the nationalist elites began the process of reorganizing Ahmedabad in a manner that conformed to their vision of Indian modernity. Like colonial officials, the nationalist elites celebrated the virtues of modern town planning and perceived the walled city as a symptomatic of a society attached to traditional ways of life, a threat to public health (Raychaudhuri 1997:116). Although there were significant differences between the nationalist and colonial visions of urban modernity in Ahmedabad, when it came to articulating their vision of a reorganized city, the nationalist elites continued to rely on the regulatory framework and town planning schemes that had been first conceived by the colonial state. For example, the Town Planning Act of 1915 continued to provide the

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107 The leadership of the TLA was mainly drawn from elite castes and included Anasuyaben Sarabhai, Gulzarilal Nanda, Shankerlal Banker, Ambalal Triveda. Anasuyaben Sarabhai (sister of the industrialist Ambalal) was appointed president of the union for life.
administrative and legal framework for the nationalist elite’s plans to extend the municipal boundaries to areas on the western banks of the Sabarmati River and land to the east of the walled city. In order to successfully expand the municipal boundaries and develop the outlying areas as well as reorganize the walled city, the nationalist elites also recognized that they would have to implement the City Wall and Relief Road schemes. In 1924, Mirams was asked by Patel and his cohort of political leaders to prepare a revised City Wall scheme to replace the fortifications with a ring road. One of the main changes in Mirams’ revised proposal was an amendment to the Town Planning Act that would minimize the number of private properties to be acquired and the number of poor and working class families to be displaced to make way for the road. In 1926, the municipal board approved the Ellis Bridge town planning scheme to begin developing areas such as Ashram Road, Ellis Bridge, Usmanpura, Navrangpura, and Paldi, on the western banks of the river.

By the time these schemes were implemented, the political conditions in Ahmedabad had undergone significant transformations. The leading members of the industrial class such as Kasturbhai Lalbhai, Ambalal Sarabhai, and Mangaldas Girdhardas were firmly allied with the nationalist movement and had begun to establish a range of new civic and educational institutions on the western banks of the Sabarmati River. In addition, Gandhi’s satyagraha ashram, which was previously located at Kochrab (in Paldi) had been relocated to its current home on the banks of the Sabarmati River. With the establishment of the Gujarat Vidyapeeth (university) and other institutions of higher learning and the development of Ashram road as a new commercial artery over the next two decades, the western banks of the Sabarmati displaced the walled city as the center for political and cultural life in Ahmedabad. By 1942, the medieval
fortifications which had been the most visible symbol of Muslim power and of Ahmedabad’s traditional urbanity had been removed.

The project of modernizing Ahmedabad also overlapped with shifts in the political arena that threatened the Congress’ dominance of city politics. With the extension of the franchise to a broader cross-section of Indian society and the formalization of separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims by the Government of India Act in 1935, the political terrain was dramatically altered. In Ahmedabad, the nationalist elites had to contend with other political movements for the allegiance of residents. Many upper caste Hindus who were the Congress’ main supporters were increasingly attracted to the religious nationalist politics of groups such as the RSS, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj; while the working class communities were targeted by the leftist Mill Kamdar Union (Valiani 2011:108–109). In addition to the effects of the Act, several decisions by the nationalist elites aliened the city’s heterogeneous and diverse Muslim population and created the conditions for the Muslim League to more effectively organize them under the rubric of a shared religious identity. In the previous section, I had noted that Ahmedabad’s Muslim communities were divided by caste, linguistic, class, and sectarian affiliations. For much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the influence of north-India centered revivalist movements had been limited to a small number of Muslims—mainly Syeds and Shaikhs—of Ahmedabad. Indeed, until the late 1920s, caste and sectarian affiliations remained the primary criteria that shaped the religious practices and political activism of the majority of the city’s Muslim communities. However, these differences were elided in colonial discourse which characterized all Muslims as united by a common set of beliefs and treated them as a homogenous and unified political and religious community. This view was

108 Due their lineage, the Syeds and Shaikhs had longstanding ties to sufi networks that straddled all of north India and were members of the religious and political elite in the pre-colonial era.
then often reinforced by the state’s attempts to regulate the religious affairs of city’s diverse communities.  

The heterogeneity of Ahmedabad’s Muslim communities and the fact that they did not constitute a unified political body did not mean that relations between nationalist elites led by Patel and these communities were free of tensions. In the early twentieth century, the various Muslim castes and communities accounted for about twenty per cent of the population of the city and made up a large section of the labor force in the textile mills. Given their numerical strength, nationalist leaders such as Patel had perceived Muslims as a potential threat to their hegemonic aspirations. This had more to do with how the Muslim figured in the nationalist imagination and with the sedimentation of ideas of Hindu and Muslim as distinct cultural and political communities. Nationalist discourse and practice, for example, did not acknowledge the plurality of Muslim groups in the city and instead treated all of them as a culturally and politically homogenous mass. In the 1910s and 1920s, when they launched their campaign to take control of local government institutions, the nationalist elites forged alliances with the religious notables, many of whom were descendants of important Sufi lineages of Syeds and Shaikhs, and treated them as representatives of all Muslims of Ahmedabad (Raychaudhuri 2001:196). By the 1930s, however, internal debates within various Muslim groups over proper

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109 The Aga Khan case which I discussed in the previous chapter is exemplary of colonial understandings of religion in India. Similar views of Islam also informed the legal resolution of disputes over the religious status of the dargah of Pir Muhammad Shah in the 1920s and 1930s. Colonial officials had classified the dargah as a waqf (religious endowment) and placed it under the jurisdiction of the local waqf board that was dominated by Sunni Syeds and Shaikhs. However, the Sunni Bohras of Ahmedabad and Kadi (a village near the city) who were the main followers of Muhammad Shah insisted that the site was not a waqf, but a property of their caste. On this dispute, see Raychaudhuri (1997:194).

110 According to the 1911 censuses, 20.9% of the population of Ahmedabad was Muslim. In 1921, the figure was 19.6% (Raychaudhuri 1997:196).
religious practice combined with the impact of colonial law and the influence of the Islamic Revival had brought about a shift in conceptions of Muslim identity and ideas of community.\textsuperscript{111}

During this period, the fragile alliance between nationalist elites and the city’s numerous Muslim communities began to unravel over questions of language education in municipal schools. From the moment that nationalists gained control over municipal institutions in the 1920s, they promoted Gujarati as the language of instruction in order to cultivate a nationalist subjectivity. In 1940, Hindustani in the Devanagari script was added to the curriculum of public schools and the singing of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhya’s \textit{Vande Mataram} was mandated by the municipal government. Elite Muslims that were allied with the Congress began to perceive these changes as a threat to their religious identity and place within the community. This was especially true of a section of elite Muslims, mainly Syeds\textsuperscript{112} and Shaikhs, but also some Bohras, who had begun to advocate for religious reform and for Urdu, which they viewed as a sign of Muslim-ness.\textsuperscript{113} They argued that the privileging of the \textit{nagari} script was part of a broader anti-Muslim policy.

Tensions between the Congress leadership and Muslim communities in the city were further aggravated by the unequal nature of urban reorganization programs. Inside the walled city, the bulk of the investments in infrastructural improvement were concentrated in areas such

\textsuperscript{111} On the Islamic revival in India see (Metcalf 1982) and for an early account on the impact of the Islamic revival amongst Gujarati Muslims see Satish Misra’s \textit{Muslim Communities in Gujarat} (1964:92–125).

\textsuperscript{112} Of the elites the Syeds enjoyed a special status because they claimed descent from the Prophet Mohammed and because their ancestors (the Bukhari Syeds) had played a central role in the establishment of the Sultanate. By the early twentieth century, many Syed and Shaikh families were at the forefront of the Islamic revival in Gujarat and became proponents of Urdu.

\textsuperscript{113} Most Gujarati Muslim communities, like other Muslims outside of north India, did not speak Urdu. This was especially true of the Bohras and Khojas amongst the elites. However, by the early twentieth century, several prominent Bohra families that had migrated or were engaged in trade with other regions of India adopted Urdu in order to find acceptance amongst the \textit{ashraf} (elite) Muslim communities of north India. On this, see Karlitzky (2002:187–207).
as Khadia, Manek Chowk, Panch Kuva, Richey Road, where upper caste Hindus resided or where they had significant business interests. In contrast to this, neighborhoods immediately to the south and the east of the walled city such as Raipur, Hirpur, Saraspur, Kalupur, Gomtipur, where poor and working class Muslims were concentrated were neglected. Indeed with the establishment of the satyagraha ashram and the Gujarat Vidyapeeth by Gandhi, the political and cultural center of the city shifted to the western banks of the Sabarmati River, and the development of areas on the western banks of the Sabarmati River became the main priority of nationalist elites. The Ellis Bridge town planning scheme became the centerpiece of the nationalist vision of urban modernity and its success was deemed to be crucial to securing the movement’s political and cultural preeminence in the city. By the 1930s, several new cooperative housing societies inhabited by upper caste Hindus had been built and several new institutions had been established or were in the planning stages in the Ellis Bridge area.\footnote{For example, the Gujarat College’s new campus was in the Ellis Bridge area. The Ahmedabad Education Society which was founded by the industrialist Kasturbhai Lalbhai and the nationalist politician G.V. Mavlankar had also proposed to establish new colleges in the area.}

Echoing colonial discourses of hygiene and order, the municipal government declared the Pir Kamal dargah and the adjoining cemetery which were located near Ellis Bridge as “congested” and “insanitary” areas and ordered their demolition (Raychaudhuri 2001:202). The shrine was revered by a broad cross section of Muslims in Ahmedabad and the demolition order resulted in widespread protests by the city’s Muslims. By this time, the leading members of the city’s industrialist class such as Kasturbhai Lalbhai, Ambalal Sarabhai, Mangaldas Girdhardas and others were firmly allied with the nationalist movement and were all invested in developing the western areas of the city. With the development of Ashram Road as a new commercial artery and the establishment of a range of educational and civic institutions on the western banks of the
Sabarmati River over the course of the next two decades, the walled city was firmly displaced as the cultural and political center of Ahmedabad.

The crisis over the Pir Kamal dargah had occurred just three years after the TLA had conceded to the demand for wage cuts by the mill owners. In 1929, after more than a decade of labor militancy, the TLA had secured higher wages for mill workers through a negotiated settlement. Five years later, owners represented by the Ahmedabad Mill Owners Association, claimed that because of the economic recession they needed to “rationalize production procedures” and cut wages by 20 per cent (Spodek 2011:106). These demands resulted in several wildcat strikes and work stoppages. The TLA, having made compromise a virtue, submitted to arbitration and after prolonged negotiations involving Gandhi, signed the Delhi Agreement in January 1935. The settlement required the workers to accept a 6.5 per cent reduction in wages and reduced work hours from sixty to forty four. The latter was meant to comply with new laws. The agreement had effectively wiped out the gains that had been made by labor in 1929. However, the wage reductions were unevenly distributed and were particularly detrimental to the weavers, an occupation that was practically monopolized by Muslims. Because the TLA was perceived as being identical with the Congress, many of the Muslim weavers shifted their allegiance to the Communist movement’s Mill Kamdar Union.115 These accumulated grievances also transformed Ahmedabad into a fertile territory for the Muslim League’s religious nationalist politics. From 1937 onwards, the League organized several public meetings and events where speakers attacked the Congress as a communal and anti-Muslim organization. The entire campaign was designed to persuade the city’s Muslims that the League alone could safeguard their rights. Because of the intense competition between the Congress and

the Muslim League and the unequal distribution of the benefits of modernization of Ahmedabad, relations between the city’s Muslims and Hindus were increasingly marked by suspicion and hostility.

In April 1941, rumors that a group of Sikhs had organized a procession during which they would play music outside the Jama Masjid triggered rioting and violence that lasted for almost a month.116 By the end of the first day, over 20 individuals were killed and more than 200 injured. Inside the walled city, the violence was particularly concentrated in Khadia, Panch Kuva, Jamalpur, Shahpur, Gandhi and Richey Roads, and Manek Chowk. The violence also engulfed areas such as Saraspur, Rakhial, and Raipur, where the poor and working class communities lived. During the riots, residents were safe only in those areas where their co-religionists were the numerical majority. There were reports that Hindus were fleeing the Muslim-dominated locality of Jamalpur, while Muslims were abandoning their homes in Hindu-dominated areas.117

The distribution of the violence suggests that the politics of space and modernization in the city and the larger problem of religious nationalist mobilization could no longer be disentangled from each other. Areas such as Raipur, Saraspur and Rakhial (and indeed parts of Jamalpur and Shahpur) had received few of the benefits of the modernization projects initiated

116 From 1937 onwards, both the Congress and Muslim League organized numerous mass meetings in Ahmedabad and in other towns and cities of Gujarat in order to gain the support of Muslims. In September 1937, Nehru gave a speech at a gathering of about 15000 people organized by Muslim organizations. Organizations affiliated with the Congress also organized public meetings that were attended by a large number of Muslims. To counter these gatherings, the League organized meetings and assemblies in Ahmedabad and other towns and cities of Gujarat. Amongst the prominent figures in the local organization of the League were I.I. Chundrigar, who eventually served as the sixth Prime Minister of Pakistan; Ghulam Haider Momin, and Safdar Hussein Bukhari. The League’s campaign included a meeting attended by some 35000 people in Ahmedabad that was addressed by Jinnah. In addition to meetings and rallies, the Congress launched a Mass Contact campaign to reach out to Muslims and counter the growing presence of the League. Despite its mobilizing efforts the Muslim League did not succeed in securing the support of Ahmedabad’s Muslims in the 1941 Municipal elections. Of the 52 seats that were contested, the Congress and allies won all but one. For a recent analysis of the competition between the League and the Congress and the subsequent violence, see Chapter 3 of Valiani (2011). See also Raychaudhuri (1997), pp. 210-217. On the 1941 riots see Raychaudhuri (1997), Basu (1996) and Valiani (2011).

117 See Aparna Basu (Basu 1996); Valiani (2011:115); and Raychaudhuri (Raychaudhuri 1997:218)
by the Congress-dominated municipal government. The case of Raipur, a poor neighborhood located next to Khadia, is particularly interesting. Unlike Khadia, where a significant numbers of Hindu, Jain and Bohra merchants lived, Raipur had been neglected in the city development and improvement schemes initiated by the nationalist elites. According to the Gazetteer, at one time the majority of the residents of Khadia had been Muslims. However, in the nineteenth century, rich Jain and Vaishnava Vania merchants as well as civil servants and petty traders moved in to Khadia and displaced almost all the Muslims, except Bohra merchants, to the Raipur area. By the early 1920s, it had emerged as the stronghold of the nationalist elites of Ahmedabad and many of its most prominent residents were important figures in the political and economic elite of the city. During the 1941 riots, there were reports of intense violence between residents of the two localities. Similarly, large parts of Jamalpur, another area bordering Khadia, had been developed after the introduction of a new town planning scheme in the 1918 and housed poor and working class Muslims. The distribution of violence, in other words, suggests that the vision of urban modernity that was articulated by the colonial state and nationalist elites created not only three urban cores—the walled city, the working class areas of the east, and the elite city on the western banks of the Sabarmati River—that were differently valued and developed. The modernization of Ahmedabad in the early twentieth century also created the conditions for the production of a city that would be segregated on the basis of religion.

This legacy of unequal access and segregation, I would argue, continues to have important implications for present-day Ahmedabad; it also continues to echo in striking ways with contemporary urban planning and heritage preservation practices. There are of course significant differences between the reorganization of the city that took place in the colonial period and now. For one, the current reorganization projects are driven by neo-liberal priorities;
in addition the constituencies driving and resisting the reorganization of the city are very different. If in the colonial period the architecture of the city was seen as representing a state project which Britain inherited, today it is seen as a symbol of secular culture by Hindu nationalists as well as heritage conservationists. Nevertheless, the continuities and resonances between colonial, nationalist and neoliberal conceptions of the city are also striking. Indeed, Ahmedabad’s walled city is still viewed as the site of social disorder and malignance and continues to be under-resourced in comparison with other more “modern” parts of the city. Although the walled city areas contain all sorts of communities, most Hindu residents living outside of the walled city describe it as dangerous and assume that it is exclusively inhabited by Muslims. Furthermore, as in the past, the Muslims who live in the old city, their relationships and affective attachments to these spaces continue to be marginalized in the name of progress and urban improvement. In the third and final section that follows, I will illustrate these continuities through two examples of infrastructural improvement for the purposes of heritage preservation; and I will conclude with a brief reflection on the life of an object that has been used as a symbol of the religious diversity of Ahmedabad, but both elides and embodies the increasing marginalization of the city’s Muslims in contemporary Ahmedabad.

**Heritage in the Age of Hindu Nationalism:**

Unlike the first wave of urban planning after independence which sought, at least in theory, to make city spaces accessible to a broad cross section of the population, the current restructuring projects in Indian cities conform to the reigning neoliberal principles of good governance and economic efficiency. Urban renewal programs in contemporary India have almost exclusively

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118 The current reorganization of Ahmedabad is partially financed by the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNURM), a central government initiative to upgrade the infrastructure of all Indian cities. In the history of urban
focused on reorganizing public spaces and improving the infrastructure in ways that privilege the needs of elite and middle class citizens who reside in gated communities and suburban enclaves. In addition, these programs have coincided with organized campaigns to preserve the “architectural and cultural heritage of the historic city, whether precolonial or colonial” (Chatterjee 2004:131). Indeed, the restructuring of Ahmedabad that I encountered during my fieldwork, a restructuring that is still in progress, shared these characteristics with other Indian cities. Much of the city was being torn up in order to construct and install new sewage and storm water drains, new water supply lines, new and wider roads and overpasses to make room for the ever increasing number of privately owned vehicles and a new mass transit system. Several of the projects, such as the restoration of Kankaria Lake and the proposed reorganization of the Bhadra citadel area, were aimed at reclaiming public space in order to carve out areas conducive to middle class leisure and consumption. At the same time, these programs act as a vehicle for the Hindu nationalist movement to inscribe its vision of Ahmedabad as the cultural and political center of the state and as the symbol of Asmita, or Gujarati regional pride, which I discuss in the last two chapters of the dissertation. For example, the renovation of Kankaria Lake also included the installation of a large sandstone mural representing Gujarat’s history from ancient times to the present. The centerpiece of the project to remake the city, however, is the plan to convert the banks of the Sabarmati River into a public space endowed with parks, museums and other types

planning in India, the JNURM marks a break with the past because it privileges middle class and elite lifeways at the expense of more inclusive city spaces.

119 Both the Kankaria Lake and Bhadra citadel were built by the Sultanate of Gujarat. The Kankaria Lake is a reservoir in the shape of a polygon with 34 sides located in the south eastern part of present-day Ahmedabad. It was completed in 1451 during the reign of Sultan Qub-ud-din Ahmad Shah II and has been repaired on several occasions. The most recent renovation, however, has transformed the area into a site of leisure that is accessible only to the paying visitor. The Bhadra citadel, as I discuss below, was the seat of power of the Sultanate and of other precolonial regimes that ruled over Gujarat. During my fieldwork, the Kankaria lake restoration was near completion, while the Bhadra citadel project was in the initial stages of planning.
of cultural institutions. This entire project hinges upon creating an illusion of the Sabarmati as a perennial river by filling a part of it with water siphoned from the Narmada River and endowing the city with a waterfront. In other words, the Hindu nationalist vision of urban modernity depends on linking the two most important symbols in its conception of Gujarati regionalism, the Narmada River and Ahmedabad, in order to create the illusion of Gujarat as a model of good governance and economic development and progress.

The restructuring of the city has also re-inscribed the partitioned spatial order of the city that emerged in the wake of serial episodes of Hindu nationalist violence against the city’s Muslims. Thus, many of the new infrastructural improvement projects at the time of my fieldwork were concentrated in the affluent areas of western Ahmedabad, where middle class and elite Hindus, almost all from upper caste communities reside; these urban improvement projects bypassed areas such as Juhapura, Mirzapur, Gomtipur, Saraspur, Shah Alam, where the poor, lower caste groups and the Muslim communities of the city are concentrated. In addition, several of the projects to reclaim public space (i.e., Kankaria Lake and Sabarmati Riverfront projects) and to open up parts of the historic walled city (Astodia Gate area, discussed later) resulted in the displacement of poor and working class Muslims.

Interestingly, and I would argue not coincidentally, these new infrastructural improvement projects have coincided with civil society initiatives to preserve the architectural heritage of the historic walled city, including privately owned houses in the pols, medieval

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120 The Sabarmati is a river with periodic flow during the monsoon season. However, the Hindu nationalist government has diverted water from the Narmada River in south Gujarat via a network of irrigation canals. In order to make way for the project, several thousand families who lived in the shanties on the river banks were expelled and forcibly relocated to neighborhoods in the periphery of the city. The majority of these residents were either members of subaltern Hindu or Muslim castes. On the riverfront project and its impact, see Renu Desai (2012:49–56; 2011).

121 The anthropologist Jan Breman has described this process as “ghetto formation.” On the segregated spaces of Ahmedabad and their relationship to Hindu nationalist violence see Nandy et al. (1997); Breman (1999; 2003); Ghassem-Fachandi (2012); and Thomas and Jaffrelot (2012).
temples, mosques and Sufi shrines. During my fieldwork, several NGOs and civil society groups had joined the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) in sponsoring an annual Heritage Festival and other public heritage events. At these events, the pols and medieval buildings of the city were held up as embodiments of a living urban tradition that was composite, syncretic, and tolerant, and the preservation of this heritage was valorized as a sign of a modern, cosmopolitan and culturally tolerant urbanity. At these events, however, there was a deafening silence about the contemporary marginalization and abysmal living conditions of the Muslim communities of the city. Nor was there any recognition of the relationship between violence and the politics of heritage preservation in the city; or more precisely, the only violence that was acknowledged was the Hindu nationalist destruction of Muslim shrines during episodes of violence, and not the original violence of the modern and modernizing state that enabled the production of the heritage.

In one of the more puzzling developments, the Hindu nationalist controlled Municipal Corporation (AMC) agreed to seek UNESCO designation of Ahmedabad as a “World Heritage City.” In the application that was eventually submitted to UNESCO in 2011, the AMC describes the morphology of the historic walled city of Ahmedabad as a “living historic cultural heritage (sic)” that was once “populated by a large merchant community in various community settlements following different religions (sic);” and added that “Ahmadabad’s multicultural communities lend a distinct character to its settlement patterns and its built environment which always had the religious institutions as its core around which the settlement patterns grew” (AMC 2011, italics added).122 By claiming that religion has always been the primary basis for organizing space and communities in Ahmedabad, the Hindu nationalist sponsored UNESCO

122 The application appears to have relied entirely on a 1980 monograph prepared by K.V. Soundar Rajan entitled Ahmadabad on behalf of the Archeological Survey of India.
application both rewrites the past of Ahmedabad and normalizes its practices of religious segregation in the present.

Heritage preservation became a priority after a fiscal crisis in the 1980s had compelled the Municipal Corporation to borrow money from the capital markets (Verma 2001). The decision to issue debt had been recommended by USAID, which was commissioned in 1997 to prepare another study on the walled city. In its report, USAID recommended preserving the architectural heritage, especially, the traditional pol houses of the walled city as a vehicle to promote heritage tourism and to make the walled city economically “sustainable.” The (re)monetization of the walled city, it was argued, would have the benefit of addressing Ahmedabad’s fiscal problems. It would also have the benefit of displacing the common perception of the walled city as a site of violence, delinquency and malignance with an image of it as a space of productivity and leisure (AMC & USAID 1997). Soon after USAID made its recommendations, the Municipal Corporation established a heritage cell; it also conducted a comprehensive survey to identify traditional houses in the pol that qualify as “heritage properties” in the walled city, and introduced regulations to govern construction activities and repair of these properties. In order to promote conservation of architectural heritage and tourism, the AMC secured aid from the French government in 2001 and announced a new policy to provide grants and loans at concessional rates to encourage conversion of pol houses into

123 The normalizing role of heritage preservation is apparent in the statements of Keshav Verma, who was the municipal commissioner that commissioned the study. In 2001, he claimed that adopting the USAID’s recommendations on heritage preservation has had a salutary effect: “People in the Walled City feel more integrated in the mainstream of the city. They are changing a 600-year-old city into a productive place. The city is much cleaner, tourism has grown, and epidemics have greatly decreased” (Verma 2001). Implicit in his formulations is the view of the walled city as a site of malignance, delinquency and violence, themes which strikingly echo colonial and nationalist discourses about the old city.

124 In 2001, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation published the results of its survey of heritage properties and also introduced new regulations governing construction activity in the walled city. See “Preliminary List of Heritage Buildings in The Walled City of Ahmedabad, 3 Vols” (AMC 2011).
hotels in order to attract “heritage tourists.” Most of the loans have been used to fund the conversion of old *havelis* in areas where upper caste Hindus reside. In the next section, I will further illustrate the many ironies and forms of violence that are constitutive of heritage preservation efforts in contemporary Ahmedabad through two examples that I encountered while conducting fieldwork.

**At the Queen’s Mosque:**

After spending one morning with a friend in the walled city, I took an auto-rickshaw to the Astodia *darwaja* (gate). During his visit to Ahmedabad in 1915, Patrick Geddes (mentioned earlier) admired the medieval fort walls whose monotony was broken by twelve gates, each with a unique design. He had recommended that the gates should be preserved not just for their magnificence and aesthetic value, but also to create the effect of historical and spatial continuity. Astodia gate is one of those twelve gates and it is located near Rani Sabrai’s mosque (also known as Rani Sipri’s mosque). I wanted to take more pictures of the mosque, which is made entirely out of red sandstone and is named after a queen who was married to one of the Sultan’s. The mosque, which was commissioned by Rani Sabrai, contains her tomb and was completed in 1514 (see Figures II.4 & II.5). Colonial writers described it as “the most exquisite gem at Ahmedabad, both in plan and detail,” exemplary of an Indo-Islamic style of architecture that is unique to Gujarat (Fergusson 1876:534). As we approached the gate, traffic on Astodia Road came to a standstill and the air was thick with dust. Tired of waiting in the rickshaw, I decided to walk to the mosque, which was to the west of the gate, hoping to find out what had happened.

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125 After the Municipal Corporation announced its new policies, several traditional *pol* houses have been converted into guest houses and heritage hotels. On the French government’s participation in the project, see “French Govt Aid for Heritage Conservation Project,” *Times of India*, November 29, 2001.
As I approached the mosque, I could see earth movers loading debris onto large trucks. The fronts of all of the buildings on the road had been demolished, and a very large number of people, mainly residents of the area, lined the street watching as earth movers and laborers filled trucks with debris under the supervision of numerous policemen wielding lathis (sticks).

In the courtyard outside the mosque, I noticed an elderly man sitting on a chair in front of a tent, talking animatedly while two policemen and several other younger men in civilian clothes listened respectfully. In Ahmedabad, such police tents usually signal a border area between a Hindu and Muslim area. On most days these tents are staffed by two or three policemen, who alternate between sipping hot, sweet tea (taken for free from area vendors) and states of repose. The atmosphere around the tents can become tense very quickly, especially when there are rumors or tensions between local Hindus and Muslims or when Hindu nationalist threaten to perpetrate violence. Astodia Road functions as the border separating Khadia, an exclusively Hindu area, from Chippaa vad (enclosure), which literally means the enclosure of the chippaa caste, a Muslim community whose occupation is wood-block printing. Until the early twentieth century, Khadia was a mixed area and some of Ahmedabad’s wealthier Jain, Hindu and Bohra Muslim merchant families lived there. In contrast, Chippaa vad was developed in the early twentieth century and is occupied exclusively by the chippaa community which was evicted as part of the modernization of the more desirable central areas of the walled city including Khadia. During previous episodes of Hindu nationalist violence, the road often became a site for pitched battles between Hindus and Muslim youth. However, on most afternoons and evenings, the road is busy with locals and visitors, Hindu and Muslim, who come to drink tea and eat the famous bhajjias (fritters) that area shops are renowned for.
On my previous visits to the area and to the mosque, I had spoken briefly to one of the young men now gathered with a group of residents by the piles of debris. When I recognized him, I walked over and introduced myself to the rest of the group. Aslambhai, the elderly man I had seen earlier talking animatedly to the policemen, was now sitting quietly, staring at the buildings across the street. After I introduced myself, he asked me if I was from the city or if I was visiting. When I said I was his guest, he smiled and invited me to join him for tea once he had found a new home. He told me that work crews had arrived with the police at 6 AM that morning to enforce a Municipal Corporation order to demolish structures on both sides of the road so that it could be widened. He added, “They [the authorities] say that our homes and shops are illegal; that the road is supposed to be 80 feet wide and every building on the road has to be demolished. They were also going to demolish part of this mosque. We pray here every day and today we stopped them from damaging the mosque. How can the Rani’s masjid (queen’s mosque) be illegal? It has been here for ages! The British left it alone; the Government maintains it. And, we have been praying here ever since I was a child. My father, who came here to work in the mills, bought a house here. I was born here in 1940. My family and my friends, we all grew up here and now my house and shop (he points to a half-demolished building across the street) are suddenly illegal” (Figure II.6). After a brief silence, he looked at me and with a touch of sarcasm, added: “the government wants to improve the city, to make sure that the roads are nice and wide for big people like you to visit!”

Aslambhai’s criticism was not misdirected; many of the new infrastructure projects in the city indeed served the needs of the city’s elites and middle classes and the increasing numbers of tourists and visitors. Besides being a border area, Astodia Road is a main artery connecting the mainly Hindu residential areas on the western banks of the Sabarmati River to the walled city.
and to areas further east where the train station, several markets and industrial areas are located. Urban infrastructure projects, such as road widening in Ahmedabad, continue to be governed by colonial-era regulations and procedures that were first articulated in the Bombay Town Planning Act of 1915. When it was drafted by the colonial authorities, it deliberately gave wide latitude to municipal authorities in order to facilitate the process of bringing order to the walled city. Now, in the post-colonial period, the same regulations are deployed to facilitate a neo-liberal order in the city. These laws allow authorities to (re)classify properties along main thoroughfares as “encroachments” once population and traffic densities exceed certain thresholds. As a result, buildings that were once legal become eligible for demolition, allowing authorities to evict tenants and owners with minimum compensation. Astodia Road is one of the few remaining places in the walled city where Hindus and Muslims continue to live and work in close proximity to each other; now, it was being torn apart in order to ease traffic congestion. Not only were homes and businesses on the road being demolished, but the Rani Sabarai and Hidayat Baksh mosques, both protected monuments, were now classified by municipal authorities as “encroachments” and their partial demolition had been ordered. According to residents of the area, the timing of the demolitions was carefully chosen by the Hindu nationalist controlled city government. Municipal demolition crews had arrived the day after the Commissioner had issued his orders in secrecy and after he and the elected members of the municipal council had flown off to Singapore to study its methods of urban planning and governance.

Although Rani Sabarai’s and the Hidayat Baksh mosques were at one time associated with the royal elites and notables of the city, now they had become meeting places for the *chippaa* and other working class Muslim communities that live and work in the area. These were sites where community members interacted with each other, spaces of collective memories,
of neighborliness and of solidarity; they were also sites of mourning and violence; and of communal celebrations during important Musleim events such as *eid*. As a result of the house demolitions, many of the residents were being forced to move to Juhapura and other far away neighborhoods and were concerned about the implications of the move. Yet, when I later mentioned the demolitions to an activist of the heritage conservation movement, he told me that “there is a real problem with traffic and crowding there. No one can see and appreciate the mosque and so of course something needs to be done.” A few days later, after Astodia road’s residents had successfully petitioned the state High Court to stay the demolition of the mosques, heritage conservationists organized a meeting with municipal authorities to explore a compromise that would allow authorities to deal with the problem of crowding and preserve the heritage structures on the road. At the meeting, the heads of several civil society groups presented a joint proposal to the authorities to restore the original facades of the residential buildings that had been demolished. On their view, this would have the double advantage of generating employment for “traditional craftsmen” and giving busy visitors and commuters “an education in Ahmedabad’s unique heritage.” What the restoration of facades would accomplish for longtime residents and worshippers at the mosque, like Aslambhai who would have to relocate due to the demolitions, was left unaddressed at this meeting.

**In the Asylum of Truth:**

On September 4, 2007, the birthday of the Hindu god Krishna, the Sarkhej Roza Trust and the Ahmedabad Community Foundation (ACF), organized an evening of *quawwali* and *bhajans* (Muslim and Hindu devotional music) at the mausoleum of Ahmed Khattu (Asylum of Truth). The *sufi* guide of Ahmed Shah, Khattu, as you will recall, had blessed the foundation of
Ahmedabad in 1411. Sarkhej Roza is a large complex consisting of Khattu’s tomb, royal palaces and necropolis, a mosque and an artificial lake. It was completed by Ahmed Shah’s successors in the 15th Century, who treated it as a royal spiritual retreat. I had been invited to the concert by Kalpana, a member of the ACF, which had played a vital role in the restoration of the complex. She had described the evening as an attempt to “revive the tradition of celebrating Hindu-Muslim harmony each year which had been interrupted by the violence of the 1980s.” According to her, in the past, Krishna’s birthday was celebrated at the shrine by Muslim and Hindu residents of the area who would participate in a night of singing bhajans and quawwals. Now, after the pogrom of 2002, the Trust and her NGO were trying to revive that tradition. The complex is jointly managed by the Trust and the Archeological Survey of India; while the ACF, which is an NGO committed to “heritage” preservation in the city, assists the trust. Many of the individuals who are active in this NGO also have an interest in promoting Ahmedabad as a destination for what in India is referred to as “heritage tourism.” With regard to Sarkhej Roza, these organizations define their mission as addressing “two kinds of problems: poor living conditions around the complex and local people's apathy to a major cultural resource” through restoration work at the site and improvement of infrastructure. Their aim is to make the complex not only more “tourist friendly” by transforming it into a “space for family outings and peaceful evenings” but also to educate the local community about its value as a cultural resource. According to the ACF, one of the major problems confronting the site was the proliferation of shanty-towns and the illegal encroachments in the vicinity of the complex, especially after the 1992 and 2002 anti-Muslim violence.

Since the late 1990s, the Hindu-nationalist controlled municipal corporation has sought to transform Ahmadabad into a “megacity” on par with Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. Not
surprisingly, most of the city’s resources have been poured into developing infrastructure in the Hindu dominated western parts of the city, neglecting Muslim areas such as Juhapura. As mentioned earlier, the Hindu nationalist government has also made cultural and heritage tourism promotion a priority. Even though the ACF’s and Trust’s understanding of Gujarat’s cultural heritage differs from that of the Hindu nationalists, due to their political connections and shared interest in heritage tourism promotion, they have managed to persuade state and city agencies to build new access roads to the Sarkhej complex and a protective earthen wall around the complex. The wall was designed to help restore the artificial lake and protect the gardens inside the complex and the road to facilitate the flow of tourists and visitors from outside. However, these projects effectively function as boundaries separating the mausoleum and the mosque from area residents. The wall also shields tourists from the locals, protecting them and ensuring a smooth, trouble free aesthetic experience. In so doing, it effectively cuts off the shrine from its surroundings, making it less accessible to the large numbers of Muslims who live nearby. From their perspective, the protective wall built to shore up the monument functions literally and figuratively as a barrier designed to keep them out and hide their presence.

Given that the ACF is fairly well connected and active in Ahmedabad and that it claims to work with local residents, I had expected the evening of music to be well attended. Instead there were about 50 people in the audience. Of these, about 15 were special guests of the trust and the ACF who were seated on the upper tier of the courtyard outside the saint’s tomb, while the musicians and the remainder of the audience were seated on the lower level. Aside from the dozen bhajan singers, there were no residents from the area around the shrine in the audience. Amongst the special guests were the chair of the Trust committee, several civil servants, the secular Congress Party’s candidate for the upcoming legislative assembly elections, and the
scion of one of Ahmedabad’s old textile mill-owner families, a man whose grandfather was a member of the nationalist elite that reorganized the city in the 1920s. The event opened with speeches by the chief trustee, who thanked the politician and scion for supporting the trust, and each was presented with a bouquet of flowers. The scion was thanked especially generously for his contributions to preserving the heritage of the city. I wondered if this had to do with the fact that he has converted the family’s ancestral home in the walled city into a luxury hotel, as he is not renowned for his engagement with civic institutions. Predictably, the Congress politician took the opportunity to speak and announced that his party, if victorious in the elections, would do everything in its power to maintain peace and bring the fruits of development to everyone, including Muslims. The speech was rather odd because a few days before, the leader of the state unit of his party had told a leading national daily that he and his party were “not secularist, we are also for Hindutva, but a soft Hindutva” (i.e. a kinder, gentler, Hindu nationalism). After the speeches, the bhajan group sang four devotional songs, after which the quawwali group sang four quawwalis. The entire performance—speeches and singing—lasted about 2 hours.

Several days after the event, I was spending the afternoon with Shakeelbhai, a friend who lives behind the complex in a modest four room house with his extended family. Shakeel had moved to the area after the anti-Muslim violence of 1992, when two of his nephews were killed. Prior to 1992, he had lived in the walled city and worked as a contractor installing and repairing air-conditioning and air-purification systems. After the events of 2002, most of his Hindu clients no longer hired him. In 2003, he closed down the business and began driving a rickshaw. When I mentioned the event to Shakeelbhai, he said that even though he moved seeking safety as well as proximity to the sufi shrine, he could not get himself to go into the complex “after they built the wall and the new road. It is because of the road and the wall that the area around my house
gets flooded during the monsoons.” Rainwater, which in the past had flowed into the artificial lake, now accumulates and floods the first floor of almost all the houses in his neighborhood. During particularly “good” monsoons (i.e. when rains are plentiful), he told me that it could take up to a week for the water to recede. In 2007, the monsoon had been particularly strong in Gujarat and for much of July and August I had been unable to meet with him or with other interlocutors who lived in the area. Many of Shakeel’s neighbors moved into the area after the 2002 violence and were provided with housing and assistance by reformist organizations such as the Tabligh-i-Jamaat and the Islamic Relief Committee (the relief agency of the Jamaat-e-ulema-al-Hind), a national organization of the Indian ulema (religious scholars). Unlike Shakeel, who believes in the power of Sufis and saints, many of his neighbors belong to movements which condemn saint worship as un-Islamic. However, both he and his neighbors had minimal contact with the ACF or with Roza trust. When I asked if he or anyone in the neighborhood participates in the ACF’s community programs or if they had had any discussions with the authorities or the NGOs about the flooding, he said: “No, they don't talk to us. We went to them to complain about the flooding and we were told that drainage was not in the plans. Another time, one trustee told us that we had no right to live here because the land belonged to the wakaf (trust) for the Roza and that we had built illegally. But we (my family, my neighbor) bought the land. We all have paid stamp duty [the transaction tax], registered the land and we have the title. Where do they think we can go if they kick us out?”

**Conclusion: Sidi Said’s Mosque**

There is perhaps no better allegory for the historical processes that have simultaneously led to the marginalization of Ahmedabad’s Muslims and to the preservation of the city’s Indo-Islamic
architecture than the screens that adorn Sidi Said’s Mosque. So before concluding this chapter, I would like to re-narrate the story of these screens. The mosque was built in 1572 and is named after its benefactor Sidi Said, an Abyssinian slave and soldier-mystic who served in the army of the Sultanate and endowed the mosque with enough wealth so that it could operate a langar (public kitchen) that fed one thousand people every day. The endowment, in the form of agricultural land, has long since been appropriated by either the modern state or some other entity. The Abyssinians, who are referred to as Habhis (from the Arabic al habsh) and Sidis in Gujarati, were slave-soldiers who moved into the ranks of the elite just before the Gujarat Sultanate was displaced by the Mughal Empire. Many of them became teachers to the royal elites of the Sultanate and continued to serve Mughal officials in a similar way. They also played important roles in successor states, including the Mughal Empire, in the region and in some cases, founded their own mini-states (Commissariat 1938:470). Sidi Said’s mosque is adorned with ten intricately carved jaalis or screens. Eight of these screens are of geometric patterns typical of mosques in the region, but two of the screens stand apart because of their intricately carved representation of a palm and vine (see Figure II.7). According to one art historian “there are no screens anywhere else in India to compare with these [two] in either skill or beauty” (Burton-Page 2008:93). Images of the screens, which symbolize a deep and profound religiosity and wonder at God’s creations, have now been appropriated as symbols of a secular India. Miniature replicas are gifted to visiting dignitaries as the official symbol of Ahmedabad and graphic reproductions adorn the letterhead and signage of the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad.

In the nineteenth century, after the British conquest of Ahmedabad, the mosque was used as the office of the mamlatdar (revenue collector). With the establishment of the Archeological
Survey of India, the mosque was classified as a historic monument. Today, Sidi Said’s mosque is a protected national monument, displayed by the state as a symbol of India’s syncretic and secular culture. It is surrounded by a cast-iron fence and a narrow sidewalk, and in the daily life of the city, it functions more like a traffic island, a mute witness to the mad rush of vehicles at the intersection of Mirzapur and Relief Roads and Nehru Bridge (which connects western Ahmedabad to the walled city and to areas further east). Straight across from the mosque is a Victorian style mansion built in 1924 by Mangaldas Girdhardas. Mangaldas was one of Ahmedabad’s leading textile magnates and a member of the secular nationalist elite that once dominated civic life. Relief Road, as the name suggests, was built to relieve congestion in the walled city. As previously discussed, construction of the road was at the center of the political contest between the colonial state and the nationalist movement. After it was eventually built by the nationalist elites, Mangaldas and other individuals like him became prime beneficiaries of the modernization of the city. The House of MG, as it is now known, has been converted into “a boutique heritage hotel” serving western tourists and a self-described “cosmopolitan” local bourgeoisie looking for a taste of Gujarat’s cultural heritage. In contrast, the Habhis or Sidis are now classified as a Scheduled Tribe and are relegated to the margins of Gujarati society. They neither drink tea at the hotel, nor do they continue to worship at Sidi Said’s mosque. From being at the center of political power and cultural life, today they have become targets of discrimination and prejudice and objects of anthropological curiosity.  

Scholars who have written about Hindu nationalist violence in postcolonial Ahmedabad have rightfully emphasized its central role in the marginalization of Ahmedabad’s diverse

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126 In November 2009, the Times of India reported that the Government of Gujarat had initiated plans to bring development and employment to the Sidis by creating a “Little Africa” near the Gir forest, the last known reserve of the Asiatic lion. This “Little Africa,” the paper reported would consist of a reconstructed Sidi village that would showcase the African heritage of the community to visiting tourists.
Muslim communities and in the production of a city partitioned along religious lines.\textsuperscript{127} On most accounts, the processes of segregation and the production of mono-religious neighborhoods and spaces is said to have begun with the pogrom of 1969 and accelerated after the two episodes of anti-Muslim violence in 1990 and 1992 that were connected to the Hindu nationalist movement’s campaign to demolish the Babri \textit{masjid} in Ayodhya. While the transformative and destructive nature of this violence cannot be under-estimated, in this chapter I have tried to suggest that the displacement and marginalization of Muslims in Ahmedabad is not solely the effect of the serial orchestrations of violence by the Hindu nationalist movement. Rather, by providing a historical account of urban planning in late colonial Ahmedabad, I have tried to suggest that the partitioned spatial order of the city is one of the effects of this past. Furthermore, by highlighting the continuities between colonial and contemporary forms of urban planning and heritage preservation, I have tried to show how practices considered to be integral to the secularizing and modernizing project of the Indian nation-state and to the celebration of the composite culture of India (and hence antithetical to Hindu nationalism) are complicit in the displacement of both the Islamic pasts of the city and the diverse Muslim communities that inhabit it in the present. Each of the examples that I described in this chapter—Justice Divecha’s forced expulsion to Juhapura, the demolition of homes and businesses on Astodia Road, the celebration of the syncretic traditions at the tomb of Khattu, and the screens of Sidi Said’s mosque—illustrates in a different way that the forms of violence and displacement experienced by Muslims in Ahmedabad are not limited to riots and pogroms. Rather, they depend on and are reinforced by forms of violence that underlie neoliberal urban planning and heritage preservation projects.

\textsuperscript{127} The number of source on the segregation of Muslims in Ahmedabad is far too large to include an exhaustive list here. Amongst the more interesting ethnographic and historical accounts are the articles by Breman (1999; 2003); Jasani (2007); Thomas and Jaffrelot (2012) and Mahadevia (2007); and books by Nandy et al. (1997); Valiani (2011); Yagnik and Sheth (2010); Ghassem-Fachandi (2012).
Figure II.3: Example of Pol layout, Ahmedabad.
Figure II.4: Rani Sabarai’s Mosque, 2007. Photograph by Author.
Figure II.5: Rani Sabarai’s Mosque, 2007. Photograph by Author.
Figure II.6: A view of demolished homes on Astodia Road. Photograph by author.
Figure II.6: Screen at Sidi Said's Mosque. Source: Wikimedia Commons.
Chapter III

Is it Natural to Hate Muslims in Gujarat?

Introduction:

In May 2006, three weeks after the municipal authorities in Vadodara (formerly Baroda) demolished a three hundred year old dargah (sufi’s tomb) in the walled city, the English-language Delhi-based newsmagazine Tehelka published a very brief but disturbing response to the event by the literary critic and writer Ganesh Devy (Devy 2006). In the Gujarati-language media, where writers and public intellectuals are very frequently engaged in heated arguments over a range of topics and issues, this violent incident elicited no commentary. The Hindu nationalist controlled municipal corporation of Vadodara, Devy’s hometown, had declared that the dargah was encroaching on public space and ordered its removal so that a road could be widened. The removal of the dargah was part of urban renewal programs at the center of the neo-liberal transformation of India’s economy since the 1990s. For the Hindu nationalist movement, the demolition was a vehicle for imposing its conception of democracy and of the public good on the city’s population. On the view of Hindu nationalists, democracy is rule by the Hindu majority and given this, Muslims are to be denied a say in defining the public good. Muslim residents, who lived near the shrine and worshipped there, opposed the demolition. When the work crews arrived, they surrounded it to prevent the demolition. However, they were

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128 The article was originally published in English in the May 20, 2006 issue of Tehelka and is based on part of a longer conversation between Devy and Shankarshan Thakur, a reporter for the magazine. Although Devy is listed as the author, the conditions that led to its publication have led several people in the debate that ensued to raise questions about it authorship and Devy’s responsibility. A Gujarati translation under the title “Muslim Tiraskaar jya Swaabhaavik Che” was published in the August 1, 2006 issue of Nirikshak, a journal or literary and political criticism. The journal which was founded by Umashankar Joshi, a Gandhian and one of Gujarat’s leading twentieth century poets is widely read by writers and others interested in literature and criticism. I discuss the article in more detail in section III of this chapter.

129 See Chapter II for more on the politics of urban renewal and neoliberalism.
assaulted by the police, who killed two young men and injured many others. For the next three days, while several areas of the city were placed under curfew, roving gangs of activists of the Hindu nationalist movement carried out attacks on Muslim citizens. After the demolition, the Hindu nationalist mayor declared that because Hindus had “allowed” their shrines to be demolished, Muslims shrines could not be exempted. What he failed to mention, however, was that unlike the dargah which had been there for some three hundred years, the demolished Hindu shrines had only been constructed by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in the 1980s and 1990s as part of a campaign to claim Vadodara as a Hindu city and to leave its mark on the urban landscape.

Although Devi’s article in Tehelka was written as an immediate response to the demolition of the shrine, it is also a commentary on the prevalence of anti-Muslim discourse in Gujarat; for this reason, it provides us with good insights on the kinds of debates taking place within the Gujarati public sphere on the question of anti-Muslim violence. Devi is outraged by the violence of the Hindu nationalist movement and despondent about the middle class support for anti-Muslim politics in Gujarat. His article is an indictment of the role of the state and the participation of citizens in the pogrom of 2002, when elite and subaltern Hindus united and joined the Hindu nationalist movement’s project of killing Muslims all over north and central Gujarat. However, the primary targets of Devy’s criticism are Gujarati writers and public intellectuals and the Gujarati Hindu middle class who, he argues, have not only failed to critically reflect on the 2002 violence, they have also failed to acknowledge their own complicity in the normalization of anti-Muslim politics in the state.130 On his view, the characteristics of a

130 In this regard Devy was not unique in Gujarat. Several of my interlocutors, some of them long-time activists in the human rights community, told me that what has struck them most about the prevalent discourse within Hindu middle class communities after the pogrom is the absence of remorse and seeming lack of desire to reflect upon the violence. See also Achyut Yagnik’s interview entitled “There is no Civil Society in Gujarat,” March 12, 2007, available at http://uswww.rediff.com/cms/print.jsp?docpath=/news/2007/mar/07godhra.htm [last accessed June 30, 2012].
tolerant, modern society—public debate, reflexivity, the ability to engage other citizens in conversation and the capacity to listen to the other with empathy—were notable for their absence in the state: “Gujarat has become an intolerable place; at least that is how I find it. Today, there are very few people I can talk to in Gujarat because they simply do not understand basic things, or don’t want to. I can make myself a very comfortable citizen of Vadodara. But the problem is I cannot talk to the people of this city; it is like walking in the desert. I find the popular myth of Gujaratis being peace-loving people impossible to believe. How could all the riots, so many of them since 1969, have happened if this were true?” On Devy’s view, “the violence is an attribute of their [Gujaratis] acquisitive nature…..They will do anything to acquire.” In addition, Devy argues that invocations of Gandhi by Gujaratis are opportunistic and hypocritical while hating Muslims is now a banal feature of middle class discourse: “Gandhi, I have to say, is not a popular man in Gujarat; they merely pay him lip service. You do not become a bad man in Gujarat if you hate Muslims; you are normal. Decent people hate Muslims. And it is not a city phenomenon alone; this is true of villages as well. If a Muslim is traumatized, it is a normal thing.”

From the few lines that I have quoted above, it should be clear that Devy is very angry and disheartened by the silence that surrounds anti-Muslim violence in the Gujarati public sphere. It should also be clear that although well intentioned and informed by a desire to problematize anti-Muslim violence, there is much that is troubling about Devy’s essay. Before addressing my own concerns about the substance of Devy’s essay and the problems I have with his argument, I want to restate the central question that he is addressing and situate it within the larger discursive field in which it seeks to intervene, a field that is also the target of his criticism. As mentioned earlier, Devy’s targets were the predominantly Hindu Gujarati middle classes and
Gujarati writers and intellectuals. What troubles him is the general absence of self-reflection and political criticism in the Gujarati public sphere in the aftermath of the pogrom of 2002. Devy does not state this explicitly in the essay, but as I read him, his other main worry is the problem of Gujaratni asmita, a phrase that can be translated as pride in the identity of Gujarat and its entanglements with Hindu nationalism in contemporary Gujarat.\[131\]

Although, or more aptly, because of the manner in which Devy raises the questions about this entanglement of Gujarati regionalism with Hindu nationalism, his essay renewed a public debate about the prevalent understandings of a Gujarati regional identity. In other words, Devy’s polemic served as an invitation to writers and intellectuals to reflect on and argue over questions such as: What is Gujarat? Is Gujarati a linguistic or religious identity? Does the term refer to a specific territory and people united by shared language? Or does it refer to a territory and people united by a common religion (Hinduism)? What forms of power and exclusion (gendered, caste, linguistic, and religious) get elided by the idea of Gujarati regionalism? Are the two terms, Gujarati and Hindu, identical as some writers and politicians in Gujarat claim? Can a Gujarati be Muslim? What are the political implications of expressing pride in claiming and inhabiting a Gujarati identity at this particular historical conjuncture? Whether participants in this debate rejected or endorsed Devy’s views, his polemic became the anchor around which academics, writers, poets and activists, some of whom had contributed to the current understanding of Gujaratni asmita and many others who had previously remained outside of the debate, began to articulate their visions of Gujarat and of a Gujarati identity. The debate which went on throughout the period of my fieldwork from 2006 to 2008 was still continuing in the winter of 2010 when I did additional research for this project. Throughout this period, editorialists, novelists, poets, academics and others wrote articles which appeared regularly in the major

\[131\] See Chapter IV for a more detailed discussion of this concept.
Gujarati language newspapers, in popular magazines, and in journals of criticism such as such as *Nirikshak, Naya Marg* and *Navneet Samarpan.* However, Gujarati Muslim writers and intellectuals were for the most part absent from this debate, an absence that reflects just how excluded they have become from the public sphere in postcolonial Gujarat. This absence was both compounded by and continuous with the very limited terms of discourse underlying this particular debate, where a majoritarian logic continued to drive the interventions of secular and liberal critics and Hindu nationalists alike. Because Devy’s article first appeared in an English-language progressive publication that describes itself as secular, I use this example to complicate the claim that the secular public sphere is free to violence and prejudice against Muslims; I also use this example to reiterate one of the larger points of this dissertation, namely that the othering of Gujarati Muslims goes beyond the Hindu nationalist project and permeates the social and political life of Gujarat. As I argued in the introduction to the dissertation and reiterated in Chapter II, the sedimentation of anti-Muslim discourse and of an exclusionary conception of *Gujaratni asmita* runs across the secularist/Hindu nationalist divide and has become so banal that it is barely noticed by a large spectrum of non-Muslim Gujaratis.

In this chapter, my aim then is to explore a contemporary debate about *Gujaratni asmita* and violence against Muslims in order to think about how the Gujarati public sphere is implicated in the articulation of a Gujarati regionalist identity that constructs the Muslim as its other. In the first section, I begin by briefly *situating* Devy’s article within a longer discourse about *Gujaratni asmita* which began in the nineteenth century; while my account will be cursory

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132 The major newspapers in Gujarat are *Gujarat Samachar, Sandesh, Divya Bhaskar, Kachh Mitra, Phulchaab* and *Gujarat Today.* Unlike the others, *Gujarat Today* is a Muslim-owned newspaper that caters primarily to a Muslim readership. In addition, two Mumbai based newspapers—*Mumbai Samachar* and *Janmabhoomi*—are avidly read by Gujarati-based writers and intellectuals. It is important to note that because of the historic presence of a large Gujarati-speaking population in Mumbai, it continues to be an important center of literary production in Gujarati. Many of the major playwrights, novelists, poets, and Gujarati publishing houses are based there, and Mumbai remains an important center for Gujarati theatre.
(only to be returned to in greater depth in the next chapter), my aim in providing it here is to suggest that such contemporary debates have antecedents in the colonial period and therefore have to be understood in relation to such genealogies. I then go on to further situate the debate by reiterating an argument that I made in Chapter II, namely that in its contemporary form, anti-Muslim discourse depends on a rearticulated form of Gujarati nativism that is intertwined with neoliberal narratives about the promises of capital and of progress. In the second section of the chapter, I provide a brief descriptive account of the demolition of the dargah, the event that triggered Devy’s intervention. The demolition, like many of the other large urban improvement projects in Gujarat that I have described in this dissertation, was part of the Hindu nationalist government’s “Vibrant Gujarat” campaign to transform the state into a model of neoliberal development. Many of these projects privilege elite and middle class desires and marginalize the urban poor and urban Muslims. In the final section of the chapter, I examine some of the responses to Devy by Gujarati writers and suggest that regionalist and secular-liberal responses to his article share an affinity with each other on the Muslim question in Gujarat. This is not to say that any of the participants in this debate endorsed Hindu nationalist violence against Muslims. In fact, none of them did. However, with few exceptions, both sides in the debate reproduce the notion that Gujarati and Hindu are identical, effectively reiterating the very claim that Hindu nationalism depends upon: that the Muslim is the other of the Gujarati.

_Gujaratni Asmita and Hindu Nationalism:_

Modern ideas of Gujarat and discourses of _Gujaratni asmita_ were first elaborated by British and Gujarati writers in the nineteenth century and can be understood as attempts to address the problems of colonial modernity. I provide a more detailed account of _Gujaratni asmita_ in the
final chapter of this dissertation. Here, I will only provide a brief and schematic account of these nineteenth century articulations in order to suggest that later iterations of the idea of Gujarat, although they address very different historical conjunctures and political challenges, are inflected by the tensions inherited from nineteenth century visions of Gujarat. The emergence of these visions of Gujarat overlapped with the entrenchment of the colonial state in the region and the emergence of a modern Gujarati public sphere in central Gujarat’s two main cities: Ahmedabad and Vadodara. Not surprisingly, nineteenth century iterations of the idea of Gujarat were deeply influenced by modern conceptions of territory, history, religion, and language that Gujarati writers encountered in colonial schools and in their readings of western texts.

Literary works, regional histories and social commentaries of the period are characterized by an emergent modern historical consciousness. The nineteenth century poet and social reformer Narmad (Narmadshankar Dave) was an early exponent of the idea of Gujarat and is widely credited for systematically articulating it in his poetry, essays and works on the Gujarati language. In “Swadeshbhiman” (national pride) published in 1856, Narmad sought to persuade his Gujarati audience to develop a new historical consciousness (Dave 1996a:27–35). According to Narmad, unlike the British, Indians (Gujaratis) did not have an affective attachment to their desh (country) and thus lacked in swadeshbhiman (pride in one’s country). On his account, this was so because the British and Gujaratis differed from each other in terms of their conceptions of the past and their orientation towards it. Narmad’s claim is not that Gujaratis are a people without knowledge of their past. Nor does he claim that Gujaratis do not take pride in that past. Rather, Narmad feels that for Gujaratis of his time, the past consisted of knowledge of one’s own caste or community genealogies and therefore elicited feelings of pride that were limited to the one’s own community. What is needed, he urges his Gujarati readers, is a new type of history
and new understanding of the past, one that can only come about by “subsuming” the particular histories/genealogies of castes within the history of the desh or nation (Skaria 2001:271–297). In other words, a feeling of swadeshbhiman can only come about if Gujaratis cultivated a new, modern orientation towards their own past. Although the Gujarati language is privileged in Narmad’s idea of Gujarat, the relationship between people, language and desh (nation/region) is already being mediated by modern notions of religion and ideas of religious difference. For example, in his poem “Kona Koni Che Gujarat?” (“To Whom Does Gujarat Belong?”), Narmad represents Gujarat as the natural home of Hindus, while others would have to first express their love of Gujarat before they can be accepted as Gujaratis; the status/place of non-Hindus in Gujarat is, in other words, conditional on their proper display of love for the region/nation:

It [Gujarat] belongs to those who speak Gujarati; to those who observe aryadharma of all varieties, and also to those who are foreigners but nurtured by this land; and to those who follow other religions but are well-wishers of mother Gujarat and therefore our brothers.

In the post-Partition national order of South Asia, this conception of Gujarat would be appropriated by two different political projects: secular and religious nationalist. For the secular nationalists, it would provide the historical and ideological justifications for the reorganization of Indian states on the basis of a claimed linguistic unity. And, the nascent privileging of indigeneity that characterized many of the nineteenth century iterations of the idea of Gujarat would be translated by Hindu nationalists into a suspicion of and hostility towards Muslims. The

133 “Swadeshbhiman” is part of a trilogy of essays on this theme. The other two are “Gujarationi Sthiti” (The Condition of Gujaratis) and “Apani Deshjanata” (Our People or The People of Our Country) in his Narmagadhya (1996[1875];36–44, 44–107). My own reading has benefited from Skaria (2001) and Suhrud (2009), but most importantly from the many conversations with Achyutbhai Yagnik in Ahmedabad.
differences between these two projects’ conceptions of Gujarat should however not be overstated.

Nineteenth century visions of Gujarat were also characterized by a tension, a struggle as it were, between a privileging of language on the one hand and of religion on the other, as the defining characteristic of Gujarati society. Both visions, however, shared a conceptual vocabulary and drew sustenance from modern conceptions of history and of religion. Much as social histories began to represent Islam and Muslims as alien to Gujarat, some nineteenth century histories of the Gujarati language located its origins in the classical past and emphasized its affinities with Sanskrit. In so doing, they described it as the language of Hindus and understated the role of Parsis and Muslims in the development of local literary traditions (Isaka 2002a). By the turn of the century, questions of religious and linguistic identity were thoroughly intertwined in articulations of Gujarati asmita as evinced by Gandhi’s discomfort with the tensions that these ideas created amongst Parsis, Muslims, and Hindus over ownership of the Gujarati language. In a speech delivered at a 1909 meeting of Gujaratis in London and later circulated at the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad meeting in Rajkot that year, Gandhi reminded his audiences that promoting love of the mother tongue while important in cultivating pride in one’s desh (nation/region) should not lead one to forget that Gujarat and Gujarati had been equally “shared and nurtured by three great religions of the world—Hinduism, Islam and Zoroastrianism.”

My point here is not to suggest that nineteenth century iterations of Gujarati asmita inevitably led to the Hindu nationalist vision of Gujarati as an exclusively Hindu identity. Rather, while the tensions that were internal to nineteenth century iterations of asmita made the concept available to two different political projects, they nevertheless presuppose a hierarchical

relationship between Gujarati Hindus and Muslims which privileges the claims of the former to the idea of Gujarat. These tensions therefore point to the limits of secular-liberal critiques of Hindu nationalist politics in Gujarat because of their shared understanding of Islam and Hinduism as rival communities and traditions. In the middle of the twentieth century, these possibilities were embodied in the different visions of Gujarat articulated by K.M. Munshi and Indulal Yagnik. Munshi and Yagnik were contemporaries and influential figures in the nationalist movement. Although their political commitments took them in different directions, both played an important role in the Mahagujarat campaign, which culminated with the creation of present-day Gujarat as a linguistically unified state on May 1, 1960. While Munshi’s vision of Gujaratni asmita privileged an upper caste Hindu history of Gujarat and represents Islam as alien and as other, Yagnik emphasized language as the basis for overcoming differences of caste and community and cultivating an affective attachment to Gujarat (Skaria 2001:271–297). Yet neither of these two visions of Gujarat is free of internal tensions and contradictions. Munshi’s Hindu nationalist leanings are well documented and I will discuss his writings in greater detail in the next chapter. But, the claim that the peoples of modern Gujarat are defined by a shared language also depends on eliding the linguistic diversity of contemporary Gujarati society. Indeed, until very recently Kutchi speakers were not considered Gujarati, nor were many Adivasi communities. Yagnik’s argument for a linguistically unified state also elided the hierarchical relationship between the Gujarati spoken in central parts of the state, which is treated as the norm, versus the versions spoken in other parts of the state such as the Saurashtra peninsula, which are generally seen as less authentic.

Since the 1980s, the Hindu nationalist movement has built upon Munshi’s vision by incorporating and reworking ideas of Gujarat into its rhetorical strategies. According to
Ghanshyam Shah, the BJP’s ability to attract the support of elite and subaltern castes and communities and its electoral success in Gujarat since the 1990s appear to be linked to an emphasis on discourses of *Gujaratni asmita* (Shah 1998:243–266). During my fieldwork, it was not unusual for Narendra Modi to reinforce the notion that only the Hindu nationalist movement would defend the interests of Gujarat and Gujaratis by describing the state unit of the Congress Party as representatives of the Sultanate in Delhi.

Both during and after the pogrom, *asmita* and anti-Muslim rhetoric appear to be equally important in the Hindu nationalist discourse in Gujarat. In 2002 it was not uncommon for Hindu nationalists to describe the violence against Gujarat’s Muslim communities as a matter of defending Gujarati honor and pride. Within a few weeks after the pogrom, the Hindu nationalist government called for early elections to the state legislative assembly. Under pressure from human rights groups and the opposition, the elections were postponed and held in December of 2002. When the BJP launched its electoral campaign, it did so with a *Gujarat Gaurav Yatra* or Pilgrimage for the Glory of Gujarat.135 Led by Narendra Modi, political meetings and rallies on the *yatra* route consisted of speeches and recitals of Narmad’s poem “*Jai Garvi Gujarat*” (Victory to proud/glorious Gujarat). In contemporary Gujarat, the poem is recited daily by children enrolled in state-run schools, a pedagogical device to cultivate a sense of belonging and an investment in the idea of Gujarat (Yagnik and Sheth 2005:201). However, during the *yatra* it was transformed into an anthem celebrating the Hindu nationalist vision of Gujarat and functioned more like a call to arms against the enemies of Gujarat. Narmad had written the poem as a dedication to the *Narmakosh*, the first modern lexicon of the Gujarati language, which he had described as his tribute to the people of Gujarat. Although Narmad’s poem addressed a

different historical and political conjuncture, the yatra route with its stops at major Hindu pilgrimage centers was a carefully scripted enactment and appropriation of the poet’s celebration of the Hindu sacred geography of the region and of Hindu kingship. In addition to the emphasis on a glorious Hindu past, political speeches during the campaign tapped into the anti-Muslim rhetoric of the war on terror. From the Hindu nationalist perspective, the mass participation in the violence that the movement had orchestrated was simultaneously proof of its claim to represent all Gujarati Hindus and an opportunity to firmly establish its control over state power and further sediment the idea that Gujarati and Hindu are identical. The political message that the movement sought to convey was also very simple: Muslims were not and could not ever hope to be treated as equal citizens in Gujarat and Hindutva alone would defend the interests of a modern Gujarat, defined as Hindu.

In the poem Narmad describes Gujarat’s spatial limits in terms of the deities that protect the region: Ambaji Mata (Goddess Amba) in the North, Mahakali (Goddess Kali) in the East, Kunteshwer Mahadev (Lord Shiva) in the south near present-day Valsad, and Somnatha (Lord Shiva) and Lord Krishna at Dwarka in the east. In addition, the one reference in the poem to the region’s political history is a glorification of Sidhraj, the Rajput Chalukya King of Patan, who is said to have defeated Mohammed Ghori in battle. In his time, Narmad was not alone in describing Sidhraj as unambiguously Hindu. Narmad and his contemporaries were influenced by the new conceptions of history and religion that they encountered in English institutions in Bombay. In addition, the influence of Alexander Forbes on their understanding of Gujarat’s history and their own relationship to that past cannot be underestimated. A judge in the colonial administration, Forbes established the Gujarati Vernacular Society and authored the highly influential Ras Mala: Hindoo Annals of the Province of Goozerat (1878 [1856]). In researching and writing the book, Forbes relied on his native informants, many of them members of the Vernacular Society and also Narmad’s interlocutors. The Ras Mala, like many other British narratives valorizes the Rajputs and privileges the Hindu religious and political history of Gujarat. Forbes too represents Sidhraj as unambiguously Hindu. According to Misra, however, in the tradition of the Khoja, Bohra and several Sunni groups of Gujarat, Sidhraj figures as the founder and leader of each of their communities, each claiming that he became a follower of their pir (Misra 1964). Misra’s account is based on the Miraat-i-Ahmadi, a Persian history of the Sultanate that was read by Muslims and non-Muslims alike and its contents were familiar to many amongst the Brahmin elites of Gujarat who often held important positions in the Sultanate and then in the princely states. I bring this up not because I want doubt whether Sidhraj was Hindu or not, but to suggest that the differences in representations of Sidhraj are indicative of a profound alteration in understandings of religion and history that occurred in the colonial period. In more recent historical writings, Sidhraj legitimates both religious nationalist and secular nationalist narratives of the past and the main disagreement is over what kind of Hindu he was. Secular nationalist accounts often cite the story of how Sidhraj, upon hearing reports that his subjects had destroyed a mosque in Khambat, travelled there in disguise to assess the situation and then ordered the mosque to rebuilt at the treasury’s expense. Hindu nationalists, however, represent him as the guardian of the faith. For the latter see Munshi and for the former see Sheth and Yagnik. For more on Forbes and the afterlife of the Ras Mala, see Chapter IV.
In the midst of the violence of 2002, Hindu nationalist leaders in the state were fond of describing Gujarat as a ‘laboratory’ of Hindutva, an exceptional state because of the movement’s success in generating popular support for its project of making India Hindu. If asmita had occupied a central place in its electoral strategy and in consolidating its power in the laboratory, then after the 2002 elections, the Hindu nationalist Government has adapted its conception of Gujaratni asmita to package its neoliberal development policies. “Aapnu Gujarat, Aagvun Gujarat” (Our Gujarat, exceptional Gujarat) became a common slogan in state-sponsored media campaigns. The “Vibrant Gujarat” campaign, with its annual state-sponsored mela (fair) for domestic and global corporations is also designed to present Gujarat as an exception amongst Indian states because of its hospitality to capital.137 Through an emphasis on the discourse of neoliberalism, hindutva violence against Muslims becomes posited as a necessary evil in the pursuit of a modern and future-oriented neoliberal Gujarat. And, criticism of anti-Muslim violence and discrimination in Gujarat becomes posited as either an expression of anti-Gujarati resentment or an attempt to prevent Gujarat from realizing its full neoliberal potential. By speaking in the name of “vibrant Gujarat” and articulating its vision using the developmentalist discourse of modernity and progress, the Hindu nationalist movement is able to appeal to Gujaratis who have faith in the promises of capital and progress. Just to be clear however, I do not mean to suggest that the Hindu nationalist movement instrumentally manipulates development discourse in order to implement its project of Hinduizing Gujarat or to “trick” pro-market Gujaratis into accepting the anti-Muslim premises of it movement. Rather, reiterating an argument that I made in previous chapters, my argument is that neoliberal discourse and Hindu nationalist

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137 The Gujarati word aagvun can mean qualities peculiar to an individual, exclusively one’s own, special, separate.
politics and aspirations are compatible with each other because of their orientation towards the future.

This fusing of regional pride with development discourse is however not restricted to the Hindu nationalist movement in Gujarat. It also informs the Congress Party’s vision of Gujarati modernity and progress. For at least two decades, political practice in the state has been characterized by an irony in the sense that regional pride has been at the center of visions of Gujarati modernity and progress not because of the emergence of a regionalist social movement or political party, as in some other parts of India. Instead, it is the two main national parties, the BJP and the Congress, which are also the most powerful in the state, that have emphasized regional pride in their political campaigns. One of the important arenas where articulations of regional pride and development discourse have intersected is in the political struggles over the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River. A state-sponsored project that is officially described as the “lifeline of Gujarat,” the dam and the river have also become sites of regional hopes and fears. The allocation of vast resources in order to complete the project has been justified by both parties as essential for the survival and wellbeing of powerful Patel and Koli agrarian communities and the predominantly Hindu urban middle classes that live in districts of Gujarat described as “water scarce.” After the World Bank withdrew financial support for the project in 1994 under pressure from subaltern movements such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan, both the Congress and BJP mobilized and competed against each other for the support of these constituencies on the promise that completion of the dam would deliver them from scarcity and drought (e.g., Mehta 2010:509–528). In their campaigns, opponents and critics of the project such as the Gandhian activist Chunilal Vaidya (a popular figure in South Gujarat and affectionately called Chuni kaka or Chuni uncle by his admirers) and the Narmada Bachao
Andolan, were portrayed by both the BJP and the Congress Party as enemies of the Gujarati people.

By referring to the campaign for the construction of the Narmada dam, I do not mean to suggest that anti-Muslim violence was an inevitable outcome of this campaign. Much of the scholarly attention on the politics of the Narmada has rightfully emphasized the struggles of subaltern communities displaced by a statist project and their critiques of postcolonial Indian modernity. However, I suggest that we also think of the politics of the Narmada dam as shaped by a counter-mobilization of the project’s beneficiaries (or at least those who view themselves as its beneficiaries) orchestrated by the state and by the two major national parties. More pertinently, one of the effects of this mobilization has been a deeper imbrication and normalization of the friend-enemy distinction in contemporary political discourse and practice in Gujarat. Let me illustrate how the normalization of an exclusionary conception of Gujaratni asmita that intersects with neoliberal discourse in ways that lead to the othering and marginalization of Gujarati Muslims blurs the distinction between the secular-liberal and Hindu nationalist projects in the Gujarati public sphere, by returning to the example which is the focus of this chapter and that led to the publication of Devy’s article.

**The Violence of “Vibrant Gujarat”:**

On the morning of May 1, 2006, municipal workers in Vadodara (formerly Baroda) demolished a dargah located on Fatehpura Road near the Champaner Gate in the walled city. According to Muslim residents of Yakutpura, where the dargah was located, it had been built some three hundred years ago over the mazaar (grave) of Rashid-ud-din Chishti, a minor figure in the Sufi order founded by Moin-ud-din Chishti of Ajmer. The demolition was part of an urban
improvement project which had begun several weeks earlier, when municipal authorities began to remove “illegal” structures in different parts of the city. According to several newspaper reports, municipal authorities appeared to have complied with prescribed town planning rules and regulations before carrying out the demolition. On April 24, the BJP-controlled municipal corporation had posted a notice on the small and nondescript green-colored shrine declaring that it was an “illegal” structure and an “encroachment” on the road because no owner was listed in the city survey, it would be demolished within a week. Muslim residents of the area opposed the demolition arguing that it would result in the desecration of the grave of a person revered by Muslims and Hindus alike. They claimed that the shrine was a “historical structure” that had existed since well before Fatehpura Road had been carved out in the late colonial period and therefore could not be classified as an encroachment. In addition, they pointed out that the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991, made it illegal to demolish a religious structure that had existed since before the 1947 Partition of India.

When Muslim residents submitted a petition objecting to the demolition and requested a meeting to explore a compromise solution, the municipal authorities agreed. Over the next few days, a committee of Muslims held several meetings with the mayor and with the Municipal

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138See for example the reports in the *Times of India* (Ahmedabad), May 2, 2006 and “Vadodara Flares Up Again as Old Dargah Is Demolished, 4 Killed 2012,” *Indian Express* (Ahmedabad), 2 May, 2006. The incident received very little coverage in the three major vernacular papers of Gujarat: the *Gujarat Samachar, Divya Bhaskar* and *Sandesh*. One possible reason for this is that all of the major Gujarati newspapers produce city-specific editions, each one privileging news of the city where it is published. In this case, the Vadodara editions did publish daily reports. However, the Ahmedabad, Rajkot and Surat editions offered minimal coverage. Since I was based in Ahmedabad at the time of this incident, my account of the events of May 2006 are based on the English language media reports and a preliminary inquiry by the Peoples Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL 2006).

139The “Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991,” states that “the religious character of a place of worship existing on the 15th day of August, 1947 shall continue to be the same as it existed on that day.” The Act was passed by the Parliament at the height of the Hindu nationalist mobilization to destroy the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and replace it with a temple to Lord Rama. While the immediate aim was to dissuade Hindu nationalists from destroying the Babri Masjid, it was also designed to prevent the destruction of shrines in other parts of the country.
Commissioner of Baroda and by the end of the week it appeared that the negotiations would result in a compromise. In order to facilitate the widening of the road, community leaders agreed to demolish the structure of the dargah (shrine) while preserving the mazaar (grave) of Rashid-ud-din Chishti. On the morning of May 1, 2006, while they were meeting with the mayor and municipal commissioner to negotiate the final details of the compromise, a police inspector had been ordered to go to Fatehpura Road “with all available force and ammunition” to provide security for the municipal workers who had been sent there to demolish the shrine.140

As the municipal workers and the police began to arrive, a large number of residents of the area surrounded the shrine to prevent its demolition.141 Prior to their arrival, several Hindu nationalist politicians, including elected representatives of the municipal council, had congregated at the site of the dargah. Nalin Bhatt, a former minister in the state government and the leader of the group, later told the press that they had come to Fatehpura to ensure that the municipal workers and police would carry out the demolition and not withdraw in the face of Muslim opposition.142 As soon as municipal workers began to approach the shrine with heavy vehicles, the Muslim residents who had gathered to protect the shrine were attacked by the police who fired teargas shells and bullets. Two local residents, Hussain Dhobi and Mohammed Ayaz Mansuri, were killed by the police, both shot in the head at close range. By mid-afternoon, there were no traces of the dargah and Rashid-ud-din Chishti’s grave was now buried under a fresh layer of pavement. And by late afternoon, most areas of Vadodara had been placed under

140 “Police Unable to Keep Violence from Spreading,” Indian Express (Ahmedabad), May 1, 2012.
141 “Vadodara Flares Up Again as Old Dargah Is Demolished, 4 Killed 2012,” Indian Express (Ahmedabad), May 2, 2006.
142 Nalin Bhatt, senior leader of the city unit of the BJP, told several correspondents from the vernacular press that he and his colleagues had gone to Fatehpura Road to supervise the demolition. My notes on ETV-Gujarat news broadcast of May 1, 2012. See also reports from the India Express (Ahmedabad), Times of India (Ahmedabad). In the vernacular media, the events in Baroda were reported in the Gujarat Samachar and Divya Bhaskar.
curfew. At the same time, large groups of men organized by the Hindu nationalist movement began attacking Muslims in different parts of the city. Despite the curfew, and the deployment of the central reserve police and a small army contingent, the violence continued for three days. At around midnight on May 2, the residents of Kismet Colony on Ajwa Road were attacked and Mohammed Abdulghani Vohra, who was returning home from work, was killed by Hindutva activists who set fire to his car.

Although there are obvious differences of scale and intensity between the violence in 2002 and the violence in 2006, I would argue that both instances of violence are intertwined; and furthermore that both depend on and contribute to constructing the Muslim as the other in Gujarat. While the former has received a lot of attention in journalistic and academic studies of anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat, more “routine” forms of violence, like the one that I describe here and which was enacted in the name of urban renewal and development, are indicative of a widespread normalization of anti-Muslim sentiment and are, I would argue, just as important to analyze. 143 During the pogrom of 2002, the initial assaults on Muslims in Vadodara (and in other parts of north and central Gujarat), were launched by the Hindu nationalist movement, and state institutions became complicit in the violence. According to human rights activists, on many occasions the police either refused to protect victims or encouraged the perpetrators; and in several well-documented incidents, they participated in the violence. When victims went to register their complaints, the police systematically refused to record accurate FIRS and filed manipulated panchnamas (e.g., Concerned Citizens Tribunal 2002; Human Rights Watch 2002; PUCL 2002). In 2006, however, the initial assault on Muslim lives and properties was carried out by the police under the supervision of the Hindu nationalist controlled city administration.

Although state officials and the press described the events on Fatehpura Road as a “riot,” the

143 See Chapter II for further examples of these more “routine” forms of violence.
“rioting” only began later in the evening of May 1, when the local leadership of the Hindu nationalist movement sent out large groups of its activists to attack Muslims in other parts of Vadodara. The state’s characterization of Muslim opposition to the demolition as a riot served to legitimize both the use of violence and the Hindu nationalist claim that Muslims are an obstacle/threat Gujarat’s progress.

Shrines dedicated to the mother goddess, to the simian deity Hanuman, to Ramdev Pir or to a minor Sufi are ubiquitous in urban and rural Gujarat. Some are old, while others are of recent vintage, but the majority of these shrines are modest structures occupying a few square feet of space. In some cases, they can be found occupying the middle of streets and sidewalks or attached to the boundary walls of properties in posh neighborhoods. In the urban spaces of Ahmedabad and of other large cities of Gujarat, these informal shrines are everywhere. The older shrines, many of which are dedicated to Hanuman or mataji (mother goddess) are no more than three or four feet in height. These older Hanuman deris usually contain within them a vermillion colored rock with two eyes protruding up from the ground, while the mataji shrines might contain a small statue of a mother goddess. Very often, there are no worshippers at or near these shrines, which creates the impression that a divine agency has made them appear and compelled the city to organize itself around them. Yet despite this general absence of worshippers around them, shrines like the mazaar of Rashid-ud-din Chishti can also be viewed as contributing to the sacred geography of the city; they function simultaneously as markers of neighborhood identities and as spaces of sociality. The more prominent ones, which receive worshippers from distant parts of the city, also support the livelihood of their caretakers and of street vendors who sell flowers, incense and other offerings.
Since the early 1980s, the construction of these shrines has become a central element in the spatial strategies of the Hindu nationalist movement. During the campaign to demolish the Babri masjid in Ayodhya, the VHP constructed a large number of small Hanuman shrines all over urban and rural Gujarat in order to claim and physically mark urban spaces as Hindu territory. In addition, the VHP established itself in the social and religious life of neighborhoods by sponsoring special aartis and community readings of the Hanuman chalisa. These shrines, which are uniform in their size and design, became vehicles for incorporating urban citizens into the movement through the sponsorship of rituals such as special aartis on Tuesdays and Saturdays when many Hindus visit Hanuman shrines. The construction of small shrines, in other words, has played a key role in the Hindu nationalist project of Hinduizing public space throughout Gujarat. Alongside this, successive Hindu nationalist governments have invoked a neoliberal logic of mobility, efficiency and free flow of peoples and goods to justify the demolition of shrines all the while singling out Muslim spaces of worship. The project of Hinduizing public space in other words is now operating through the secular logic of neoliberal capital.

Partha Chatterjee, in his recent work on political society has observed that with the entrenchment of neo-liberal reforms, urban policy in India has sought to “reclaim public spaces for the use of proper citizens” and to privilege “elite consumption, elite lifestyles, and elite culture” (Chatterjee 2004:131–132). In this context, urban infrastructure improvement frequently consists of widening and improving roads in order to facilitate the mobility of elites and middle classes and the flow of capital and goods while ignoring public amenities such as sidewalks and pedestrian crossings that serve the poor. Not surprisingly, roadside shrines like Rashid-ud-din Chishti’s dargah are increasingly viewed as obstacles to the efficient circulation
of capital and people and unbecoming of modern cities. Gujarat is one of the most urbanized states of India and to a large extent, the power of the Hindu nationalist movement in the state has been rooted in its ability to mobilize and cater to its predominantly Hindu and middle class constituencies in the cities of the state. Over the past two decades, it has been the dominant power in the municipal governments of large cities such as Ahmedabad and Vadodara. This period, which has coincided with the neo-liberal reforms of the Indian economy, has also been characterized by the reorganization of urban spaces in a manner that privileges middle class and elite interests. For the contemporary Hindu nationalist movement, the privileging of individual responsibility and of the idea of progress in neo-liberal discourse makes it particularly amenable to realizing its majoritarian goals in contemporary Gujarat.

In this project, the urban poor and Muslims in Gujarat become discursively excluded from conceptions of the public and physically relegated to the margins of the city spaces. For example, the majority of Muslims in the largest cities of Gujarat (i.e., Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, and Rajkot) live in slum-like conditions in areas that are deprived of public services and that lack in basic infrastructure. In Vadodara, Muslim opposition to the demolition of the Rashid-ud-din’s shrine was characterized as defiance, in the words of the Municipal Commissioner of city, of “the larger public good.” During the 2002 pogrom, observers of Gujarat noted that the vernacular press had played a central role instigating and justifying the violence against Muslims by systematically representing Muslims as criminal and as enemies of the nation (Varadarajan 2002; Editors Guild of India 2002). This time, however, the judiciary

144 The Editors Guild of India which conducted an enquiry into the coverage during the 2002 pogrom found that Gujarati-language newspapers published numerous articles inciting readers to avenge the death of the kar sevaks in Godhra. In many cases, newspapers editorials and articles described Muslim habitations in urban Gujarat as “mini-Pakistan” and caricatured those Hindus who did not participate in the violence as cowards. See Aakar Patel, et al., Rights and Wrongs: Ordeal by Fire in the Killing Fields of Gujarat (Editors Guild of India 2002).
and the English language media also entered into the fray portraying Muslims as standing in opposition to development and progress. The local edition of the *Indian Express*, which covered the incident extensively, reported that the demolition had been carried out after the VHP launched a campaign demanding “action against Muslim shrines.” Ironically, in the same report, the writer claimed that “dargahs are generally not considered places of worship by Muslims,” implying that the Muslim community’s claims about the religious significance of the shrine were theologically suspect. The Ahmedabad editions of the *Times of India* also published a lengthy article about the numerous “religious structures” encroaching on public space in Gujarat’s cities and attributed this to the permissive attitude of municipal authorities. The following day, a two-judge bench issued a *sou moto* ruling on the basis of this article, directing the police and municipal governments “to take immediate steps for the removal of encroachments by religious structures on public space without discrimination and submit their report.” At first glance, the judicial intervention seemed reasonable. However, the ruling made no provisions requiring authorities to find alternative spaces for these shrines and seemed to reiterate the Hindu nationalist vision of secularism and democracy as majoritarian rule, which was succinctly stated by the mayor of Vadodara: “We are telling Hindus to remove temples, how could we allow the other community to remove it [dargah] partially. A balance needed to be maintained. The demolition drive will continue.”

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145 I say ironically, because the claim that a Sufi tomb has no religious significance reproduces an understanding of Islam that is itself the subject of intense debate amongst Muslims not just in India, but everywhere else. See “How Politics Made Dargah Removal Point of Prestige for the Civic Body,” *Indian Express*, 2006. In another context, see Talal Asad’s discussion of the headscarf debate in France for another example of how secularist discourse justifies its exclusions through the invocation of theological arguments, while invalidating counter-arguments that go against its interpretations.

146 *Times of India*, May 2, 2006.
Can a Gujarati be Muslim?:

Now that I have provided more of a context for it, I return in this section to Devy’s article “Hating Muslims is a Natural Thing in Gujarat” and the debate that followed its publication in Tehelka. Tehelka is an English newsmagazine published out of Delhi; it is not accessible to most Gujaratis, and Devy’s remarks would have probably gone unnoticed had it not been translated into Gujarati and then published in Nirikshak, a small but highly respected journal of literary and social criticism. In the world of Gujarati letters, Devy is a respected figure because of his pioneering work on Adivasi literature and languages. Until recently, literary production in Gujarat was dominated by middle class and upper caste narratives. However, since the 1980s there has been a flourishing of Dalit and Adivasi literature in Gujarat. Devy, who established the Adivasi Academy in Tejgadh near Vadodara, has played a seminal role in the growth of the latter. Along with Devy’s article, the editors also included a passionate defense of the idea of Gujarat by Sirish Panchal, a professor of literature at M.S. University and one of the leading literary critics of Gujarat. The publication of the two articles came a few weeks before the Adivasi Academy was to host the annual Gujarati Sahitya Parishad conference. In the debate that ensued, several prominent Gujarati writers, including Panchal, demanded that the Parishad not hold the conference at the academy because Devy had “insulted Gujarat” (Chinu Modi). This demand reflected a division that had emerged during the 2002 pogrom between Gujarati writers who claimed to speak on behalf of Gujarat and critics of Hindu nationalist politics whose views were articulated mainly in the English language media. It was also a reflection of a public sphere in which Hindu nationalism and secular nationalism were the only available frameworks for thinking about religious nationalist violence and prejudice against Muslims in Gujarat.

Panchal’s response was entitled “Shu Gujaratni Praja aatli Badhi Bhundi che?” (“Are the People of Gujarat that Hateful?”). The Gujarati word bhundi (ભૂંડી) means small-minded, wicked, sinful, and hateful. See (Panchal 2006).
As argued earlier, the contemporary debate revisited the question of religion/religious difference and national identity that had first been posed by nineteenth century Gujarati writers and were foundational to the modern Gujarati literary tradition. In subsequent decades, the question had been addressed by Gandhi, whose idea of Gujarat was firmly rooted in the principle of *ahimsa* which he defined as both nonviolence and equality. Nineteenth century and Gandhian articulations of Gujarat were constitutive of the modern Gujarati literary tradition, an inheritance that many contemporary Gujarati writers address, struggle with, and rework in their writings. For contemporary writers, their interventions have to account for this problematic in a context of Hindu nationalist violence and at a time when the Hindu nationalist movement claims to represent the majority and presents itself as the authentically secular alternative. However, despite claims that they represent opposite sides in an argument over the idea of Gujarat, both conceive of and represent the Muslim as the other of the Gujarati. The protagonists in this debate are in other words not as far apart as they suggest.

In Gujarat, the reception of Devy’s article was mediated by a discursive context marked by two mutually constitutive pairs of oppositions, Hindu versus Muslim and Gujarati versus English. In the narratives of Hindu nationalist politicians about the 2002 pogrom, Gujarati and Hindu were collapsed into one another in order to create the impression that all Gujarati Hindus were united in their support for the violence. This impression was reinforced by news reporting in the vernacular papers, especially in the two largest dailies, the *Gujarat Samachar* and

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148 Amongst recent works that address this question are Joseph Macwan’s *Angaliyat* (1988) and Bindu Bhatt’s *Akhepatar* (1999). Macwan’s novel which is available in translation as *The Stepchild* (2004) is the first Dalit novel in Gujarati literature and was published in the aftermath of the anti-reservation violence of 1981 and 1985. In the novel, Macwan represents the rise of Patidar (Patel) during the anti-colonial struggle and their political domination of the postcolonial state from the perspective of the Vankars, a dalit community. Bhatt’s *Akhepatar* (a corruption of the Gujarati word *akshaypatra*, meaning inexhaustible vessel) is a melancholic novel based on her mother’s experience of displacement and uprootedness and her futile search for a homeland in Gujarat after she left Karachi during the Partition.
According to one study on the 2002 pogrom, these newspapers not only reproduced Hindu nationalist narratives and but also incited Hindus to participate in the violence. In addition, the editorial pages of these newspapers were dominated by prominent members of the literary establishment such as Gunvant Shah and Chinu Modi and “popular” writers such as Chandrakant Bakshi who were sympathetic to Hindu nationalist arguments and further contributed to the impression that Gujarati Hindus were united in their support for the violence. Gujarati writers and public intellectuals such as Achyut Yagnik, Prakash Shah, Girish Patel, Narayan Desai (the son of Gandhi’s personal secretary, Mahadev Desai) and J.S. Bandukwala who were critical of the Hindu nationalist project were excluded from the editorial pages of the vernacular papers.

The support for Hindu nationalist politics expressed by many Gujarati writers and public intellectuals in 2002 was in stark contrast to how their predecessors had responded to the violence in September 1969, when several hundred Muslims were killed within three days in Ahmedabad. At that time, the poet and Gandhian social critic Umashankar Joshi had organized the literary community to provide relief and support for the victim. As the president of the

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149 In 2002, the two largest newspapers in Gujarat were *Gujarat Samachar* and *Sandesh* with circulation figures of 810,000 and 705,000 respectively. Given that newspapers are shared by multiple readers and headline stories are discussed at street corners, *chai laris* (tea stalls) and *paan* (betel) shops, the audience for these papers is far larger than these figures suggest. The Editor’s Guild of India which conducted an inquiry on media coverage and censorship during the pogrom concluded that unlike the English and Hindi media outlets, the vernacular papers, mainly *Sandesh* and *Gujarat Samachar*, had been “provocative, irresponsible and blatantly violative of all norms of media ethics (sic)” (2002:2). This is not to say that the English media was beyond reproach. The *Times of India*, which has the largest readership for an English newspaper in Gujarat, frequently reproduced the claims of Hindu nationalist leaders. However, the Editor’s Guild did not address this and settled on the conclusion that the English language media were better than their Gujarati peers. In the process, it reinforced the claim to moral superiority that often underlies many English-language publications that see themselves as more modern, professional and progressive than their vernacular counterparts. Nor did the editors raise questions about the ethical and political implications of the preferred media practice of depending on privileged access to political leaders for their coverage. Instead, the report simply assumed that if the journalists are trained in the proper ethics then they will ask the right questions and report objectively. However, as Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi has pointed out, the mediasphere in Gujarat during the pogrom was a like a hall of mirrors, with the *Times of India* either repeating some of the more egregious stories from *Sandesh* and *Gujarat Samachar* or reproducing without any question the statements of Hindu nationalist leaders (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012:64–66).
Sahitya Parishad and Vice Chancellor of Gujarat University he had ensured that both institutions remained autonomous from political pressures. However, by the time the pogrom of 2002 began, the most vocal and visible writers and public intellectuals in the Gujarati public sphere were individuals sympathetic to Hindu nationalist politics or directly connected to the movement. Both the Sahitya Parishad and university literature departments were dominated by individuals affiliated with the Hindu nationalist movement. Amongst these, Keka Shastri, the Sanskrit scholar, founder of the VHP and former president of its Gujarat unit, and one-time president of the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad, is the most well-known outside of the state. But there were many others in the literary establishment that endorsed the violence.

Both during and after the pogrom it was not unusual for editorialists in the vernacular press to describe critics of Hindu nationalism as anti-Gujarati and anti-Hindu (e.g., Bakshi 2002; Modi 2004). This exclusion, combined with Hindu nationalist attacks on a peace meeting called by writers at the Sabarmati Ashram and on professor Bandukwala’s home in Vadodara aggravated the sense of fear and isolation felt by many who opposed the violence. In 2006, four years after the pogrom, several of my interlocutors, who are authors and who teach

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151 Shastri, who was 96 in 2002, told the journalist Sheela Bhatt that the VHP had used voter registration lists to identify of Muslim-owned businesses and drawn up plans to attack them on the morning of February 28, 2002, the day after the incident in Godhra. In the interview he had insisted that the assault on Muslim had to be carried out: “Karvunj pade. Karvuj pade. [It had to be done. It had to be done.] We don’t like it, but we were angry. Lust and anger are blind.” During my fieldwork and also during visits to Ahmedabad in prior years, several friends and acquaintances told me that Shastri was a controversial figure and that he had participated in the attacks on Muslims in 1969. I found it impossible to verify these accounts, but his life-long immersion in Hindu nationalist politics and in giving shape to the movement in Gujarat is well documented. So his views in the interview should come as no surprise. Sheela Bhatt’s report “It had to be done, VHP leader says of Riots” (2002) can be found at http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/mar/12train.htm. For an analysis of Shastri’s racist views see (Nussbaum 2007).

152 Bakshi’s editorials are collected in a book entitled Godhra Kand: Gujarat Virudh Secular Taliban (The Story of Godhra: The Secular-Taliban Oppose Gujarat”). He repeatedly argued in his columns that secularists and Islamic “fundamentalism” were the main problems in Gujarat. Another writer, S.K. Modi, who has now published his work in English, argued that the English-language media dislikes Hindus and Hinduism.
in literature departments in colleges in Ahmedabad, said that they had felt overwhelmed by the intensity of Hindu nationalist violence. Overcome by a sense of isolation and fear, they had started to feel that conversation about the violence had become impossible. Hannah Arendt has argued that humans “insofar as they live and move and act in this world, can experience meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves” (Arendt 1958:4). The sedimentation of Hindu nationalist narratives and understandings of Gujarat within the literary community, as one writer put it to me, “made me wonder ‘whom can I speak to? [koni sathe vaat karu?].’ I am sure I wasn’t the only one feeling this way in 2002 because of the horrific violence. There has been no remorse, no self-reflection amongst us writers and intellectuals that we might be responsible for what happened and that we should find ways to help reduce the prejudice against Muslims.”

Prakash Shah, the editor of the Nirikshak, has pointed out that although Devy’s essay was deeply troubling in many respects, his description of his hometown of Vadodara as a “desert” and of Gujarat as inhospitable to critique and self-reflection ought to be taken seriously given the pogrom of 2002. He added that Devy’s essay also pointed to how banal prejudice and discrimination against Muslims has become in the lives of middle class Hindus of Gujarat. With the publication of Devy’s article in Nirikshak in August 2006, however, responses from prominent Gujarati writers reiterated the English versus Gujarati and secularist versus Hindu nationalist oppositions that had become entrenched in the Gujarati public sphere during the pogrom. At the heart of these claims were questions of authenticity and of claiming the power to represent and speak on behalf of Gujarat and Gujaratis. Many of the initial responses to Devy’s essay betrayed the type of hostility that was visible during the pogrom when critics writing in

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153Personal Interview, Ahmedabad, January 18, 2007. Name withheld at the request of subject.
English were characterized as anti-Gujarati. Several respondents, including one of the most widely read contemporary Gujarati poets, Chinu Modi, attacked Devy of being an outsider who had maligned Gujarat and Gujaratis. The senior poet Sitanshu Yashchandra and Sirish Panchal, who responded with passionate critiques of the essentialist claims in Devy’s article, accused him of bad faith. Panchal argued that “it is Gujarati intellectuals and English journalists [who] want to keep this wound [the pogrom] bleeding.” And, “non-Gujaratis, who have no perception or feeling for the place continually write whatever they feel like about Gujarat and as a result they created the impression that is an infernal place” (Panchal 2006:6–8).

Although this binary characterization implies that a radical difference exists between the English language/secular public sphere and the vernacular/Hindu nationalist one (a binary characterization that the English language public sphere also perpetuates), I would argue that there are in fact many continuities between them when it comes to the Muslim question. There is indeed much that is troubling and disturbing about both Devy’s essay and many of the responses to his argument. Although Devy wrote his article to express solidarity with victims of prejudice and violence, the essay inflicts its own form of epistemic violence and contributes to othering the Muslims of Gujarat. On Devi’s view, the fact that “Gujarat is the only state with a sizable number of Muslims but no Urdu paper,” is proof of the state’s hostility towards Muslims. Urdu and Islam are of course not identical with each other. To collapse the two requires an elision of both the heterogeneity of Gujarati Muslim communities and the contested status of Urdu within these communities.

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155 As previously mentioned, Gujarat has one of most diverse Muslim populations in South Asia. According to one study there are eighty-seven distinct Muslim jamaats (communities) in the state. In addition, the majority of Gujarat’s Muslims did not speak or read Urdu until very recently. The spread of Urdu in Gujarat is connected to the influence of nationalist politics in the early part of the twentieth century and more recently to the influence of
Equally unsettling is Devi’s characterization of the source of the hatred of Muslims in Gujarat. According to Devy, “hatred” of Muslims “practiced here [in Gujarat] is not conscious or learnt. It is just somehow normal, as nature would have meant it to be” (Devy 2006). It is ironic that in making this statement, Devy in fact reproduces the Hindu nationalist movement’s justifications for its own violence against Muslims. On this view, communalism and violence against Muslims are rooted in Gujarati prakruti (nature). During my fieldwork, several of my interlocutors within the Hindu nationalist movement made similar arguments. By attributing the violence to the prakruti of Gujarat’s Hindus and Muslims, Hindu nationalist leaders elided their own pravruti (work, labor) in producing the violence. I provide some examples of such invocations in the next chapter where I argue that such comments are performative statements that serve to naturalize that which is being described as natural, and are part of the Hindu nationalist project of making Gujarat a Hindu nationalist state where Muslims are outsiders.

Several prominent Gujarati writers took Devy to task for insisting that there is an identifiable, singular, and transparent object called the “Gujarati nature,” one of whose characteristics is the hatred of Muslims (see for example Sanghvi 2006, Panchal 2006, and Kothari 2006). Others pointed out that the violence was concentrated in north and central Gujarat and suggested that this was evidence that not all “Gujaratis” hate Muslims (Sanghvi 2006, and Yashchandra 2006). However, what these objections failed to point out is that Devy’s argument hinges on the assumption that Gujarati and Hindu are identical. Unless he means that it is natural not just for Gujarati Hindus but also for Gujarati Muslims to hate Muslims (which is unlikely), then he is making a statement about Gujarati nature that assumes and normalizes its

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Islamic reform movements. In addition, due to discrimination and prejudice, Muslims in Gujarat are increasingly dependent on schools operated by Islamic charities. On the Muslim communities of Gujarat see the Anthropological Survey of India’s People of Gujarat (2003), and Misra’s Muslim Communities in Gujarat (1964). On the Hindi-Urdu controversy in general, see King (1994) and Orsini (2002).
Hinduness. In other words, the debate served to reinforce the notion that a Gujarati cannot be Muslim and is indicative of how deeply sedimented the Hindu nationalist vision of Gujarat has become in the discourse of Gujarati writers and intellectuals. Indeed, even critics of Devy who argued that it is not natural for Gujaratis to hate Muslims failed to point out that Muslims are Gujarati too. For example, Sirish Panchal, a secular-liberal critic who initiated the campaign to relocate the Sahitya Parishad conference and wrote one of the more nuanced and passionate responses to Devy, reiterated the idea that Gujarati and Muslim are incommensurable categories:

> I have spent a good part of my life in the Panigate area [a formerly mixed area of Vadodara]. Even today many of my relatives live there. Whenever I write about this city, I do not do so with the security and luxury of an outsider (pardesi) or a tourist (pravasi). At one time, we [Devy and I] were very close to each other and shared our intimate thoughts and feelings with each other. But, for several years we have had no contact. So does he now feel that I have become a less generous person? Has my capacity to understand him diminished? Let us ask him if he understands the social geography of Vadodara? If he cares to look, he would have noticed how readily Hindus and Muslims clash with each other and how quickly they embrace each other after a fight. In this riot torn Vadodara, there is a Muslim police inspector who often goes to a Vaniya’s [bania’s] shop and asks for water. The shopkeeper offers him water in the same glass that he drinks from. Our dhobi [laundryman], our vegetable vendor, our embroider, our pinjara (one who works on mattresses), our pharmacist, they are all Muslims. They do not survive on my business alone, they have numerous Gujarati clients. (Shirish Panchal, 2006)

The last line in the quote above which mentions approvingly that “Muslims” have “Gujarati” clients is particularly telling and problematic. By positing a Gujarati versus Muslim binary, this author, just like Devy and the Hindu nationalists that both criticize, suggests that Gujaratis are by definition non-Muslim. What Panchal challenges in other words is the applicability and factuality of Devy’s theory, not its underlying premise. So even when critics of Hindu nationalism and of anti-Muslim violence, like Panchal and Devy, speak of Gujaratis and
Gujaratiness, it to Hindus that they are referring. The reference to generosity earlier in Panchal’s quote is also particularly telling and problematic for it suggests that Hindus (or what he calls Gujaratis) need to be “generous” in order to co-exist or do business with Muslims. As Wendy Brown has suggested in another context, tolerance is a modality of power that seeks to reinscribe the “characterological superiority of the tolerant over the tolerated” (2006: 178). Tolerance as a political practice, she further argues, is “always conferred by the dominant, it is always a certain expression of domination even as it offers protection or incorporation to the less powerful, and tolerance as an individual virtue has a similar asymmetrical structure” (2006: 178).

It is this same asymmetrical relation of power that is reinforced, I would argue, when Hindu or secular critics of anti-Muslim violence and discrimination invoke their own generosity towards Muslims to disprove the notion that it is within “Gujarati nature” to hate Muslims.

**Conclusion:**

I want to end this chapter with a few remarks on Devy’s observation that he feels that his hometown of Vadodara is like a “desert,” a place where civility is absent, where civil society is inhospitable to critique and self-reflection. In light of the 2002 pogrom and the widespread prejudice against Muslims, his experience of urban middle class life in contemporary Gujarat is understandable. Long-time observers of Gujarat have noted that one of the striking features of the pogrom was the extent of participation by law-abiding, urban middle class citizens in the violence (Nandy 2002; Yagnik and Sheth 2002). In Ahmedabad, for example, Muslim owned businesses on posh C.G. Road were looted by prosperous residents of the area. In several instances in Ahmedabad and in Vadodara, “respectable” middle class individuals organized and
lead large bodies of Hindus that perpetrated some of the worse massacres. Devy’s privileging of civility and urbanity and his belief that a fully developed civil society could mitigate anti-Muslim violence and prejudice are not unusual. A similar privileging of civility and modern urbanity informs the political scientist Ashutosh Varshney’s densely researched comparative study on the incidence of communal riots in Indian cities (2002). Writing before the pogrom of 2002, Varshney argues that “communal riots” are less likely to occur in cities that are endowed with robust civic institutions and that provide opportunities for “associational” and “everyday forms of engagement” between Hindus and Muslims (Varshney 2002: 9 & 45). Here is a summary of his major argument:

What accounts for the difference between peace and violence? Though not anticipated when the project began, the pre-existing local networks of civic engagement between the two communities stand out as the single most important proximate cause. Where such networks of engagement exist, tensions and conflicts were regulated and managed; where they are missing, communal identities led to endemic and ghastly violence. As already stated, these networks can be broken down into two parts: *associational* forms of engagement and *everyday* forms of engagement. The former ties are formed in organizational settings; the latter require no organization. Both forms of engagement, if intercommunal, promote peace, but the capacity of the associational forms to withstand national-level “exogenous shocks”—such as India’s partition in 1947 or the demolition of the Baburi mosque in December 1992 in full public gaze by Hindu militants—is substantially higher. (Varshney 2002: 9)

While his theory might sound convincing, in the episodes of violence that Varshney draws his conclusions from, the violence very frequently occurred in localities where Hindus and Muslims did live in proximity to each other and perpetrators and victims were neighbors. It also occurred

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156 In Ahmedabad, where the violence was most concentrated, there seemed to be a division of labor in the organization of the pogrom, with middle class residents engaged in looting and apologetics and the non-Muslim poor and lower castes engaged in the massacres of their Muslim neighbors. But, middle class involvement in the pogrom was not confined to looting and offering apologies. In several cases, “respectable” individuals also organized massacres. In Vadodara, a former mayor led one such attack, while in Ahmedabad, Maya Kodnani, a gynecologist by training and Jaideep Patel, a pathologist, organized and led the crowds that carried out the massacre at Naroda-Patiya, where approximately 150 individuals were killed. In fact, the title of the Human Rights Watch report “We Have No Orders to Save You” (2002b) is a direct quote from a witness who was told so by a police inspector responsible for Naroda-Patiya. For the testimonies of some of the perpetrators, see Ashish Khetan’s reports in *Tehelka*, November 3, 2007. For more on Kodnani, see Chapter IV.
in cities like Ahmedabad and Vadodara, which due to the legacy of anti-colonial nationalism, are endowed with a dense network of voluntary associations and now NGOs. To be fair to Varhsney, he does show that the influence of these institutions has diminished since the 1960s. Nevertheless, in Varshney’s account, civic associations and the inter-communal ties that they are expected to facilitate are presented as operating outside of the field of relations of power. The possibility that these institutions might themselves be implicated in the production of violence is not entertained in large part because communal violence is seen as antithetical to civil society and thus to modernity. In addition, there is no recognition in Varshney’s argument of the myriad ways in which the legacies of colonialism, the formation of the modern nation-state and the making of regions such as Gujarat have reconfigured social relations and understandings of community, religion, region, tradition, history, difference, etc. It is as if these relations and understandings exist outside of history and outside of power/knowledge relations. Finally, Varshney assumes that public interaction in modernity occurs between unmarked, free and equal subjects and is always transparent and unmediated by differences of class, gender, caste and religion. However, as Talal Asad has reminded us, “the public sphere is a space necessarily (not just contingently) articulated by power. And everyone who enters it must address power’s disposition of people and things, the dependence of some on the goodwill of others” (Asad 2003:184).

Asad’s point was brought home to me during in January 2010, when a Gujarati Muslim friend who is married to a Hindu and works as a senior correspondent for a national newspaper, described what it was like to go to public events and political rallies in Ahmedabad. Unlike the majority of Ahmedabad’s residents, she enjoys privileged access to political rallies, meetings organized by NGOs, civic associations, conferences and art exhibits. As a secularized Muslim,
she is also indistinguishable from non-Muslims of the city. Yet despite all of this, she once told me “At least three-four times every week, I am made to feel like an outsider. This is my city….I grew up here, but a lot of people when they hear my first name [she has taken her husband’s family name] start saying stupid things like ‘What kind of name is that? Are you Gujarati?’ Just a few days before, I went to cover a meeting organized by the real estate developers association and one person there saw my card and started telling me that there must be something wrong with my parents for having given me a name like this [meaning a Muslim first name]. Clearly, she had decided that a Gujarati cannot be Muslim. Some days when the editor gives me an assignment, my first inclination is to tell him to send someone else.”

The point being that entry is predicated on being able to prove that one is a Gujarati (i.e. a Hindu), an impossibility for Muslims in Gujarat today.

As I have tried to show in this chapter, the notion that violence is reflective of a breakdown of civil society and debate elides the fact that debate within civil society often takes place in majoritarian and hegemonic terms. So while Devy sees himself as an advocate for Muslim Gujaratis and as a critic of Hindu nationalist violence and of the complicity of the Hindu Middle class, including its writers and intellectuals, his intervention in the public sphere enacts its own form of epistemic violence and participates in reinforcing the idea that Muslims do not belong in Gujarat. And while the English-language secular-liberal press often posits itself as morally superior and as a critic of the violence and complicities of its vernacular counterpart, it is often, as I hope to have shown through this example, just as unable to rethink and challenge the basic premise that Hindu and Gujarati are identical or that Muslims are an obstacle to development and progress. This suggests that a widespread normalization of an exclusionary notion of Gujaratiness and Gujarati asmita has taken place, one which I will argue in the next

\[157\] My notes of January 14, 2010 (Ahmedabad). Name withheld at the request of the subject.
chapter owes its sedimentation in part to a colonial genealogy of positing the Muslim as the outsider in Gujarat.
Chapter IV

Revisiting the Idea of Gujarat

Introduction:

In December 2002, about seven months after the organized violence of the pogrom against Muslims had come to an end, elections for the legislative assembly were held in Gujarat. The Hindu nationalist chief minister Narendra Modi launched the BJP’s election campaign with the Gujarat Gaurav Yatra (pilgrimage or journey for the pride of Gujarat), which began at the shrine of Bahuchar mata in north Gujarat. After seeking the blessings of the mother goddess, Modi inaugurated the campaign by giving a speech at a political gathering where he showed no remorse for the violence that had taken place. Instead, he implicitly equated Muslims with evil and described them as a threat to Gujarati self-respect: “This is a holy place of power (shakti), the power for the extermination of asuras [demons]. We have resolved to destroy and stamp out all forces of evil who pose a threat to the self-respect of Gujarat.” Not only that, his speech singled out Muslims who had sought shelter in relief camps operated by Islamic charities and voluntary associations after they had been forced out of their homes by Hindu nationalist mobs. The camps and the concentration of Muslims inside them were portrayed as a danger to public health and as a drain on the state’s resources. At the time of the election campaign, Gujarat’s Muslims continued to face threats and hostility from their Hindu neighbors and continued to feel vulnerable because of a well-organized campaign of social boycott and stigmatization. Even so, the Hindu nationalist government claimed that law and order had been restored and ordered the

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158 The Bahuchar mata (Becharaji) shrine is located in north Gujarat and is frequented by those wishing for a male child or seeking cures for diseases and ailments. The mother goddess is also the patron/guardian of hijaras (eunuchs). In popular iconography, Bahuchar is represented as a young woman riding a rooster. However at the shrine, the main object of worship is a yantra (diagram) representing a vulva that is hidden behind an image of the goddess on the rooster. Although the shrine now attracts pilgrims from a broad range of castes and communities, traditionally worshippers of the goddess belonged to Rajput castes and to subaltern groups such as the kolis, thakardas, and kamalis.
closure of these relief camps on grounds of public health. In a predictable inversion, Modi blamed the Muslim victims for their plight, chastising them for their “excessive” reproductive practices, and characterizing them as a threat to the development and prosperity of Gujarat:

Do you think that we should be operating relief camps? Should your government operate baby producing centers? We want to achieve progress for Gujarat by adopting family planning with determination. But they [Muslims] will say *ame panch ane amaara panchis* [we are 5 and our 25]! In whose name do we pursue development? Shouldn’t Gujarat implement family planning? Why should *their inhibitions* prevent Gujarat from developing? Which religious community keeps coming in the way of Gujarat’s progress? Why is money not reaching the poor? If these [Muslim] people keep on producing children, then should our children be limited to repairing cycle punctures [flat tires]? If we want Gujarat to prosper, then every child must be able to get an education and become enlightened….for this reason, those people [i.e., Muslims], who keep reproducing need to be taught a lesson. If we object to their exploding population, they complain. Can you tell me if there is any nation like ours that allows their population to explode like this?159

This speech, like several others during the campaign, was designed to reinforce the Hindu nationalist argument that political differences and violence between Hindus and Muslims are the *inevitable* result of *inherent* differences in their ways of life. By representing Muslims as more invested in their religious traditions (what Modi describes in his speech as their “inhibitions”), Modi creates and enacts a contrast between the parasitic Muslim who is a drain on the region’s resources and a hindrance to its progress, and the idealized Gujarati Hindu who is willing to transcend the demands of his/her religious tradition in the name of the region/nation and its development. In addition, he constructs Muslim social life as a threat to the well-being of Gujarat (by which he means Hindu Gujarat) such that for the latter to flourish the former must

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159 Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh’s book *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* (2002) describes a similar discourse within Israel about the reproductive practices of its Arab citizens. Not unlike Israeli discourse about Arabs, Hindu nationalist discourse seeks to pathologize the Muslim community’s ways of being and its attachments to its traditions as coming in the way of development and progress. In both cases, population control is invoked as a rational and benevolent solution to what are seen as the excessive and pathological reproductive practices of a minority that is a drain on the advancement of the majority population.
Such statements serve not only to stigmatize Muslims and question their regional and national loyalties, they also serve to interpellate Gujarati Hindus into enacting a particular way of being that privileges loyalty to the region, and thus to the nation-state, above all. In other words, these statements serve to make clear that a display of loyalty to the region/nation at this particular conjuncture is contingent on accepting the premise that Muslims are an other in and a drain on Gujarat. This is not unlike the discourse of *laïcité* analyzed by Talal Asad in his provocative reading of the headscarf debate in contemporary France (Asad 2006). He argues that statements in the French public sphere about the “problem” of the headscarf are at the same time pedagogical tools that seek to incite French citizens into recognizing themselves as loyal subjects of the Republic and endowing them with the right kind of “educated emotions” (Asad 2006:514). Similarly in this context, Gujarati Hindus are being incited to perceive themselves as loyal citizens unlike Muslims who are alien and incommensurable others coming in the way of Gujarat’s progress and prosperity. How this notion of the Muslims of Gujarat as alien and incommensurable with Gujarati Hindus who are the true representatives of the region has come to be posited as an incontestable truth in contemporary Gujarat is part of what this chapter seeks to think about.

After an intense mobilization that aggravated the injustice and vulnerability of Muslims in Gujarat, the Hindu nationalist BJP won 122 out of 182 assembly seats in the 2002 elections and formed the government. Not only was Modi re-elected but so were several leaders of the movement who were identified as organizers and perpetrators of the violence in major cities such as Ahmedabad and Vadodara. The most notorious example was that of Maya Kodnani, a gynecologist and activist of the women’s wing of the RSS and one of the main organizers of the

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160 This formulation is inspired by Michel Foucault’s argument on state racism in his *Society Must be Defended* (2002).
Naroda Patiya massacre who won the election from the Naroda constituency of Ahmedabad.\textsuperscript{161} Naroda includes the middle class areas of Shahibaug with their broad, leafy streets and bungalows, and the planned spaces of Kuber Nagar and Sardarnagar, where Partition refugees from Sindh were rehabilitated by the Indian state.\textsuperscript{162} Even today, Kuber Nagar and Sardarnagar are described by residents of Ahmedabad as camps because they were originally part of the military cantonment, which was expanded to accommodate the larger Indian army during World War II. It also includes the industrial and working class area of Naroda-Patiya, whose population was comprised of migrant workers (Hindu and non-Hindu) from north India and from Karnataka, Maharashtra and other parts of Gujarat. A significant number of residents of the area were also members of subaltern communities such as the chaara, a group that was classified by the colonial state as a criminal tribe.

On February 28, 2002, a large body of men numbering between 5000 and 10000, including many chaara, carried out a massacre of approximately 100 Muslim residents of Naroda-Patiya. According to survivor testimonies, the crowds were led by Babu Bajrangi (an activist of the Bajrang Dal), Maya Kodnani and Jaideep Patel (the vice-President of the state unit of the VHP). After the killings, several witnesses identified Kodnani and testified that she had provided the killers with fuel (kerosene) and swords. In addition, they told the police (and human rights groups) that Kodnani and Patel had both directed and encouraged the mobs to

\textsuperscript{161} For a details on the massacres in Naroda Patiya and Naroda Gam see “We Have No Orders to Save You”: State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat (Human Rights Watch 2002b) and Crimes against Humanity, 3 Volumes (Concerned Citizens Tribunal 2002).

\textsuperscript{162} On the Sindhi Hindu community of Gujarat and their experience of Partition and its aftermaths see, Rita Kothari’s The Burden of Refuge (2007). For a historically nuanced and rich analysis of the rehabilitation of Partition refugees in Delhi and Karachi, see Vazira Zamindar’s The Long Partition (2007).
attack Muslim residents of the area. At her trial in 2011-2102, survivors further testified that on the day of the massacre, Kodnani had directed the attackers to their target and participated in the destruction of the local mosque known as the Noorani Masjid.

By the time the campaign for the elections began in late 2002, the role of Kodnani, Patel and Bajrangi and other leaders of the movement in the massacres had been thoroughly documented by human rights groups and was widely known by the public in Gujarat. However, throughout the election campaign, the Hindu nationalist movement remained unapologetic about its responsibility for the massacre. Instead, Hindu nationalists combined their anti-Muslim statements with claims that the death of the movement’s activists in Godhra was an attack on Gujarati asmita (Gujarat’s pride), and that the assault on Muslims was in defense of Gujarati asmita. From their perspective, the election of 2002 was in fact a referendum on the legitimacy of their claim that the pogrom of 2002 was a spontaneous and natural reaction by Gujaratis (i.e. Hindus) to the violent incident at the Godhra train station, and that it was a natural extension and legitimate defense of Gujarati pride. These campaign statements in other words served to

163 In September 2012, a special court tried and convicted Kodnani, Patel and Bajrangi of conspiracy to commit murder. The ruling is unprecedented in the judicial history of India in the sense that it is the first time that an elected representative has been sentenced for playing a central role in organizing violence against a minority community. According to Jyotsna Yagnik, the judge who presided over the trial, Kodnani had been protected by the police, who had refused to record evidence implicating her. Instead, they had deliberately filed inaccurate first information reports and panchnamas. Yagnik’s judgment which is over 1200 pages long provides a compelling account of Kodnani’s role in the massacre. However, it needs to be stressed here that the trial is also indicative of the gendered politics of both the Hindu right and the secular state in India. Kodnani is a woman and a relatively junior figure in the Hindu nationalist movement and could not have acted without the support of senior figures in the movement. While she has been tried and convicted, more powerful figures of the BJP and the RSS remain free to pursue their political careers. The most visible of these figures is, of course, Narendra Modi. But there are others. Gordhan Zadaphia, a colleague of Modi’s from their days in the RSS, remains free. During the pogrom in 2002, Zadaphia was minister of state for home affairs and thus directly responsible for the deployment of police forces in the state. Today, he is no longer a member of the BJP and has formed an opposition party that is allied with yet another powerful group of former members of the BJP. Both are united by their own caste affiliations and their opposition to Narendra Modi, who they view as having betrayed the Hindu nationalist movement. For the judgment see: Common Judgment in the matter of State of Gujarat vs Maya Kodnani and 35 others, Sessions Case Nos.235/09, 236/09, 241/09, 242/09, 243/09, 245/09, 246/09 & 270/09 in the Sessions Court, Ahmedabad, India available online at: http://www.cjponline.org/gujaratTrials/narodapatiya/NP%20Full%20Judgmt/Naroda%20Patiya%20-%20Common%20Judgment.pdf. Excerpts of the judgment are also available in Communalism Combat’s Special Issue on Naroda Patiya Verdict (November 2012) online at http://www.sabrang.com/cc/archive/2012/nov2012/index.html. [Accessed May 2, 2013].
naturalize the pogroms in Gujarat and to make an argument for their inevitability; they also served to produce, perform and enact a certain understanding of Gujarati asmita.

In 2007, five years after the pogrom of 2002, fresh elections for the state legislative assembly were held in Gujarat, and once again the BJP was returned to power with a large majority in the assembly. My fieldwork for this project overlapped with this election campaign and I attended several rallies organized by both the secular nationalist Congress and the Hindu nationalist BJP in Ahmedabad and Rajkot. Once again, the Hindu nationalist campaign was launched from the shrine of Bahuchar mata and once again the BJP’s rhetorical strategies were organized around a conception of Gujarati regionalism that was anti-Muslim. In the rhetoric of the Hindu nationalists, and echoing the discourse of the American “war on terror,” Gujarati society was now engaged in a war against “Muslim terrorists.” It was also engaged in a battle against the Congress-led central government in Delhi. On several occasions, Modi and other leaders of the BJP described the ruling party as Dillini Sultanate (the Delhi Sultanate) and repeatedly characterized the Congress party’s professions of upholding the constitutional commitment to secularism and democracy as a ruse for “appeasing” Muslims at the expense of Gujarat and Gujaratis (by which, again, he meant Hindu Gujaratis). This was a coded way of expressing anti-Muslim prejudice and of eliding the distinction between Gujarati and Hindu. It was also a way to present the BJP as the sole protector of Gujaratni asmita, a theme that Hindu nationalist politicians repeated throughout the campaign for the 2007 assembly elections.

It was in the midst of preparations for this election campaign that I first met Maya Kodnani in October 2007. She was then a member of the legislative assembly and was preparing for her reelection campaign. There was much speculation at that time that she would be
promoted to serve as minister if she and her party won the elections.\textsuperscript{164} Several days later, during one of our longer interviews, Kodnani spoke to me about her political trajectory and told me that it was her father who had introduced her to the Hindu nationalist ideas of the RSS. A daughter of refugees of the 1947 Partition, Kodnani grew up in a social milieu dominated by male activists of the RSS. Her father was a member of the RSS in pre-Partition Sindh. After the Karachi riots of January 1948, the family moved to India and lived in Jaipur for several years before settling in north Gujarat. There, Kodnani’s father (whom I later met for an interview) helped establish \textit{shakhas} (chapters) of the RSS in the villages and towns of the area.\textsuperscript{165} In our interview, Maya Kodnani also emphasized that her decision to join the Rashtriya Swayamsevika Sangh (the women’s wing of the RSS) had been a “natural” development in her life considering her family history. In fact, during our conversations, I noticed that Kodnani was partial to the word “nature,” using it both as a noun and as an adverb to describe biographical details and socio-political events. The result was oddly disturbing. In Kodnani’s telling, her life trajectory and major political and social events such as the pogrom of 2002 were historically inevitable, being propelled forward by an invisible force: “Everything happened \textit{naturally}….I started going to meetings of the RSS and also became involved in community affairs. Then I was promoted to run for municipal elections. After some time in the municipality, it was \textit{natural} for me to run for elections from Naroda for the assembly.” Furthermore, the pogrom of 2002 occurred because of “\textit{Gujaratni prakruti}” (Gujarat’s nature), which is “communal” and because “\textit{Gujarati ane Mussalman na sambandh pehle thi kharab che, ane hamesha kharaab rehwana che}” (Relations

\textsuperscript{164} And, in fact, she was appointed Minister of Children’s and Women’s Development after the 2007 elections.

\textsuperscript{165} Personal interview with Mr. Kodnani (father of Maya Kodnani) in Ahmedabad on December 2, 2007.
between Gujaratis and Muslims have been bad from the very beginning, they have always been bad and they shall always remain bad).\textsuperscript{166}

Whether it was intentional or not, I got the feeling that her repeated use of words like \textit{swabhaav} (a person’s intrinsic nature) and \textit{prakruti} (nature) in referring to Gujarat and to Hindu nationalist politics was designed to deflect attention away from her role as one of the main organizers of the assault on Muslims that took place in her constituency on February 28, 2002. Not only that, her repeated references to nature seemed to assert her rightful place within the Hindu nationalist project in Gujarat and to perform her Hindu nationalist credentials. Furthermore, by distinguishing between Gujaratis and Muslims, Kodnani, like Modi and many others within and outside the Hindu nationalist project, was invoking a binary opposition that has increasingly become prevalent and normative in present-day Gujarat. The invocation of this opposition served to participate in, enact and normalize a conception of Gujarat as both Hindu and Hindu nationalist. Her invocations of the naturalness and inevitability of the violence served, in other words, to \textit{perform} and \textit{produce} the normalization of that which is being described as natural in Gujarat. This includes the normalization of a certain way of \textit{being} Hindu for which hatred of Muslims is both a natural and naturalized form of Gujarati pride; and it includes a certain conception of Gujaratiness and Gujarati pride which is based on a binary opposition between those who belong (natives) and those who do not (outsiders). It is the aim of this chapter to trace some of the contingent factors that have gone into the making of this particular modern conception of Gujaratiness and Hinduness, which posits the Muslim as its constitutive outside.

\textsuperscript{166} Personal interview, Ahmedabad, November 18, 2007.
Scholars of Gujarat have described the privileging of *Gujaratni asmita* in the rhetorical strategies of the Hindu nationalist movement as a form of cultural nationalist discourse that enjoys widespread support amongst Gujarati Hindus, especially in urban centers (Shah 1998; Ibrahim 2009; Ghassem-Fachandi 2012). They have partially attributed the successive victories of the Hindu nationalist movement in every legislative assembly election held in Gujarat since 1995 to its adoption of the language of *Gujaratni asmita* (e.g., Shah 1998; Mehta and Mehta 2011). For example, the political sociologist Ghanshyam Shah has suggested that the strength of Hindu nationalism in Gujarat lies in its *appropriation* and *instrumentalization* of the idea of *Gujaratni asmita*. He notes that at least since the late 1980s, the Hindu nationalist movement has presented itself to the public as the sole guardian of Gujarati regional identity (Shah 1998). The BJP’s electoral success in Gujarat and its ability to attract the support of elite and subaltern castes and communities, he further argues, are linked to its emphasis on *Gujaratni asmita* (Shah 1998:243–266). It should be clear by now that I agree with Shah and others that the idea of *Gujaratni asmita* lies at the core of the Hindu nationalist project in contemporary Gujarat. However, I think that it is important not to presume that the words Gujarat and Gujarati have stable and uncontested meanings, or that the Hindu nationalist conception of Gujarat as a territorial, historical, political and cultural entity with clearly defined boundaries, in which the Muslim is an outsider, has always enjoyed an authoritative status in society.

Indeed, as I have tried to suggest so far, this idea of *Gujarat* and of *Gujaratni asmita* is one that has to be constantly displayed, performed, produced and enacted through a process of repetition. And this making has depended on a politicized understanding of indigeneity in which Islam and Muslims are construed as alien to Gujarat rather than as constitutive of it. To give just one example, after coming to power in 1995, the movement immediately began to
reorient governmental functions in order to promote its exclusionary vision of Gujarat.

Successive Hindu nationalist governments have revised vernacular history and social science texts in order to present narratives that valorize the pre-Islamic past of the region and in particular, the Rajput Caulukya dynasty that ruled from Patan. Not only are these new histories designed to normalize the Hindu nationalist conception of Gujarat as an enduring, religiously and culturally homogenous and unified political entity, they are also designed to represent Hindu nationalist rule in Gujarat as continuous with the rule of the Patan kings of the pre-Sultanate era by eliding differences of time and place. These narratives also function as a way to authorize the movement’s own attempts to remake Gujarati society in the present in ways that privilege the Hindu nationalist valorization of Rajput and Brahmanical virtues.

This exclusionary notion of indigeneity, I will suggest in this chapter, was first articulated during the colonial period and subsequently reproduced in the practice of writing regional histories that emerged in the nineteenth century under conditions of colonial modernity. In other words, the Hindu nationalist emphasis on *Gujaratni asmita* in contemporary Gujarat is not about appropriating, instrumentalizing or manipulating a prior and given conception of regional identity that has always been there in Gujarat. Rather, the invocations of *asmita* form an integral part of the Hindu nationalist project to articulate and normalize the idea of Gujarat as a territorial, historical and cultural entity in which the Muslim is construed as an alien presence; and these invocations have a colonial genealogy that was crucial to their making and is essential to understanding their force in the present. My argument in this chapter therefore is that the power and authority of contemporary exclusionary discourses of regionalism cannot be understood without taking this colonial genealogy into consideration.
Observers of Gujarat have also suggested that the Hindu nationalist movement’s conception of Gujarati regionalism is largely inspired by the historical writings of the lawyer and nationalist politician, K.M. Munshi (1877-1971). Although there are significant differences between them, not least because they are separated by time and by political context, there are indeed many affinities between Munshi’s writings and the Hindu nationalist idea of Gujarati regionalism. It is important to note however that Munshi’s own regionalist sensibilities were derived from his readings of the historical narratives produced by colonial officials in the nineteenth century. These colonial texts left a deep imprint on Munshi and on the community of Gujarati intellectuals and writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of which he was a part. Munshi was a major figure in this community, having served as a president of the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad. He described his own historical writings as part of a broader political project of cultivating a strong regionalist sensibility in Gujarat (Munshi 1943; Munshi 1939). In addition, he situated his work as a continuation of the project that was begun by predecessors connected to the Gujarati Vernacular Society, an organization that was founded by Alexander Kinloch Forbes (1828-1865) when he was posted as a judge in Ahmedabad.

For intellectuals who produced these narratives as well as for their audiences, regional history was a new genre that opened up new ways of narrating and apprehending the past. More importantly, the possibility of writing such narratives was conditioned by their reliance on historical and ethnographic narratives produced by colonial officials. Unlike an older generation of vernacular narratives (both oral and written) about the past which can be most aptly described as genealogies of individual castes and as political and cultural histories of local princely lineages, in the regional histories of the nineteenth century there was an attempt to subsume these multiple pasts into a singular narrative. In other words, by writing regional histories, nineteenth

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167 Most recently, see Simpson and Kapadia (2010); Isaka (2002); and Ibrahim (2009) for this view.
century Gujarati intellectuals were “bringing” Gujarat “into existence” (Kaviraj 1995:108). In so doing, they relied on colonial texts such as Tod’s *Annals and antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829), Briggs’ *Cities of Gurjarashtra* (1849), the *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* (1896), and colonial translations of *Miraat-i-Amhadi* and *Miraat-i-Sikandari*. 

Last but not least, nineteenth century articulations of Gujarati regionalism relied heavily on and were profoundly influenced by Alexander Kinloch Forbes’ *Ras Mala: Hindoo Annals of the Province of Goozerat in Western India* (1856). For nineteenth century Gujarati writers, these colonial texts provided them not only with the empirical evidence to construct regional narratives but also with new and modern conceptions of region, religion and history to support their claims and arguments about Gujarat as a political and cultural entity. One of the central characteristics of these nineteenth century regional histories, as I hope to show, was the privileging of a new and highly politicized conception of *indigeneity* that treated Muslims and Islam as external to historical and cultural developments in the region. In these histories, the incorporation of the territories of present-day Gujarat into Muslim-ruled states (i.e., the Sultanates of Delhi, Gujarat Sultanate and the Mughal Empire) is more often than not represented as an oppressive encounter and a rupture. In addition, there is an elision of the role of these state projects in the making of religious and literary traditions of the region and of the influence of Arabic and Persian in the making of modern Gujarati (Sheikh 2010).

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168 The historical sections of the *Gazetteer* published in 1896 consisted of J.W. Watson’s *History of Gujarat* (1886). Translations of the *Miraat-i-Ahmadi* (a Persian chronicle written by Ali Muhammad Khan, the Mughal diwan of Gujarat) and the *Miraat-i-Sikandari* (written by Sikandar bin Muhammad, a dependent of the Bhukhari Syeds who were notables of Sultanate and the Mughal Empire) were the combined together and included in Edwin Clive Bayley’s *The Local Muhammadan Dynasties of Gujarat* (1886).


170 The argument on indigeneity that I am trying to make is derived from Partha Chatterjee’s *The Nation and its Fragments* (1993), especially the chapter on history writing in Bengal in the nineteenth century. My argument is also derived from Mahmood Mamdani’s seminal work on the Rwandan genocide in *When Victims Become Killers* (2002).
In this chapter, then, my aim is to situate contemporary iterations of *Gujaratni asmita* within the history of the making of a regionalist political and cultural tradition in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In order to explore this process, I begin with a brief description of the Gujarat Vernacular Society and of the community of Gujarati intellectuals who collaborated with its founder, Alexander Forbes (the author of the *Ras Mala*). My aim in this section is to suggest that the histories of the region that were produced at this time laid the groundwork for the articulation of an exclusionary idea of Gujarat in which Islam and Muslims figure as both the other and the outsider. At the center of the intellectual production of these regional histories was Forbes’ *Ras Mala*. Although the text is full of ambiguities and tensions that make it available to different interpretations, I will argue that it has lent itself to an exclusionary reading and making of Gujarati history, one that intersects with many of the premises of the Hindu nationalist project of Hinduizing Gujarat. In order to demonstrate the centrality of this text in the making of exclusionary conceptions of *Gujaratni asmita*, I will provide a description of some of the key premises and characteristics of this text in the second section of this chapter. I end the chapter by briefly discussing the continuities between Forbes’ and Munshi’s historiographical projects and by describing the after-life of the *Ras Mala* in contemporary Gujarat. Before I proceed with the rest of the chapter however, I want to make one more clarification about the nature of my project in this chapter and in the dissertation as a whole, with a focus on how it departs from an “invention of tradition” argument (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992).\(^{171}\)

Present-day Gujarat is a creation of the postcolonial state. It was established as a linguistically homogenous and distinct politico-administrative unit in 1960 by partitioning the Gujarati-speaking areas of Bombay State and combining them with Saurashtra and Kutch.

\(^{171}\) For a provocative critique of the idea of “invented traditions,” see Talal Asad’s “From the History of Colonial Anthropology to the Anthropology of Western Hegemony,” (1991:314–324)
During the colonial era, large parts of present-day Gujarat (Saurashtra/Kathiawad, Kutch, Idar, Mahikantha Siddhpur, etc.) were indirect rule territories which were fragmented into princely states. Under the nominal sovereignty of princes and chiefs, the power to enforce the law (and hence, exercise violence) was concentrated in the hands of the political agents of the East India Company and later of the crown. The formation of Gujarat effectively meant the incorporation of a broad range of linguistic and religious communities of the region within a single political-administrative unit. In this sense at least, the category “Gujarati culture” defined as including within it many of the communities residing in Kutch, Dangs, Saurashtra and south Gujarat is a late colonial and postcolonial phenomenon. Until as recently as the 1970s and 1980s, the terms Gujarat and Gujarati were understood in some parts of the state as mainly referring to the central and northern areas of the state (i.e., Ahmedabad, Kheda, Baroda/Vadodara, Patan, Kheda, and Bharuch) and excluded Saurashtra, Kutch and the Dangs. As a child who grew up in a village in Saurashtra, I remember visiting Ahmedabad with my parents and being told by hosts, often with condescension, that the language we spoke was not proper Gujarati, but Kathiawadi (i.e., from the land of the Kathis or from Saurashtra). One of the ironies of the creation of Gujarat is that just as the usage and meaning of the word Gujarati has become inclusive of a broader range of communities (whether defined in terms of their language, caste, or religion), the Muslim has been discursively and politically excluded/marginalized.172

Given its recent creation, the Hindu nationalist movement’s invocation of *Gujaratni asmita* has prompted some historians and anthropologists to interrogate the movement’s conception of Gujarat.173 In his introduction to *The Idea of Gujarat*, a collection of essays by

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172 In the understanding of Gujarat that prevailed until at least the 1970s, neither Porbandar (Gandhi’s birthplace) nor Paneli (Jinnah’s ancestral village) were considered part of Gujarat.

173 See for example Ibrahim(2009), Simpson (2010), and Simpson and Kapadia (2010).
historians and anthropologists of Gujarat, for example, Edward Simpson describes modern Gujarat as an “invented tradition, created from the political will of bold and visionary leaders. Its formation also speaks of the inventive power of traditions, for the ideas on which it rests were selectively culled from other long and varied cultural and political histories” (Simpson 2010: 3). Simpson adds that modern Gujarat’s temporal, spatial and cultural characteristics were delineated and produced in the colonial period by British officials “sometimes with the judicious assistance of indigenous interlocutors” (4). According to Simpson, we can think of the modern idea of Gujarat as a “taxonomic legacy” of British rule that has proven difficult, if not impossible to dislodge in the postcolonial period. Thus, local attempts at “reorienting the way history was written” have not only failed to displace colonial forms of knowledge, but these efforts are marred by “errors and inconsistencies” (4).

I am of course sympathetic to the argument that colonial power and its forms of knowledge profoundly altered social practices and identities and also reconfigured the manner in which they were represented.

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174 For a volume that claims to interrogate secular as well as religious nationalist claims about modern Gujarat, it is oddly silent on crucial aspects of Gujarati society and culture. There are no essays on Gujarati Muslims, none on gender and none on the adivasis (tribal society), and only one essay addresses the caste question. Nor are figures such as Indulal Yagnik and Harihar Khambolja, both leaders of the Mahagujarat movement and both critics of Munshi’s pro-Brahmin and pro-Rajput prejudices, mentioned anywhere in the book. Nor is there any reference to the resistance by various communities in the Dangs to their incorporation into the master-category “Gujarati.” Instead, many of the essays reproduce the very assumptions and ideas of Gujarat that the volume claims to critique.

175 Simpson is referring to K.M. Munshi (discussed later in this chapter), Jivraj Mehta (who became the first Chief Minister of Gujarat in 1960), Indulal Yagnik and others who played an important role in the movement to create Gujarat as a separate politico-administrative unit in 1960.

176 Here Simpson is referring to two attempts to produce nationalist histories of Gujarat. The first was a multivolume project announced by the Gujarat Research Society, an institution created by Munshi in 1936. The Gujarat Research Society was created in order to promote research on Gujarat that would support the regionalist claim of its distinct-ness from other neighboring regions. Although the histories were never published, the research articles produced by the society provided the “evidence” as it were for the Mahagujarat movement after independence. The other initiative was the 8 volume history of Gujarat published by the B.J. Institute for Research in Ahmedabad and sponsored by the state government of Gujarat. The latter should really be viewed as completing the unfinished business of the Gujarat Research Society, since many of the essays in the volume were written by scholars connected to Munshi.
which Indians defined and inhabited their traditions (e.g., Cohn 1996, Dirks 2001, Scott 1999). In fact, this is one of the main arguments of this dissertation. Technologies of government such as the census and modern law along with print technologies undermined older social and political institutions and fundamentally altered conceptions of community, religion, territory and history. These governmental techniques also altered relations between people and territory. More importantly, colonialism and its forms of knowledge fundamentally altered conceptions of the past and how one relates to it. However, Simpson’s characterization of modern Gujarat as an “invented tradition” is troubling because of the normative assumptions about agency and consciousness and the conception of tradition that it hinges upon. It would be obvious to point out that all traditions, because they are dynamic, heterogeneous and characterized by debate and multiplicity (Asad 1986), are inventive. However, to describe a tradition as “invented” assumes that there is a prior and pristine (and hence, authentic) version of a given tradition awaiting discovery by an enlightened and rational subject. Invention is also suggestive of creating something new, something that was unknown, a contrivance. In this case, it assumes that not only had the multiple communities of Gujarat been thoroughly detached from their traditions, but that colonial power and native subjects fabricated a regional tradition. In other words, the characterization of a tradition as “invented” is also a claim about the power to unmask claims about that tradition. It reduces tradition to an ideology or a fixed set of propositions, telling us little about how a particular account of a tradition acquires authoritative status at particular conjunctures and comes to be embodied and inhabited in particular ways. To claim that a tradition is invented also tells us very little about the authorizing role of modern power, in this case of colonial power’s role in authorizing the view that Muslims and Islam are alien to Gujarat. And, it tells us even less about the effects of that “invention” in the postcolonial present,
suggesting instead that it is enough to unmask its origins and point to its “inaccuracies” to undo its effects in the postcolonial present.

Yet it seems to me that the more pertinent questions are what forms of agency were enabled and what forms disabled under colonial modernity? How did the colonial and modern definition of Gujarat become the authoritative one? How were prior understandings of Gujarat, which conceived of the region’s territorial boundaries in radically different terms, become marginalized and disabled? In addition, how have these colonial forms of knowledge continued to define the terrain on which certain ideas of Gujarat are deemed authoritative, while others have receded from view? Which agents have been empowered to represent Gujarat and which have been silenced and marginalized? And finally what role has colonial power/knowledge played in authorizing political projects at different historical conjunctures and to what effects? While I cannot claim to have answered, or even addressed, all of these questions in my dissertation, I want to make it clear that what I think matters are not the colonial origins of an idea, but the ways in which colonial power reshaped and reconfigured the political and imaginative terrain of the postcolonial world, by enabling certain practices and interpretations that have had exclusionary effects in the present.

The Gujarat Vernacular Society and the Making of a Regional Political Tradition:

In an essay about the methodological challenges of studying regions and the growing importance of regionalist political movements in postcolonial India, Bernard Cohn defines a historical region as “one in which there are sacred myths and symbols, held by significant groups within the area, regarding the relationship of people to their ‘past’ and the geographical entity”(Cohn 1987:113). Regions, he adds, are highly mutable: “even the assumed enduring ones subsumed under the
concept ‘historical’ regions are of a changing nature through time. Various kinds of circumstances can rapidly alter the boundaries and the very nature and conception of a region” (Ibid:113). On Cohn’s view, British rule in India altered conceptions of territory, people and history; it also transformed the relations between them, effectively creating the conditions for the rise of new understandings of territoriality and for the emergence of new regionalist movements in postcolonial India. Cohn suggests analytically distinguishing between the concepts of region and regionalism. Region, he argues, is a “form of analysis,” while regionalism is a “call to action” (119). In the wake of the Partition of India in 1947, the preferred political practice in India has been to acknowledge and extend recognition to linguistically based regionalisms and to accommodate demands for regional autonomy by partitioning the larger administrative provinces inherited from the colonial state into linguistically defined states (Government of India 1955). This reorganization of states can be understood as a bureaucratic-administrative technique for managing India’s diverse population and molding it into a modern, secular nation. However, Cohn argues that it is not language alone, but also “literature, religion, and political history” that provide the repertoire of symbols and narratives for writers, intellectuals and political movements to make what he calls a “regional tradition” (119).

In this section, I describe the making of a regional tradition in nineteenth century Gujarat. This making, as I hope to show, was made possible by new conceptions of history, religion, community, territory and language that became increasingly important to the organization of colonial power in India. I refer to the making rather than invention of a regional tradition intentionally here, because the latter is suggestive of fabricating something new through an act of consciousness while the former connotes the act of producing under particular conditions. The Gujarati regional tradition, like other regional traditions of India, was produced in the context of
a state that sought to govern by defining and regulating the traditions of colonized subjects. One effect of these interventions was the production of new ideas of Gujarat and Gujaratiness. In Gujarat, two main actors stood at the center of this process and played a particularly formative role: Alexander Kinloch Forbes, a sessions-court judge at Ahmedabad who founded the Gujarat Vernacular Society (GVS) in 1848, and the community of Gujarati writers and intellectuals that were connected to the society. Although he never rose to the upper reaches of the colonial civil service, amongst contemporary writers and intellectuals in Gujarat, he is probably the most well-known British official of the nineteenth century. This is in large part because of the institutions he established in Ahmedabad, Surat and Bombay, which were also the major centers of Gujarati literary production in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Besides the Gujarat Vernacular Society (from here on GVS), Forbes also established the Gujarat Atthavisi Society in Surat in 1850 and the Gujarati Sabha (later renamed as the Forbes Gujarati Sabha) in Bombay in 1864. In Ahmedabad, the GVS encouraged Gujarati writers to produce histories of the region, its language and literary traditions. The GVS also published a weekly called Vartmaan (meaning news in Gujarati); a paper that was popularly known as Budhvaryu because it was issued on Wednesdays.

As a civil servant, Forbes’ career overlapped with the 1857 Mutiny and the resulting transition of the British Empire in India from company rule to crown colony. In the Bombay Presidency, where Forbes was employed, his career ran parallel with this transition to a form of power that Nicholas Dirks has called the “ethnographic state” (Dirks 2001). After 1857, knowledge production about and the regulation of indigenous cultural practices and religious traditions became increasingly important in stabilizing colonial rule in India. According to Dirks, one effect of these interventions was the “redefinition” of the category religion that would
substantively alter politics in “specific regional theaters” (Dirks 2001:151). In Gujarat, Forbes’ role in the promotion of history writing and literary production was seminal to the development of an emergent regional tradition. When he began his career in the Bombay Presidency, Forbes was appointed Assistant District Collector in Ahmednagar in 1843 and then served as judge in the sessions courts in Ahmedabad between 1846 and 1850 and in Surat for a year. In the latter part of his career, he served as Political Agent, first in Mahikantha and then in Kathiawar (the peninsular area of Gujarat) where the colonial state was engaged in stabilizing itself on the basis of a system of indirect rule built on princely states. Just before his retirement and subsequent death in 1865, Forbes was appointed Vice Chancellor of Bombay University and Vice President of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bombay.

On Forbes’ view, the GVS’s primary activities would be to collect old manuscripts, systematize knowledge about the history and language of the region, and promote education in Gujarati. Like other officials of his time, Forbes described his project in theological terms, as a calling:

We are under a religious obligation not only to do the work for which we are responsible to human masters and which for the most part they alone can turn to the good of the country; but (beyond that) to employ ourselves and our faculties and means in some measure (what measure is a question left to everyman’s own decision, but in some measure) to the benefit of India and the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ therein. Now we acknowledge this at Ahmedabad by some social enterprises in which many are partners together. When we contribute to a Christian mission we acknowledge the call. When we try to lift up the language of the province from its present ignoble condition and encourage the more gifted fancies among those to whom it is vernacular, to enlarge, to refine, and regulate it by manifold application, that it may become fitter to convey from mind to mind and from generation to generation both the beautiful and the true, then too we acknowledge the same call to benefit those among whom for the present we are sojourners.\footnote{Hiralal T. Parekh’s \textit{Gujarat Varnakyular Sociatino Itihas} (History of the Gujarat Vernacular Society), Vol 1, p. 10-11 quoted in Yagnik and Sheth (2005:82).}
In other words, a project made possible by the force of arms and directed at stabilizing colonial power by mastering native traditions, was justified as a calling and as beneficial to colonized subjects.

In the initial years after its establishment, the “native” members of the Vernacular Society came from the elite castes of the city and of surrounding areas. Several of them were employed by the colonial state and were members of a traditional elite that the East India Company state incorporated into the structures of rule in Ahmedabad. For example, Ranchoddlal Chotalal (1823-1898), Bholanath Sarabhai and Mahipatram Rupram Nilkanth were all *nagar brahmins* who had served the East India Company state in various capacities. Like many a *nagar Brahmin* at that time, they came from families with long traditions of serving the precolonial Muslim, Rajput and Maratha rulers of the region and were educated in both Persian and Sanskrit. Before he became known as the founder of Ahmedabad’s first textile mill and the first native to be appointed to the Municipal Commission, Ranchoddlal had worked as a customs officer and functionary in the political department, while Sarabhai was a judge and Nilkanth was employed in the education department. Ranchoddlal was also appointed President of the Ahmedabad Municipality (discussed in Chapter II) and from the very beginning was a benefactor of the GVS. Similarly, Maganlal Vakhatchand, was a prominent Jain and a member of the family of the *nagar sheth* of Ahmedabad and had served as the secretary of the Town Wall Committee and of the Municipal Commission.178

However, the most celebrated figure of the GVS was not a member of Ahmedabad’s elite, but a young poet named Dalpatram Dayaram. In retrospect, he is regarded as a *kavishvar* (king of poets) and one of the founding fathers of the modern Gujarati literary tradition (Joshi

178 For biographical details on the prominent members of the Vernacular Society, see Kenneth Gillion’s *Ahmedabad* (1968:63–65) and Yagnik and Sheth’s *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat* (2005), especially Chapter 4.
After arriving in Ahmedabad, Forbes had been looking for a tutor, and Dalpatram was recommended by his Indian colleague, Bholanath Sarabhai. Over time, the tutor became Forbes’ principle collaborator and informant and “the driving force behind the GVS” (Yagnik and Sheth 2005:85). Dalpatram edited Buddhiprakash (Enlightenment), the monthly journal of the GVS where prominent writers such as the poet Narmad contributed regularly. It was Dalpatram who travelled all over north Gujarat and helped gather and collate the oral narratives of charans and bhats (genealogists) that Forbes then incorporated into his book Ras Mala: The Hindoo Annals of the Province of Goozerat in Western India. Before I discuss this text and the collaboration between Forbes and Dalpatram in greater detail, I want to briefly turn to the new practice of writing histories of the region/desh that was elaborated by writers and intellectuals connected to the Vernacular society.

Over the course of the next fifty years, the society published a large corpus of books, many of them histories of the region written for different types of audiences while others dealt with aspects of the Gujarati language and grammar. Maganlal Vakhatchand, who was the secretary of the Municipal Commission, was encouraged to write Amdavadno Itihas [History of Ahmedabad] (1851) and Gujaratdeshno Itihas [History of Gujarat] (1860); the latter went through multiple printings and was used as a textbook for several decades in Ahmedabad. In fact, the very first Gujarati-language essay to be awarded a prize by the GVS was Gujaratno Itihas (1850) by Edalji Dosabhai. When he wrote it in 1849, Dosabhai was a student in the Government English School in Ahmedabad and relied on existing colonial sources. At the time of its publication, Forbes recommended that the text be published and adopted as a school textbook; he also suggested to Dosabhai that he consider revising and translating the work into

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179 The other writers in this category are Narmadshankar Lalshankar or Narmad (discussed in Chapter III), Govardhanram Tripathi and Manibhai Nabubhai. See Tridip Suhrud’s Writing Life (2009) for an account of their work and for an interesting reading of Gandhi’s ideas of nation and ethics in light of their works.
Interestingly, when the English edition was finally completed in 1894, it had a new chronological scheme. Instead of the two parts that made up the original Gujarati edition, the new edition was organized into four parts—one each for Hindu, Muslim, Maratha and British rule. According to Dosabhai, the revisions reflected the “vast amount of additional information [that] has become available” from the *Ras Mala* and other “reputable” sources (Dosábhai 1894:ii–iii).

The historian Riho Isaka (2002) has argued that the new style of periodization seen in Dosabhai’s translated text and in texts written by other authors is indicative of how nineteenth century Gujarati intellectuals selectively appropriated from colonial sources. Indeed, several other Gujarati authors narrated the past of the region chronologically, dividing it into four successive eras. Thus, Gujarat’s history was divided into the glorious Hindu era, which was succeeded by Muslim conquest and the era of Muslim rule under the Sultanate and the Mughals. The latter was often characterized as a period of decline. The Muslims in turn were followed by the Marathas, who were displaced by the British. On Isaka’s view, although nineteenth century “Gujarati writers were educated under the colonial system” and “depended on European sources in order to understand local history,…this [dependence] did not prevent them from adopting these accounts rather selectively, according to their own views and the way in which they wanted to project their history. We should also remember that these British sources drew heavily on local accounts of history” (Isaka 2002b:4867). Isaka also suggests that because the ranks of

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180 According to Dosabhai, the original Gujarati version of the text was adapted and included in three editions of a vernacular history textbook in Ahmedabad. See his “Introduction” to *A History of Gujarat from the Earliest Times to the Present Period* (1894), which is the revised and translated version of the original *Gujaratno Itihas*.

181 For example, see Mahipatram Rupram Nilkanth’s *Gujaratno Balbodhak Itihas* [A history of Gujarat for children] (Nilkanth 1878); Govind Desai’s *Gujaratno Prachin Itihas* [The Early History of Gujarat] (1921) & his *Gujaratno Arvachin Itihas* [The History Modern Gujarat] (1912), both originally published in 1898; and V.K. Shahstri’s *Gujarati Bhashano Itihas* [History of the Gujarati Language] (1887).
these nineteenth century writers were dominated by upper caste Hindus (*nagar & shrimali Brahmins and vaishnava vanias*), Jains, and Zorastrians, there was a tendency, especially amongst the Hindu writers, to glorify the pre-Islamic era. Indeed, the poet Narmadshanker Lalshanker or Narmad (discussed in Chapter III) was convinced that Muslim rule in Gujarat had severed the links between contemporary Hindus and their glorious past, and that this had resulted in a decline in intellectual capacities (Dave 1996b). Dalpatram (Forbes’ assistant) wrote an allegorical poem entitled *Hindustan upar Hunnar Khan ni Chadhai* (Invasion of Hindustan by King Industry) in which he represents the ethical and material challenges posed by modern industry and technology in allegoric terms as invasions by Hunnar Khan (industry) and Yantra Khan (machinery). Muslim rule before the invasion of modern industry (i.e., British rule) is characterized as having weakened the intellectual and moral capacities of Hindustan. In contemporary Gujarat, Dalpatram’s poem is frequently cited as an expression of the mercantile ethos of Gujarat because of the way Dalpatram urges Gujaratis to adopt and appropriate modern technology for their benefit. However, the tropes of Muslim invasions and Hindu oppression also suggest that in its modern iteration the mercantile ethos hinged upon the erasure of the role of itinerant communities of Muslims in forging Gujarat’s links to the wider Indian Ocean world (Ho 2006; Pearson 1976; Misra 1964).

I have cited the example of Dalpatram’s poem to show how, on my view, Isaka’s focus on whether Gujarati writers appropriated or resisted colonial narratives and representations of the past evades the more interesting question of the productive role of colonial power/knowledge and the changes that these effected in local conceptions of history, indigeneity, tradition and region. In a provocative essay on the effects of colonial and modern power, Talal Asad has argued that “Within the modern world which has come into being, changes have taken place as
the effect of the dominant political power by which new possibilities are constructed and old ones destroyed. The changes do not reflect the simple expansion of the range of individual choice, but the creation of conditions in which only new (i.e., modern) choices can be made. The reason for this is that the changes involve the re-formation of subjectivities and the re-organization of social spaces in which subjects act and are acted upon. The modern state—imperial, colonial, post-colonial—has been crucial to these processes of construction/destruction (Asad 1992:333–352).” In British India, as both Cohn (Cohn 1987; 1996) and Dirks (Dirks 2001) have reminded us, colonial historiography played an important role in enabling particular types of subjectivities while disabling others. In the particular case of Gujarat, the representation of its past in chronological terms, with each era representing the triumph of a particular “religion” or nation were also tied to a theory of indigeneity that construed Islam as a foreign influence that precipitated the decline of a great ancient civilization. This style of periodization was in fact a reflection of the shifts in meanings of region, religion and indigeneity that had occurred in nineteenth century colonial discourse and in the discourse of Gujarati intellectuals. One important factor that contributed to this shift was the involvement of several nineteenth century Gujarati writers and intellectuals in religious reform movements based in Bombay and Ahmedabad. Some of the major debates and disputes over reform of caste practices that arose ended up in the courts (e.g., Maharaja libel case; Aga Khan cases discussed in Chapter I) and the adjudication of these disputes resulted in the articulation of new conceptions of Hinduism and Islam. So when Gujarati intellectuals began to appropriate the style of colonial histories, they

For example, Narmadshankar Lalshankar Dave (Narmad), Karsandas Mulji and Mahipatram Rupram Nilkanth were all involved in reformist initiatives in Bombay. See Gillion (1968) and Yagnik and Sheth (2005). Mahipatram also wrote a new history text for children—Gujaratno balbodhak Itihas [History of Gujarat for Children] that was published by the GVS in 1878. Narmad and Karsandas were both trenchant critics of the Vaishnavite maharaj and the dispute, in fact ended up in the courts. See chapter I for my discussion of the libel case, and Chapter III for a brief discussion of Narmad’s essays.
had no choice but to borrow concepts and categories as well. Put baldly, by appropriating stylistic conventions from colonial sources, Gujarati writers were also compelled to appropriate key concepts and ways of seeing and relating to their past that had been articulated by colonial power. One effect of these appropriations was to reiterate the claim that Islam and Muslims were the other of Gujarat and of Gujaratis (who were originally Hindu).

Amongst the texts that influenced and shaped ideas of region and regionalism in the small community of nineteenth century Gujarati writers and intellectuals, perhaps none were more influential than the essays on *swadeshbhiman* by Narmadshankar Lalshankar (Narmad) and Alexander Forbes’ *Ras Mala*. In fact, by coincidence, both the texts were first published in 1856. I have already discussed some of Narmad’s ideas about history and his articulation of Gujarati regionalism in the previous chapter and so will not return to them here. Instead in the remainder of this section, I want to focus on Forbes’ *Ras Mala* and its place in the making of a Gujarati regional tradition. As previously mentioned, *Ras Mala*’s status as an authoritative text can be partially attributed to Forbes’ own position as a powerful civil servant. As the founder and head of the GVS, he controlled resources and acted as a patron and mentor to a generation of 19th century Gujarati writers and intellectuals. One of the reasons for the *Ras Mala*’s authoritative status is that unlike other colonial texts, it was almost immediately translated into Gujarati by Forbes’ friends at the GVS. The book’s status was also reinforced by the endorsement it received from Narmad, who was by then a well-known reformer and intellectual. The publication of *Ras Mala*, in fact, served as an opportunity for Narmad to reiterate his ideas of *swadeshbhiman* (pride in the homeland). Soon after the *Ras Mala*’s publication in English, Narmad wrote a review of it in *Budhhiprakash*, the monthly journal of the Vernacular Society edited by Dalpatram. In it, Narmad chides his readers: “Oh, countrymen (deshio)! What species
of animal/beast are you? What kind of indolent and lazy people are you that you have no consciousness of that which is yours, of your own past!....how strange it is that the things we should know in our own language, on our own [terms] are now brought to us in a foreign language.” According to Narmad, Forbes had done a great service to the Gujarati people by writing the Ras Mala. He had done the labor that “we should have done for ourselves. And, [what] we do not know about ourselves, the English are now showing us its authentic form. They are now showing us what we Hindus were like originally…. If we really think about this, then should be ashamed of ourselves…..The English tell us that there are three benefits to reading the Ras Mala. It has material that will benefit the historian, it has material on Rajput life and traditions and it will increase our knowledge so we get to know the Rajputs and their way of life” (Dave 1996a:85–92). Implicit in the review was the suggestion that Hindu society and its understanding of itself had gone into decline after the Muslim conquests and the establishment of Muslim states. And, such a reading I am arguing was made possible by the structure and the content of Forbes’ text.

Taking up over 700 pages and divided into four parts or books, the Ras Mala reads like multiple books masquerading as a single text. Forbes appears to have been motivated by the desire to produce an equivalent of Tod’s Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan (1832) for Gujarat. The text resists easy classification because it relies on a combination of other colonial texts, translations of Persian sources on the period of the Sultanate and Mughal rule over Gujarat, and the oral narratives of charans and bhats or genealogists. It also draws on Forbes’ first-hand experiences during his travels through Gujarat and his observations of encounters with colonial subjects. In some cases, the encounters were between Forbes’ assistant and main interlocutor, Dalpatram, and the local population. The oral narratives of charans and bhats were transcribed
by Dalpatram in Gujarati and conveyed to Forbes, who in turn translated them into English. The
first three books are on the dynasties that ruled Gujarat, organized in a chronological fashion
with Book I being dedicated to the Chavdas (Chowras), the Caulukyas (Solanki Rajputs) and the
Vaghelas that ruled from Patan, a town in north Gujarat. Book II, which is based on other
colonial accounts and on translations of Persian sources (mainly, on the *Miraat-i-Ahmadi* and the
*Miraat-i-Sikandari*) provides an all too brief account of the Sultanate and of Mughal rule; it ends
with descriptions of the Rajput clan that ruled over Idar, the princely state to which Forbes was
sent as Political Agent. Book III begins with an account of the Maratha Gaekwads and switches
back to the Rajput clans that Forbes was responsible for as Political Agent (in Kathiawar,
Mahikantha, Idar and Dholka). The final book, which is based on direct observations, accounts
of colonial subjects recorded by Forbes and by Dalpatram, and descriptions contained in other
colonial texts, deals entirely with the social and cultural practices of castes and communities in
towns and in villages. Some of the chapters contain detailed descriptions of religious festivals,
land tenures and settlements under precolonial regimes, marriage and funeral rites, and on the
belief in *bhoots* (evil spirits/ghosts/superstition). Two of the chapters in *Ras Mala*—one on caste
and one on *bhoots*—read like translations of essays that were published by the GVS under the
name of Dalpatram.  

At the very outset, Forbes attempts to describe and define the boundaries of Gujarat in the
following manner:

> The province of Goozerat, Western India, is composed of two portions—the one
> of these is continental, the other is peninsular and projects into the Arabian See
> nearly opposite the coast of Oman, and below that of Mekran and Sindh. Hindoos

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183 Dalpatram had written an essay on caste entitled *Gnatinibandh* at the encouragement of Forbes in 1851 and it was awarded the Gujarat Vernacular Society’s price for the best essay by a native that year. See Dalpatram’s *Gnatinibandh* (1885) and Chapter I of Book IV of *Ras Mala* (Forbes 1859). The essay on *bhoots* was translated by Forbes into English and published under the title *On Demonology and the Popular Superstitions of Gujarat* (Forbes 1990).
usually assume the river Nerbudda [Narmada] to be the southern boundary of the continental portion, or Giuzerat proper. The language of the province is, however, spoken much further to the south—as far even as Damaun [Daman], or St. John’s about half-way between the mouth of the river and Bombay. Stretching northwards from the banks of the Nerbudda, a range of hills connecting the Vindhyas with the Arawullee Mountains forms the eastern and northern barrier of Giuzerat, and separates it from Malwa, Mewar and Marwar. The Gulf of Kutch and a salt, and sometimes partially inundated, desert called the Runn are the boundaries of the province on the north-west and west; the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Cambay wash its southern and south-western shores. The least protected frontier line, and that by which Giuzerat has usually been invaded, is on the north-west, where a sandy plain intervenes between the desert and the foot of Mount Aboo (Forbes 1973 [1856]:2).

By defining Giuzarat in this manner, Forbes was effectively incorporating diverse linguistic and cultural communities in Kutch, in Kathiawad, and in Dangs that did not identify themselves as Gujarati until the twentieth century. In addition, it is important to note that Forbes’ claims about Giuzarat are based on oral narratives of genealogists of ruling lineages that were centered in north Giuzarat in the immediate vicinity of Patan (i.e., present-day districts of Patan, Ahmedabad, Mehasana, Anand and eastern Vadodra). Although the territories that the Vaghelas and Caulukya kings controlled fluctuated constantly, and their sovereignty was nominal over areas to the south and southwest of Patan, Forbes’ Giuzarat definition of Giuzarat make it appears as if it had existed since time immemorial. In other words, the particular histories of ruling lineages and the culture of kingdoms whose writ was limited are treated as representative of a much larger region. It is this definition of Giuzarat that would become the basis for the movement to create Giuzarat as a linguistically unified and distinct state within India after independence.

Forbes was sympathetic to the Rajput lineages of north Giuzarat probably due to his role as Political Agent to the princely states in the area and out of a genuine sense of sympathy, curiosity and fascination about their past. Indeed, the bulk of the text that covers the pre-
Sultanate era is a celebratory account of the rule of the Caulukya (Solanki Rajput) kings and especially of the rule of Jaisimha Sidhraja who are said to have transformed the barren plains of the north into a paradise of plenty (Forbes 1973:118–138). However, because of Forbes’ reliance on the oral narratives of charans and bhats, the text is characterized by ambiguities and tensions that lend themselves to alternative readings. This is particularly true of the contradictory representations of caste in the text. Large parts of the text are infused with an Orientalist understanding of caste as a religious institution that is unchanging; a hierarchical system that existed outside of relations of power in which the Brahmins and Kshatriyas occupied the upper ranks. At the same time, these representations are contradicted by the chapter on caste that is based largely on Dalpatram’s essay “Gнатинибандх” (On Caste) mentioned earlier in the chapter (Dalpatram 1885). In this essay, Dalpatram, a Shrimali Brahmin, made the radical argument that caste was a historical and social institution and not just a religiously sanctioned institution. In addition, the essay was pioneering for its time due to its reliance on evidence based on observations and interpretations of caste histories and genealogies collected from the bhats (caste genealogists) rather than on the textual authority of the Vedas or other classical texts. On Dalpatram’s view, castes had developed their own rules for regulating property and individual behavior. In addition, he suggested that the maintenance of caste solidarities and boundaries was achieved by fairly well developed and adaptable customs, rules and regulations that were enforced by associations (panch). Finally, he suggested that caste associations functioned in conjunction with the sovereign (state) in the resolution of internal disputes and in the organization of local politics. Dalpatram’s account on the social and political basis of caste and on its centrality to the organization of politics, is in fact, confirmed by later studies such as Farhat Hasan’s (2004) study of the Mughal Empire in Gujarat cited in the previous chapter.
However, by the time that Dalpatram had composed his essay, colonial law had already begun to limit the jurisdiction of caste associations to questions of family and to evaluate and re-classify caste practices in terms of their fidelity to the textual tradition. The effect was to authorize, as Dirks has argued, an understanding of caste as a religiously sanctioned hierarchical institution that existed outside of relations of power (Dirks 2001). Within the *Ras Mala*, Dalpatram’s account of caste is similarly overwhelmed by Forbes’ privileging of Rajput kingship.

Although Forbes was aware of the limits of his sources—he emphasized that there is a dearth of proper historical records—the prose is very frequently marked by a certitude typical of one who is in a position of authority. In that sense, the book provides a window into the colonial relations of power that enabled its production and how these new forms of power addressed the challenges of stabilizing rule over an alien and conquered people. Throughout the nineteenth century, the British sought to develop new techniques of ensuring political stability in Gujarat and were concerned with identifying native institutions and traditions that could be utilized for that purpose. Along the same lines, Forbes’ text betrays an almost obsessive desire to identify and describe what he calls the “ancient” political history and traditions of Gujarat. Preserving these institutions, according to Forbes, would help the British secure their own rule over the region and provide a framework for good government. Furthermore, he argued that the Rajput chiefs of his own time embodied the authentic political traditions and history of the region. In contrast, he characterized centuries of Muslim rule as violent and their political impact as both negligible and superficial. Most importantly for the purpose of this chapter, he almost always described the violence of the Muslim rulers as *religiously* motivated.

In addition, Forbes’ privileging of the Rajput chiefs, which was articulated for the purposes of securing British rule, hinged on an opposition between the non-indigenous Muslim
and the native Hindu. By doing so, Forbes not only diminished the role of Islam and Muslims in
the political and cultural history of Gujarat, he also constructed them as alien to it. This allowed
him to discursively clear the ground for establishing continuity between the ancient political
institutions (i.e. Rajput chiefs) and the British policy of indirect rule in the present:

The stranger who is for any length of time resident in the land of the Hindoos
can hardly fail to notice the customs and usages of that people which are
evidently relics of a state of society not long gone by—visions, as it were, of
a noble vessel, whose phantom-like outline, if only by an illusion such as
Fata Morgana exhibits, in exalted reflection, these existing things. The very
remains of Moslem power themselves are most strongly impressed with the
character of the race whose rule was supplanted by that of the crescent, and
from even these we might have gathered the fact that many a splendid
metropolis might have adorned the plains of Aryaverta before the avalanche
of Mohummedan invasion fell from the western mountains upon the land.
(Forbes 1973: x)

Later, he expanded this to suggest that the Rajput chieftains of his time have more in common
with the pre-medieval kings of the region and that they offer a window into the ancient past of
Gujarat:

It is to the story of the city of Wun Raj [the founder of Anhilwad Patan],
and the Hindoo principalities and chieftianships which sprang up amidst its
ruins, and which have many of them, continued in existence to the present
day, that the reader’s attention is in the present work invited. (Ibid, xii)

Although Wun Raj’s identity is contested—as his name suggests—he was a forest dweller and is
claimed by Bhils as one of their ancestors, Forbes portrays him as a Rajput.

The emphasis on Rajput chiefs and kings of Gujarat appears to perform multiple
functions in Forbes’ narrative. For one, it enabled him to describe Gujarat as a distinct region
with a unique and continuous political history that was largely unaffected by the Sultanates
(Delhi and Gujarat) and the Mughals. By characterizing the Rajput chieftains of his times as the
enemies of Muslims and as bearers of the “ancient” political traditions of Gujarat, Forbes was in
effect construing Islam and Muslims as alien to the region; he is also constructing the conflict
between Rajputs and Muslims as a timeless religious war. Thus, Mohammed of Ghazna’s sacking of Patan during one of his raids on Gujarat is mentioned, but it is the attack on Somnatha that is privileged. And although his Jain sources do not interpret the raid in the same terms (Thapar 2005), Forbes insists that the raid was religiously motivated: “It was against the god, however, and not the kings of the Hindoos that Mahmood now made war; and city of Wun Raj (Patan) left behind, his banners were soon rapidly advancing towards Somnath” (Forbes 1973:56).

By privileging Rajputs as hereditary rulers, Forbes was also legitimizing British colonial conquest, and especially the institution of indirect rule, as being continuous with the “indigenous” political traditions of Gujarat. Mahmood Mamdani has argued that a common characteristic of both direct and indirect rule colonies in Africa was the politicization of indigeneity. The institution of indirect rule, which was meant as a strategy stabilizing colonial power, he argues, was also the basis for a modern politics of indigeneity. Amongst the legacies of this institutionalization of the distinction between settler and native, Mamdani further suggests, are politicized ethnic identities and historically unprecedented forms of mass violence in postcolonial Africa (Mamdani 1996, 2002). In contemporary Gujarat, this settler-native dichotomy is expressed in terms of the opposition between the Muslim and the Gujarati (Hindu). Forbes’ theories of indirect rule and his privileging of Rajput kingship can be interpreted as providing the grounds for this later distinction.

Forbes’ Ras Mala also conceives of Gujarat as a region whose boundaries were readily identifiable. Unlike the older conceptions of Gujarat that prevailed during the Sultanate, Forbes defines it as comprised of peninsular territories (Kathiawad & Kutch) and mainland areas (north, central and south Gujarat of today) with clearly defined borders. In the north, the region was
separated from Rajasthan by the Aravalli range and in the east it was separated from present-day Madhya Pradesh (i.e. Malwa) by the Vindhya. In addition, he defines Kutch as constituting the northwestern limits of the territory and the Gulf of Cambay as the southern limits. Like most such attempts at fixing the boundaries of a space whose boundaries were fluid and porous, Forbes’ attempt to produce a coherent definition of Gujarat is marked by its own contradictions. Rajputs, who are represented as hereditary rulers and whose centrality in the political history of Gujarat distinguishes them from inhabitants of other regions, are simultaneously described as indigenous to it and as outsiders whose origins are in Rajasthan. In contrast, Muslims of Gujarat, because they are Muslims are construed as alien to it. Under the two preceding regimes, Gujarat’s boundaries were not fixed. This is not to say that there were no conceptions of Gujarat, there clearly were. For example, the founder of the tradition of the Urdu ghazal was known by the name Wali Gujarati and is buried in Ahmedabad. However, in his birthplace Aurangabad, he was also known as Wali Deccani. The point I wish to highlight, in other words, is that in Forbes’ account, Gujarat is being defined simultaneously as a region of India and as a Hindu region.

K.M. Munshi and Gujaratni Asmita:

In the twentieth century, the colonial historiography of Gujarat in general, including the Ras Mala, have authorized and shaped different types of cultural and political projects in Gujarat. Because of the collaboration between Forbes and the poet Dalpatram, the Ras Mala has been treated as an authority on the poetic and literary traditions of precolonial and nineteenth century Gujarat (Joshi 2004). The Ras Mala has also been a key text in the political activism of Indulal Yagnik and K.M. Munshi. Both of them played an instrumental role in organizing the
Mahagujarat campaign to create the linguistically distinct and unified state of Gujarat after independence in 1965. In the 1950s, Yagnik organized and led the agitation to create Gujarat. Although the movement was centered mainly in Ahmedabad and the urban centers of central Gujarat, it secured its prize of a state that included Kutch, Kathiawad and the Dangs—the areas identified by Forbes as belonging to Gujarat in 1960. In his memoirs, Yagnik recalls feeling a renewed sense of pride in the people and history of Gujarat after he read the Ras Mala. In fact, Yagnik discovered the Ras mala when he read Munshi’s Gujarat and its Literature, which was written as a tribute to Forbes for inducting into History. According to Yagnik, by writing about King Vanraj (Wun Raj) and the great ancient city of Anhilwara Patan that he founded, Forbes had brought to life the glorious achievements of the ancestors of the original people of Gujarat and today’s masses—the Bhils and the Kolis. The Ras Mala, he claims, reaffirmed his desire to continue with his political work to liberate the masses from exploitation by the state and their local intermediaries (Yagnik 2011:164–166, 181). If on the one hand, the Ras Mala authorized the progressive politics of Yagnik, it also provided the inspiration for a different kind of idea of Gujarat.

However, the challenge of elaborating a Gujarati regional tradition was pursued most systematically and avidly by the nationalist politician and writer K.M. Munshi (1877-1971) who articulated it through his histories and works of fiction. As noted earlier, observers of contemporary Gujarat have suggested that the Hindu nationalist movement’s conception of Gujarati regionalism is largely inspired by the historical writings K.M. Munshi.¹⁸⁴ For this reason, I would like to now briefly turn to discussing Munshi’s writings and some of the building blocks of his conception of Gujarat in this last section of the chapter. As I hope to show, Munshi relied heavily on some of the major premises of colonial historiography, and especially

¹⁸⁴ Most recently, see Simpson and Kapadia (2010); Isaka (2002); and Ibrahim (2009) for this view.
of Forbes’ *Ras Mala*, in his conception of Gujarati regionalism. Furthermore, he helped to popularize some of the main ideas that are invoked today to justify the exclusion of Muslims and to naturalize the binary opposition between the Gujarati and the Muslim, some examples of which are provided in my discussion of Modi and Maya Kodnani at the beginning of this chapter. There is an irony in the emergence of Munshi as a leading thinker of Gujarati regionalism. In 1915, after Gandhi returned from South Africa, the *Gurjar Sabha* (an association of Gujaratis) had organized a reception in his honor. At the meeting, Munshi as the secretary of the *sabha* and Jinnah as the chair of that meeting reported to have delivered their speeches in English. Gandhi, on the other hand, turned the event into a “humble protest against the use of English in a Gujarati gathering” and appeared to have offended his hosts (CWMG:??). In subsequent years, both Jinnah and Munshi clashed with Gandhi over the latter’s preference for extra-constitutional politics in the struggle against colonialism and eventually resigned from the Congress after Gandhi became leader of the Congress in 1920.

By the time that Munshi and Gandhi were disagreeing with each, both had emerged as powerful figures in the world of Gujarati arts and letters, actively shaping discussions and debates on Gujarati language and literature and on the history of Gujarat, in organizations such as the Gujarat Sahitya Parishad. For Munshi, the historical narratives about the Caulukya Kings of Patan that form the core of the first book of *Ras Mala* provided the raw material for many of his writings on Gujarat. The achievements of the Caulukya Kings of Patan served as the foundation for his argument on *Gujaratni asmita*, which he defined as consciousness (Munshi 1939). Patan, because of its rich store of Jain texts in Sanskrit and Prakrit, also featured in his writings as the birthplace of Gujarati literature (Munshi 1935). Furthermore, Patan and the Caulukya Court provided the basic material for his trilogy of historical novels on the rise of
Jaysimha Siddraja and the formation of Gujarat. On Munshi’s account, an idea of Gujarat that was similar to its modern sense had already been articulated and was hegemonic in Patan during the reign of the Caulukya Kings. For Munshi, whose idea of Gujarat emphasized the Hindu religious identity of its society and who privileged Vedic texts in his understanding of caste, the Caulukyas kings and ministers, especially Jaysimha Sidhraja epitomized the pinnacle of Rajput and Brahmin virtues and skills of statecraft. Sidhraja is portrayed as having created a unified kingdom and political community whose territorial boundaries were nearly identical with those of present-day Gujarat.

Munshi is not alone in describing Sidhraja as the “founder of Gujarat” or in emphasizing the historical importance of the city of Patan. In addition to Hindu nationalists who treat the political and cultural history of Caulukya era Patan as a symbol of the region’s lost glories before its conquest by Muslims, Patan occupies center stage in regional political histories and in histories of Gujarati literature written by individuals who were often critical of Munshi’s Hindu nationalist sympathies (e.g., Shastri 1953; Jhaveri 1978; Vala 1999; Yashchandra 2003). For example, in a recent survey of “Gujarati literary culture,” the poet Sitanshu Yashchandra attacks Munshi for anachronistically using the label Gujarati to describe medieval languages and literatures attributed to authors patronized by the Caulukya kings but then goes on to reproduce Munshi’s chronological scheme in writing a history of Gujarati literature. Like Munshi, he locates Gujarati literature’s origins in its pre-Islamic past and characterizes the Sultanate and its Muslim successors as hostile to “Gujarati” writing. In fact, the establishment of the Sultanate is represented in much the same terms as it was in colonial texts, a state-form that results in alienating “Gujarat from its natural milieu in the Indian subcontinent” (Yashchandra 2003). In

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185 In several works of fiction and of history, Munshi described Sidhraja Jayasimha, the twelfth century Caulukya king as the founder of “modern Gujarat” (Munshi 1943:14).
addition, like many literary histories produced under the patronage of the Gujarati Vernacular Society, there is a marked tendency to characterize the relationship between Persian and Arabic and Gujarati as hostile; that is the former two are seen as constituting alien influences on the latter.

The phrase *Gujratni asmita* appears to have been popularized by Munshi, who used it as the title of a book urging his Gujarati-speaking audience to cultivate a new political and historical sensibility (1939). His role in the formation of Gujarat as a separate administrative unit of India in 1960 is not insignificant. For one, he systematically developed the modern idea of Gujarat and wanted Gujarati-speakers to transcend their attachments to caste and community and cultivate an attachment to the region. The region in turn was to be represented by a strong state. In other words, Munshi’s vision of Gujarati regionalism was anchored around a particular conception of religion and of the state. On Munshi’s view, Gujarat was always a distinctive political and cultural region whose people were united by a language (Gujarati), a religion (Hinduism), and a political history. Munshi also played a central role in the formation of the *Mahagujarat* movement and was instrumental in producing and popularizing the version of regional history that became central to the movement’s own arguments for the creation of Gujarat as a linguistically defined administrative unit within the Indian union. Most importantly, his writings contributed to the emergence of distinctively modern conception of regionalism that privileged an idea of indigeneity conceived of in religious terms. Thus in his works, Muslims figure as outsiders and as alien to the region and its history. One of the main

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186 In 1939, Munshi published a Gujarati language book entitled *Gujratni asmita*. Munshi makes essentially the same argument in his *The Glory that was Gurjaradesa* (1943). In both of these works he argues that modern Gujarat was founded by King Jaisimha Siddhraja, the medieval Caulukya King who ruled from Patan in the twelfth century and that Gujarat’s history was interrupted by Muslim rule which began with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate’s sovereignty.

187 While I do not provide enough information about the *Mahagujarat* movement in this dissertation, I hope to fill this gap by doing so in future elaborations of this project.
themes in Munshi’s historical writings is the denigration of the role of Islam and Muslims and of
the waves of itinerants from the Muslim world that contributed to the making of medieval and
modern Gujarat, especially to the making of the Gujarati language and its aesthetic traditions and
practices. In Munshi’s work, Gujarat was defined as a region with a defined territory and the
Gujaratis as a people with a common language whose roots were in Sanskrit. In addition, the
Gujaratis were defined as having a continuous and shared political and theological history.

As I hope to have also made clear, Munshi’s writings and his conception of *Gujaratni asmita* are continuous with Forbes’ *Ras Mala* in positing the Muslims of Gujarat as outsiders, in
suggesting that Gujarat has always existed as a unified political and cultural community since
pre-Islamic times, and finally by subsuming the multiple histories of the region’s communities
into the singular history of the Patan Kings. While I am not claiming that Munshi’s writings are
derivative of the *Ras Mala* or of colonial historiography in general, the continuities between
them are definitely striking. In addition, the affinities between the Hindu nationalist idea of
Gujarat and Munshi’s historical writings are equally striking. In historical novels and in his
histories of the region, Munshi valorized Rajput and Brahmin virtues as embodied by the
Caulukya kings who ruled over north Gujarat from the city of Patan. The collapse of the
Caulukya kingdom and of its successors, the Vaghelas, and the incorporation of Gujarat into the
Delhi Sultanate followed by the formation of the Gujarat Sultanate are represented in terms of a
rupture in the region’s historical flow. Thus, Gujarat is said to have been sheared from its
*natural* links to a Hindu India. For the Hindu nationalist movement, Munshi’s historical writings
appear to function as sources that authorize its own vision of Gujarat’s past and of how Gujarat’s
politics and society ought to be organized in the present. Let me illustrate what I mean through a
concluding example.
Conclusion:

In early 2003 the Hindu nationalist government announced that beginning with the Independence Day ceremonials on August 15 of that year, all future official commemorations of India’s Independence and Republic Days and of Gujarat Day (May 1) would be held in a different districts of the state in order to strengthen the bonds between the people and their state. Instead of the standard speeches by political leaders, these ceremonials, it was announced, would also include performances to showcase “Gujarati tradition” (Bhatt 2003). The decision to transform these public rituals into a travelling cultural performance that celebrated the aesthetic forms of the region was a break with existing protocol and was announced a few weeks after the BJP’s electoral triumph in December 2002. Because the BJP has won three consecutive state assembly elections (2002, 2007, and most recently in 2012) in Gujarat after the pogrom, this policy has continued to this day. In both 2003 and 2008, after winning the elections in the prior year, the Hindu nationalist government selected Patan for its Independence Day commemorations.

The political scientist Srirupa Roy (2007) has suggested that commemorative rituals such as the annual Republic Day parade in Delhi or the Bastille Day parade in France are performances that reiterate the identity of the nation-state and help solidify the links between state, citizens (public) and the nation. In India, Roy argues that the Republic Day parades with their “cultural tableau” are like a stage on which the Indian state displays its idea of the nation as a culturally diverse and politically unified community whose well-being can only be assured by a powerful and modernizing secular state. She also argues that these public performances function as pedagogical devices meant to educate subjects and transform them into citizens who become invested in this vision of the nation. These celebrations act in other words as a stage from which the state calls upon the audience to participate in the realization of its vision of the Indian nation.
Until the 2003 Independence Day ceremonies in Patan, officially sponsored events in Gujarat continued to emphasize the theme of unity in diversity that forms the core of secular Indian nationalism. However, in 2003 the BJP-controlled government started transforming the commemoration in Patan into a theater for articulating the Hindu nationalist idea of Gujarat. At the center of this vision was an attempt to incorporate and reenact the political and cultural history of Patan a century before that city’s incorporation into the Delhi Sultanate on Hindu nationalist terms.

For the 2003 Independence Day (August 15) commemoration, the flag hoisting ceremony and speeches by the governor and the chief minister of the state were supplemented with other types of performances organized by Hindu nationalist groups in the city. The VHP recruited several temple trusts to organize and fund a series of cultural events and performances that would commence on the night before. On the evening of August 14, citizens of the town were invited to participate in a sahastra jyot yatra (lit. a march of a thousand lights). The temples of the city had been asked to join in a ghantnad (synchronized ringing of temple bells) at sunrise which would be followed by a prabhaat pheri, an early morning procession during which participants would march through the city streets singing devotional songs (Bhatt 2003). Both of these performances, I would argue, can be interpreted as rituals meant to solidify the Hindu nationalist government’s claim that its rule is continuous with a political and cultural history whose central elements were the tradition of Rajput kingship and the anti-colonial movement led by Gandhi. The sahastra jyot yatra, was also meant to establish a symbolic link between the Hindu nationalist government of the present and the rule of Jaysimha Siddhraj, the twelfth century Caulukya king of Patan who built the Sahastra linga tank.188

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188 The Gujarati word sahastra means one thousand and the word is also the root for several epithets for Indra. The choice of sahastra as the theme for the night-time procession was meant to invoke the memory of Jaysimha.
In this chapter, I have tried to show how the Hindu nationalist privileging of medieval Patan as the core of the political and social history of modern Gujarat is continuous with the colonial idea of Gujarat as a distinct region. By suggesting that there are similarities between these two ideas of Gujarat, I do not mean to claim that the Hindu nationalist idea of Gujarat is merely derivative of colonial discourses. Rather, what I want to suggest is that much like the generation of writers and activists of the early twentieth century who had drawn on colonial knowledge in articulating their idea of Gujarati regionalism, the Hindu nationalist movement views nineteenth century colonial knowledge as authorizing its own exclusionary political project. As I show in my discussion of Alexander Forbes’ *Ras Mala*, a theme that unites the colonial and Hindu nationalist constructions of Gujarat is the importance they accord to Rajput virtues and kingship in their understanding of the political history and traditions of Gujarat. This question of Rajput virtues and kingship in the Hindu nationalist vision of Gujarat came to the fore in 2003 during the Independence Day commemoration organized by the BJP government at Patan. The significance of this privileging of Patan in both the colonial and Hindu nationalist historiography of Gujarat lies in its dependence on an erasure of the contributions of Muslims to the making of the region’s history and culture. This erasure, I would argue, has been essential to the making of the modern idea of Gujarat which has depended on constructing Gujarati Muslims as outsiders, parasites and legitimate targets of violence. It is for this reason that I have argued in this chapter that violence against Muslims (by which I mean more than pogroms) and the naturalization of their othering in Gujarat today cannot be apprehended without taking this complex genealogy into consideration.

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Siddhraja, the Rajput Solanki King who ruled Patan in the twelfth century who is said to have commissioned the Sahastralinga Tank, an artificial lake that was surrounded by a thousand miniature shrines to the Lord Shiva.
Conclusion

As I write this conclusion, eleven years have gone by since the pogrom of 2002. Many Muslims in Gujarat continue to suffer from the effects of the violence, and the very real injustices and injuries that were inflicted upon them have yet to be acknowledged. Nor have the years since the pogrom been free of violence. During two years (2006-2008) of fieldwork for this project and shorter visits to Gujarat before (2004 and 2005) and after (2010 and 2011), many of my Muslim interlocutors expressed feelings of fear and vulnerability because of the violence and threats of violence that they have been subjected to since 2002. In the years immediately after the pogrom, several young Muslim women and men were killed by the police who claimed that the victims were terrorists sent by Pakistani intelligence agencies to carry out attacks in Gujarat. According to special inquiries ordered by the Supreme Court and the state High Court, these extrajudicial murders, or “fake encounters” as they are euphemistically called in India, were committed by senior police officers under the direction of Amit Shah, the then Home Minister in the Hindu nationalist controlled state government.189 The day after I arrived in Ahmedabad in June 2004, Ishrat Jahan, Javed Gulam Sheikh, Amjad Ali Rana and Zeeshan Johar were killed on the road connecting Gandhinagar to Ahmedabad. In this and three other cases of extrajudicial murder, the police claimed that the victims were members of Pakistan-sponsored terrorists groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed who had been sent to Gujarat to assassinate the Hindu nationalist Chief Minister Narendra Modi. During my fieldwork in Ahmedabad between 2006

189 This practice is not exceptional to Gujarat and appears to have become more common after the 1980s, when the police and military were engaged in suppressing the Sikh separatist movement in Punjab. On the more recent incidents of extrajudicial killings and deaths in police custody, see Human Rights Watch’s Broken System: Dysfunction, Abuse and Impunity in the Indian Police (2009). On the Gujarat extrajudicial killings see Dionne Bunsha’s “Fake Encounter” (2007), and Ashish Khetan and Harinder Baweja “Fake Killings: Unwritten State Policy” (2007).
and 2008, I heard of several attacks on Muslims in the predominantly working class neighborhoods of Rakhial, Saraspur, and Gomtipur. During the pogrom, the violence against Muslims residing in these areas had been particularly ferocious, and in many cases Muslims were killed by their own neighbors. Because these neighborhoods had been at the center of “communal violence” in the 1980s and 1990s, they are categorized as “sensitive areas” by the police; a description that is adopted by residents as well as the local media. Yet, when these incidents occurred, the local media did not bother to report on them, thus creating the impression that they had not crossed over some arbitrary threshold to qualify as violence. It was as if attacks on Muslims were now considered too insignificant (or banal) to deserve proper coverage in the local papers or television networks.

In addition, wherever I went in Ahmedabad, it was clear that in the aftermath of the 2002 pogrom and the major instances of anti-Muslim violence that have taken place in the state since the first program of 1969 (1980, 1985, 1990 and 1992), the partitioning of the city along religious lines has now been solidified. During my fieldwork, almost every one of my Hindu and Muslim interlocutors in Ahmedabad lived in religiously segregated spaces and spoke of the invisible borders that divided Muslim from non-Muslim areas of the city. Historically, violence against Muslims in Gujarat was concentrated in urban settlements in the central and southern parts of the state. In 2002, however, there were several attacks on Muslims in Rajkot, Junagadh, Bhavnagar and Jamnagar, the major cities of the Saurashtra region (Concerned Citizens Tribunal 2002). As a result, the partitioning of space along religious lines has also become more apparent in these smaller urban centers as well. Given that the majority of the state’s population is below the age of forty, the subjectivities of the generations of Gujaratis born after 1969 is indelibly marked by violence against Muslims and by religious segregation and spatial partitions.
Ironically, what binds these generations of Gujarati Hindus and Muslims to each other, albeit on unequal terms as perpetrator-beneficiary and victim, is a shared history of Hindu nationalist violence.

During the time of my fieldwork, Hindu nationalist groups also engaged in calculated displays of violence in order to police the social boundary between Muslims and Hindus while maintaining a climate of fear and suspicion. In December 2006, Bajrang Dal and Durga Vahini activists armed with hockey sticks entered the campus of Gujarat College and assaulted several male students who were seen talking to women peers. Although the culprits were well known, no arrests were made by the police. At the time, the Dal claimed that they had entered the campus to “protect” Hindu women from predatory Muslim men. Katherine Ewing, in her study of the stigmatization of Turkic men in Germany, draws on the work of Stanley Cohen to describe the creation of “moral panics” that work through the construction of a person or group as a threat to the moral health of the nation. She points out that the media plays a crucial role in creating “a politics of anxiety associated with moral panics… [and] that such moral panics acquire their emotional force by drawing rhetorical links between a current issue and latent, historically configured social fantasies associated with a national imaginary. Moral panics are an important means by which the public renews its emotional investment in a national imaginary” (Ewing 2008:10). In the case of Gujarat, the figures of the Muslim as a violent and virile intruder/conqueror, the virtuous Hindu woman, and the brave Hindu male defender (the Bajrang Dal) became central to creating a sense of moral panic. It was as if the imaginary desires of Muslim men and Hindu women were morally dangerous and in need of constant policing.

In contrast to the fear and vulnerability that were palpable in Muslim neighborhoods, most of my middle class Hindu interlocutors lived as if the pogrom of 2002 had occurred in
another time and a faraway place. When prompted, most of them claimed that it was the work of manipulative politicians who preyed on the ignorance and prejudices of the poor. Some acknowledged the violence of the pogrom, but at the same time praised Narendra Modi for his commitment to good governance, for attracting investments and for developing the state (vikaas). Still others became irritated and claimed that now that “they” (Muslims) had been taught a lesson “they will not get in the way of development.” In addition, prominent activists of the Hindu nationalist movement who had been identified as the organizers and perpetrators of violence moved about with impunity throughout the time of my fieldwork. Jaideep Patel, the vice president of the VHP who has been identified as one of the main organizers and perpetrators of the massacres in Naroda-Patiya and in Naroda Gam, moved about the city with an armed police escort. In late 2006, when I tried to arrange a meeting with Patel for a scholar who was visiting from the United States, he agreed to meet us at the home of a veteran activist of the VHP in one of the most prosperous gated communities in western Ahmedabad. The most visible symbol of the impunity of the Hindu nationalist movement in Gujarat is of course the Chief Minister Narendra Modi, who has been reelected three times since the pogrom of 2002.

The sense of fear and vulnerability experienced by Muslims in the wake of the 2002 violence is only compounded by the weakness of political alternatives to the Congress and the BJP in Gujarat. Both of these parties have dominated politics in the state since the 1980s. Although the Congress describes itself as a secular alternative to the Hindu nationalist BJP, both are invested in a concept of the political as made up of a Hindu majority and a Muslim minority. In addition, both parties alternate between treating Muslims as a vote bank and vilifying them as threats to the nation. The fact that several leaders of the Congress Party in Gujarat are former members of the BJP and were at one time senior activists of the RSS only accentuates the feeling
among many Gujarati Muslims that there are no political alternatives in the state. In December 2007, when elections for the legislative assembly were being held, several of my Muslim interlocutors told me that they were going to vote for the BJP out of fear that the Hindu nationalist movement’s electoral defeat would lead to yet another massive round of organized violence against Muslims.

This sense of a political impasse and the conundrums of inhabiting both a Muslim and Gujarati identity at this historical conjuncture were at the forefront during a symposium that I attended in Ahmedabad in April 2007. The event had been organized by Sanchetna, an NGO that provides healthcare and education to residents of slums in Ahmedabad. The organization describes itself as committed to promoting secular values and communal harmony amongst the poor. The two-day symposium was meant to facilitate a conversation about the findings and recommendations of the central government’s report on the “Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India” and how these might benefit Muslim communities of Gujarat. The report had been released by the Congress-led central government in Delhi in November 2006. More commonly known as the Sachar Committee Report (after the retired justice that presided over the inquiry), it is the first comprehensive official study on the socioeconomic conditions of the Muslim population of India six decades after independence. According to the Sachar Committee, although the conditions of Muslims across India’s states and within the community varied, “the community [as a whole] exhibits deficits and deprivation in practically all dimensions of development” (Sachar Committee 2006: 237). Unlike Hindus,

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190 For example, Shankersinh Vaghela, currently the leader of the opposition in the state legislative assembly, left the BJP, joined the Congress in 1998 and served as the Minister for Textiles in the Congress-dominated UPA government in Delhi from 2004 to 2009. Prior to joining the Congress, he was a member of the RSS and the BJP and later formed his own political party called the Rashtriya Janata Party and served as Chief Minister from October 1996 to October 1997. In the 1990s, he was credited with building the organizational and political base of the Hindu nationalist movement in Gujarat.
the report suggests, Muslims have to negotiate the interrelated problems of “identity, security and equity” and their “relative deprivation” is compounded by social and political marginalization in India. Given its limited mandate, the committee’s recommendations emphasized problems of economic inequality and suggested that “policies to deal with the relative deprivation of the Muslims in the country should sharply focus on inclusive development and ‘mainstreaming’ of the community while respecting diversity” (Sachar Committee 2006:237). Although the report suggested that relative to other states, the Muslims of Gujarat had fared better than Muslims in many other states of India, they nevertheless had to deal with relatively higher levels of poverty and deprivation that were compounded by discrimination and by social and political marginalization.

The participants in the symposium were a disparate group that appeared to have come together primarily out of a shared experience of prejudice and violence. They also reflected the heterogeneity and the internal differences that characterize Gujarat’s Muslim communities. The organizers had invited representatives from Islamic movements such as the Jamaat-e-Islami, Tabligh-i-Jamaat; leaders of various Muslim jamaats (castes/communities); representatives of Islamic charities and NGOs; and individuals considered to be “allies” of Gujarati Muslims. In addition, several journalists, including some from the vernacular media, were present at the seminar. The presence of reporters from the Gujarati press was particularly interesting considering the vernacular media’s well documented role in the 2002 pogrom when it portrayed Muslims as treacherous and violent (Patel and Editors Guild of India 2002). Over the course of two days, scholars who had participated in the drafting of the Sachar Committee’s report gave presentations on their findings and recommendations. The most animated discussion during the symposium came after a presentation that focused on reservations (affirmative action) for Other
Backward Classes (OBC) and their impact on Muslim communities classified as belonging to this category. With the implementation of the Mandal Commission’s recommendations in 1991, the central government had added about one hundred and thirty Muslim castes to the list of OBC communities eligible for reservation of jobs in government institutions, public sector enterprises and centrally funded educational institutions. However, the Sachar Committee found that the implementation of the Mandal recommendations had been uneven across different states because of discrepancies between the central and state lists of OBC groups classified as being eligible for reservations. As a result of these inconsistencies, many deserving OBC communities were in fact excluded from both lists and denied access to employment and other opportunities. For example, the committee pointed out that while there were 27 Muslim communities included in the OBC list in Gujarat, only 22 of them appeared on the central list. The Committee therefore recommended that the government prioritize eliminating inconsistencies in the lists by conducting a fresh national survey in order to identify the most vulnerable Muslims and ensure that they were eligible for affirmative action. This recommendation became the main topic of debate at the symposium. The debate was fascinating and reflected the internal diversity of the local Muslim community. It not only highlighted the differences and disagreements that exist amongst Gujarat’s Muslim communities over questions of religious practice and belief; it also gave voice to different opinions on ways of securing distributive justice in a politically and

191 The chapter on Muslim OBCs in fact relies almost entirely on the 1901 census in its analysis of caste and social stratification amongst Indian Muslims in contemporary India. According to the report’s authors, Indian Muslims are divided broadly into two classes: asharf (the elite castes, made up of descendants of Arab, Persian, Afghan; upper caste converts) and ajlaf (converts from lower castes); these are further divided into other sub-groups whose practices incorporate those of Hindu castes, such as “endogamy,” “hierarchy,” and “hereditary occupation” (Sachar Committee: 192). Not only does this reproduce the trope of non-indigenous and indigenous Muslim that were common in colonial discourse, but the report hinges on the view that Islam outside of the Arabian peninsula had a propensity to deviate from its “pure” or “authentic” form (Sachar Committee 2006:192). In anthropology, such a view of Islam was developed by Clifford Geertz in his book *Islam Observed* (1968). However, as Satish Misra (Misra 1964) and Imtiaz Ahmad (Ahmad 1978) pointed out a long time ago, the claim that caste in Muslim communities had “features of the Hindu caste system” does not adequately capture the organization and functioning of social life amongst Muslims. Nor do most Indian Muslims describe themselves in the same terms as members of a Hindu caste.
socially inhospitable context. The debate also exemplified the sense of political impasse that many of my Muslim interlocutors described feeling and the very limited terms of discourse in which discussions about the “Muslim question” can be had in Gujarat, at this particular conjuncture.

Several speakers, including one of the organizers of the symposium, argued that reservations for OBCs (caste based affirmative action) offered a legal avenue for Muslims of Gujarat to overcome problems of economic deprivation, social prejudice and marginalization. Implicit in these arguments was the suggestion that if Muslims remained socially and economically marginalized in postcolonial India and Gujarat, this is because they and their representatives have given too much priority to questions of “religious identity” in their dealings with the state and have neglected other, more concrete concerns such as access to secular education, to jobs, to credit, etc. According to these speakers, the Sachar Committee’s emphasis on reservations for Muslim OBCs would have the double benefit of improving individual Muslim lives and making the community less susceptible to hostility and prejudice. In doing so, they constructed an opposition between “Good Muslims” who take advantage of options legally available to them as Indian citizens and “Bad Muslims” who are over-invested in their “tradition” and their “Islamic identity” and are participating in their own oppression (Mamdani 2004). By privileging their caste identities, establishing their credentials as Indian citizens and appearing less threatening to non-Muslims, they argued, Muslims would be better able to take advantage of opportunities such as affirmative action. Not everyone at the symposium however agreed with this characterization of the status of Muslims in Gujarat or with the proposed solutions. Several of the representatives from Islamic charities, for example, pointed out that it did not matter what individual Muslims did or did not do in their self-representations or dealings
with the state, since there appeared to be an unwritten policy in Gujarat of denying caste certificates to Muslims belonging of OBC communities. A caste certificate is required to prove eligibility for reservations. According to some of the participants, government officials in Gujarat frequently and arbitrarily rejected applications on the grounds that “reservations are not for religious minorities.” Others at the symposium, including representatives of Islamic charities and reform movements, argued that because caste violated the Islamic principle of equality in front of God, it was unreasonable to expect Muslims to “compromise” their faith in order to share in the benefits of economic development.

Listening to this debate, I could not help but feel ambivalent about the implications of the various arguments put forward by participants at the symposium. I realized that the Sachar Committee’s authors were thinking strategically and practically about ways of alleviating the marginalization and poverty experienced by Muslims all over India. Furthermore, their recommendations had the advantage of highlighting the heterogeneity of the Muslim population of India by foregrounding the various caste identities to which they belonged. By highlighting the diversity of the Muslim population, especially at a time of heightened tensions with Pakistan over Kashmir, the Sachar Committee report had the effect of undermining the secular and religious nationalist tendency to characterize India’s Muslims as a politically and socially undifferentiated religious minority. Nevertheless, I worried that one of the implications of this debate was that it has become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, at this particular juncture, for Muslims to discuss the question of justice on their own terms or to advocate for their rights as Muslims in Gujarat.

In *Formations of the Secular*, Talal Asad makes the disturbing but provocative argument that it is difficult if not impossible for Muslims to represent themselves (or be represented) as
Muslims in liberal democracies in Europe (2003:173). While Muslims are “clearly present in a secular Europe,” they are “in an important sense absent from it” (2003: 159). They are “included within and excluded from Europe at one and the same time” and this inclusion/exclusion, he argues, “has less to do with the ‘absolutist Faith’ of Muslims living in a secular environment and more with European notions of ‘culture’ and ‘civilization’ and ‘the secular state,’ ‘majority’ and ‘minority.’” (2003: 159). Because Muslims today are seen by liberals and the extreme right alike as external to the (unchangeable) essence of Europe (despite a history of Islam being constitutive of it), Islam, Asad further suggests, must be made inessential to Muslim immigrants in order for them to become of Europe (as opposed to merely being in Europe). Muslims in other words can only be assimilated into Europe “once they have divested themselves of what many of them regard (mistakenly) as essential to themselves” (2003: 169). And this insistence “is in effect to demand that they can and should shed the narratives and practices that they take to be necessary to their lives as Muslims” (175). He ends his essay not by offering any answers but by asking the following set of questions: “What kind of conditions can be developed in secular Europe—and beyond—in which everyone may live as a minority among minorities?... [and] is it possible for Muslims (or any other immigrants for that matter) to be represented as themselves” (180). Although there are many crucial differences between Muslims of Western Europe and of Gujarat (or India in general), Asad’s argument is helpful in thinking critically about the Sachar Committee Report and more generally about the construction of the minority question in contemporary Gujarat.

192 He writes: “The ideology of political representation in liberal democracies makes it difficult if not impossible to represent Muslims as Muslims. Because in theory the citizens who constitute a democratic state belong to a class that is defined only by what is common to all its members and its members only. What is common is the abstract equality of individual citizens to one another, so that each counts as one” (2003: 173). “In principle, therefore,” he adds, “nothing should distinguish Muslims from non-Muslims as citizens of a European democratic state other than their fewer numbers” (173-174).
The Sachar Committee Report is premised on the idea that Muslims of India are a religious minority that is both distinct from other religious minorities and from a Hindu majority. While Muslims have never constituted a numerical majority in India, it is important to keep in mind that minorities and majorities are never merely descriptive or quantitative modes of classification. Rather, as Talal Asad has argued, they are statistical and political concepts that are integral to the functioning of modern regimes of power and linked intimately to the emergence of nationalism and the formation of the modern nation-state (Asad 2003). In India, notions of majority and minority have been central to the articulation of regionalist politics in the postcolonial era. In addition, while the status of Muslims as a religious minority is naturalized in the discourse of the report, it is at the same time problematized as an obstacle to their socioeconomic integration in postcolonial and post-Partition India. This is made evident in the report’s emphasis on the “mainstreaming” of Muslims as a means towards a more inclusive development. The word “mainstreaming” is suggestive of blending in and backgrounding one’s difference. Since the difference that has been identified as constituting Muslims into a minority is religious difference, the recommendation for “mainstreaming” suggests that Muslims background their “religious” difference.193 In this sense, the Sachar Committee Report, and its advocates at the symposium in Ahmedabad, can be seen as demanding that Indian Muslims “shed the narratives and practices that they [or some of them at least] take to be necessary to their lives as Muslims” (Asad 2003: 175) and that they divest themselves of their way of being Muslim as a precondition for their “inclusion” in development and their recognition as citizens/Gujaratis. Not unlike the Muslim immigrants in Europe that Asad writes about, the Muslims of Gujarat cannot advocate for their rights or request inclusion as Muslims. They can

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193 Although the report devotes a chapter to OBCs and caste amongst Muslims, it refers to Muslims throughout in the singular as “the Muslim community.”
only do so on the basis of what they have in common with other citizens of India/Gujaratis; and this means that they should emphasize this sameness in their self-representation. Yet, as some of the participants in the Ahmedabad symposium emphasized, it is often others who insist on highlighting their “difference” and over-determining their status as Muslims. This is most clearly the case when government officials in Gujarat reject applications for caste certificates on the grounds that “reservations are not for religious minorities.” In addition, while Muslims are being discriminated against and targeted by violence as Muslims, it is their Muslimness that the recommendations of the Sachar Committee Report can be seen as problematizing. Furthermore, the report, and the larger discourse of which it is a part, places the burden for integration onto Muslims themselves.

But how did the Muslims of Gujarat come to be constructed as outsiders, or as immigrants needing to be included and “mainstreamed” into Indian/Gujarati society? When did being an Indian/Gujarati Muslim cease to be a coherent category? There are after all many crucial historical differences between most liberal democracies of Western Europe and Gujarat (and India) on the Muslim question. Unlike in much of Western Europe, Muslims were neither immigrants (in the sense we understand the term in the age of nation-states, as outsiders) nor strangers in Gujarat (and India). Nor is the history of Islam alien to the history of Gujarat (Ho 2006; Quraishi 1972). The two have been braided together since at least the middle of the twelfth century, if not earlier. Within four years after the death of the Prophet Mohammed, the histories of Islam and of the communities living in the territories that became part of modern Gujarat began to intersect with each other due to trade and exchange and the activities of missionaries and soldiers. That year, the governor of Bahrain reportedly dispatched his brother on an expedition to Bharuch, which was already a well-established trading center at that time
By the twelfth century, the flow of traders, Sufis (warrior-mystics), religious specialists, soldiers and conquerors and their interactions with local populations facilitated the rise of multiple communities of Muslims in towns such as Cambay, Bharuch, Patan and Junagadh. How else are we to understand the emergence of Narsinh Mehta (1418-1481), whose life overlapped with the Sultanate of Gujarat? Narsinh Mehta, as I mentioned in Chapter I, is regarded by many Gujarati Hindus as the greatest poet of the Vaishnavite tradition and as the adi kavi (first poet) of the Gujarati language.

This centuries-long history of interaction and co-constitution is completely elided in the Sachar Committee Report and more generally in contemporary discourses about Muslims in India/Gujarat. It is as if Muslims only started arriving in India/Gujarat in recent decades or that they have always been outsiders to it. Islam is constructed as a fully-formed religion that came from the outside and remained an outsider in India despite existing within it. Even in sophisticated academic accounts that recognize that Islam/Muslims are not strangers to Gujarat, this gesture turns into one of claiming that what arrived in Gujarat were multiple forms of Islam that were then “appropriated” into a pre-existing social and cultural complex that was itself coherent (Misra 1964; Ghassem-Fachandi 2012). Such claims understate the extent to which the Islamic tradition itself was formed and constituted through these interactions and histories. They posit the histories of Islam and of non-Muslim Gujarati communities are mutually exclusive. They also underestimate the extent to which these interactions created the conditions for the emergence of new linguistic and devotional practices in Gujarat.

To paraphrase Asad, while Muslims are “clearly present” in India/Gujarat, they are “in an important sense [made] absent from it” (2003: 159). Indeed how else can one explain the

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194 My argument here is inspired by Partha Chatterjee’s discussion about the practice of nationalist history writing in nineteenth century Bengal in his Nation and its Fragments (1993).
similarities between the contemporary discourse about Muslim immigrants in Europe and Muslims in Gujarat expect by rendering Muslims into outsiders? And furthermore, how else can one accept the logic of the well-meaning Sachar Committee Report except by eliding the political history that has rendered Muslims strangers in Gujarat? It is the genealogy of this making of Gujarati Muslims into outsiders that I have tried to tell in this dissertation. What I have argued is that the transmutation of Gujarati Muslims into strangers occurred simultaneously with the articulation of the modern idea of Gujarat in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition, I have tried to suggest that colonial power and its forms of knowledge played an important role in displacing older conceptions of territory, history and community, in which Muslim communities were not posited as outsiders. Islam as inessential and external to the idea of Gujarat and as a specter is, in other words, a legacy bequeathed by colonialism and its forms of knowledge. This, I have tried to show, has implications for how we think about violence against Muslims in contemporary Gujarat. It complicates in particular the tendency to exceptionalize the violence and bigotry of the Hindu nationalist movement (which is of course undeniable), while staying silent on the complicities of secular and liberal forms of power that are equally enmeshed in the project of Othering Muslims in Gujarat. My argument about the making of Gujarat and of its Muslims as outsiders also complicates the tendency to emphasize the violence and horror of pogroms while staying silent on everyday and more routine forms of violence that are just as crucial in marginalizing Muslims and producing their Otherness. What the privileging of pogroms renders invisible are the multiple and everyday forms of violence, marginalization and Othering that Muslims have to live with on a daily basis in contemporary Gujarat. So while my dissertation is not an ethnography or history of the Muslim communities

195 Here I use the word specter in much the same way has Dirks (2001) has used it in thinking about the politics of caste in postcolonial India.
of Gujarat, I hope to have nevertheless provided a sense of some of the challenges and
difficulties of inhabiting a Muslim identity in contemporary Gujarat. At the same time, I hope to
have conveyed some the difficulties entailed in inhabiting a Hindu identity that is not articulated
in opposition to a Muslim Other at this particular conjuncture. By emphasizing the performative
and subject-constituting nature of Hindu nationalist and other exclusionary discourses (including
secular nationalist ones), I hope to have raised questions about the productive nature of modern
power and its ability to transform political, regional, and religious subjectivities. Finally by
historicizing some of these developments in Gujarat and describing some of the genealogies that
have gone into constituting them, I hope to have argued that such legacies have *enduring* effects
in the postcolonial present that we inhabit; and thus that the question of colonial knowledge and
representation, as David Scott has argued (1999), is not merely an epistemological or
historiographical one, but rather a *political* one. Written as a history of the present, this
dissertation seeks to “shift the focus away from postcoloniality’s concern with the politics of
colonialist representations and in the direction of the problem of rethinking the present in terms
of new conceptualizations of postcolonial politics” (Scott 1999: 224). What motivates it is a
desire to imagine a future in which Hindu/Gujarati and Muslim are no longer conceptualized as
oppositional categories; in which Gujarati Muslims are able to represent themselves *as Muslims*
and in their own (varied) terms; and where Hindus are no longer invited and incited to inhabit a
subjectivity that depends on making Muslims strangers in Gujarat.
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