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ART, TOLERANCE AND DEMOCRACY



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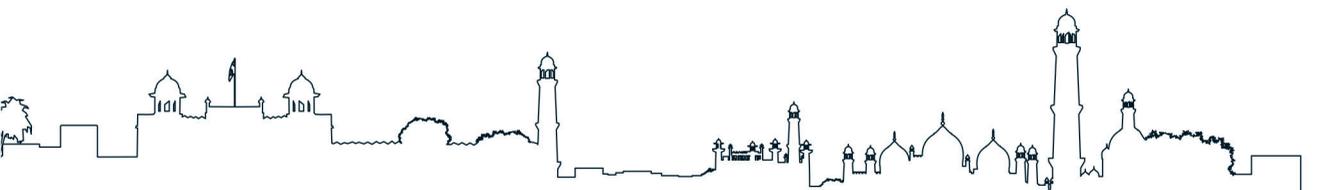
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ART,  
TOLERANCE AND  
DEMOCRACY



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# Art, Tolerance and Democracy

**Prof. Pervaiz Vandal**

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In the long process of development of life on Earth, the human species acquired the special ability to ponder and reflect. From simple instinctive actions and reactions, they developed the ability to also deliberate. After a day's hard work of hunting, gathering or growing food, groups sat together, perhaps around a cooking fire, enjoyed the collective company, shared the narratives of the day's events, applauded, clapped and sang as expressions of joy at particular exploits, brooded over the challenges the next day might bring, and perhaps even quarrelled over sharing what was available or disagreed on the next plans and actions, before going to sleep. The process of sleep, rejuvenation, along with the dreams they saw, prepared them for the next day with a goal and objective beyond mere physical survival.

The joy, shared through narration, of a successful day coupled with the beseeching of the unknown forces for a better future was of as basic an importance for the sustenance and revitalization of the human spirit, as the food consumed. From such celebration of achievements and deliberation thereon, the human mind, culture and art are conjointly born.

The Human Mind is that element, part, substance or process that reasons, thinks, feels, wills, perceives or judges. Thereby humans developed the ability to move from concrete **percept-based-thought** to abstract **concept-based-thought**. "Human appreciation of art is innate and not socially constructed... [and]... the origin of language, (spoken or unspoken) and the human mind are shown to have emerged simultaneously"<sup>1</sup>; it is part of the genetic endowment of humans. Researches in cognition, its psychology and philosophy, show that the mind has the ability to pull together different strands of knowledge in an integrative process so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, a symphony, a bouquet of a variety of flowers. The Neural Networks are activated which permit us to process, assimilate and respond to complex sets of inputs and interactions. Creativity and art grow out of this complex gathering of wide experiences.

Cognition processes the information received from the five senses along with what is gleaned from oral history, tradition, books, which are a summary of other people's experiences.

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1. Dutton, Denis. 2009. *The Art Instinct: Beauty Pleasure and Human Evolution*. Bloomsbury Press.

Wide exposure to all segments of society enriches the mind, but then it is necessary to verbalize and write the cognition to help the integrative process and form a judgment. Verbalizing and writing of thoughts clarifies and sharpens them and this can be called 'reading the mind'. In the correlation of language and mind this is an important process and helps the mind to further vault to higher concepts and understanding through self-analyses and self-criticism. The process of being able to create objects of beauty, which may or may not be of any consumptive or ritualistic use, comes from this integrative process which, when propelled by the creative impulse, brings forth artistic creations. Its foremost requirement is an open mind, tolerant of differing opinion.

Culture is that set of beliefs and practices which animates, sustains and binds a people and thereby defines identity. In the present maelstrom of existence, culture is at once being enriched and destroyed; the past is our bedrock and yet it must continuously evolve. The perennial question remains: what must we carry through from our past and what must be changed to cope with the current context of existence? This is the essence of the debate that takes place in our persons and society, albeit mostly at the subsurface level of consciousness, and this is what generates conflict. Conflict is built into existence. The mechanism of conflict-resolution that a society evolves reflects its maturity in the spectrum of human development. Open debate, tolerance for different views, freedom of expression, a clear bar on violence and institutions that foster this, are qualities of a high culture. Understanding of the 'self' leads to the understanding of others. The single identity merges with the family, clan and other humans and ultimately nature. This submergence in nature is the goal expressed in almost all religions. It calls for a diminishing of the ego, a negation indeed of the person, to develop the ability to reach out to even the enemy.

Humans cannot but think and wonder at their culture, mode of living, with a certain delight mixed with awe. It is indeed humbling when placed in the universal context of the solar system and the galaxies beyond imagination. What is life all about is a perpetual unanswered question.

Art in the full sweep of all aesthetic events, from painting, sculpture, music, architecture, theatre, poetry and literature, provides experiences that uplift ordinary existence to a feeling of fulfilment, peace and serenity, and with that, tolerance towards the 'other', the 'different' and the 'outsider' germinates and flourishes. The experience of creativity and art is essentially humbling.

People in times of danger both real and imagined tend to barricade; build boundaries, the most effective of which are the psychological.

A family, clan or tribe gathers together in the face of peril, calling upon biological and psychological commonalities to stick together and thus tribalism is born; self has to be glorified and the rival, the other, has to be vilified. It is fear and insecurity that drives our sense of superiority; drives us to think that we are 'uber alles', or are the chosen people or are destined to rule and suppress others.

Greater collaboration between the arts and education at all levels would emphasize imagination, critical thinking, social inclusion and tolerance of the different. Education and awareness are critical for the long-term sustainability of democracy and the arts play a pivotal role in helping people to accept different perspectives in a holistic manner.

Art, tolerance and democracy in a dialectical manner both flourish and generate a culture of freedom of thought, expression and assembly.



# Not Just Another Song and Dance: Aboriginal Australians Performing 'Corroborees' as Political and Social Activism

**Prof. Jakelin Troy, Amanda Harris, PhD, Prof. Linda Barwick and Matt Poll**

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## Introduction

In this paper we explore the use of 'art' in the twentieth century, in particular musical and dance performances, as the medium used by Aboriginal communities in Australia to make social and political statements about their identities and rights as the Indigenous peoples of this country. In Australia, it is common practice amongst Aboriginal people to perform 'corroborees' which are performances that include music, dance, creation of artworks and oratory practices, including speech giving. The word first appears in the historical record for Australia as 'car-rib-ber-re' meaning 'dance or sing' (Dawes c1790-1791), a word from the language of the Aboriginal people of the area now known as the Sydney Basin. This word was borrowed into the developing Australian English as 'corroboree' and became the generic term used by Aboriginal people and colonists alike for gatherings of Aboriginal people for the purpose of communal festivity involving a feast followed by drinking, social and intellectual interaction and entertainment in the form of dancing and singing (Troy 1990, 1993).

The paper has been developed out of a research collaboration, with colleagues from the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne and The University of California Riverside, with whom we are exploring the use of traditional performative practices as vehicles for pushing back against intolerance of Indigenous cultural, linguistic, social and political systems. Australia in the twentieth century was a 'democracy' but one that excluded Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people were increasingly forced to assimilate to the social and cultural norms of the wider society but at the same time we were excluded from being counted in any census of the population, unable to vote for governments, prevented from moving freely without permits, were not paid for our labor, were prevented from speaking our languages and maintaining our laws and cultural practices. A system of apartheid existed where we were kept away from public places that were deemed for 'whites only'. Most heartbreaking was the forced removal of our children who were stolen from their families and placed in foster homes or institutions. We lost generations of people from our communities. Our research into the continued performance of a key cultural icon, the corroboree, against this backdrop of social oppression is a story about the resilience of Aboriginal people as we fought for tolerance and acceptance of our rightful place in the democracy that is Australia, using our art and cultural practices as our medium for protest.

The project seeks to find out who were the individuals involved in these public performances, and why they were taking part. Underlying these events is a rich but largely hidden and dispersed history of ongoing Aboriginal cultural engagement, political mobilization, and reclamation through performance. In this project, our multidisciplinary team—musicologists, linguists, dance historians, digital humanists, curators, artists and cultural historians—will remap the ‘long’ Assimilation era (1935 -75) by excavating, curating and mobilizing a corpus of public cultural records of the period. Australian cultural institutions such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), the National Library of Australia (NLA), the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) and the National Archives all hold important collections that we will draw upon in this project.

Materials of interest to this project include holdings that are relatively poorly indexed, such as collections of personal papers, correspondence, ephemera, newsreels, historical newspapers, oral histories and reports, in many of which, records of Aboriginal performances appear mixed up with other topical matters. We will augment this corpus with present-day interpretations and responses from personal archives, oral histories, exhibitions and creative works. Focusing on urban and regional networks in south-eastern Australia, we aim to re-evaluate the artistic legacy of public performances by Aboriginal people (music, dance and associated cultural practices), and to reclaim these rich and hybrid histories for broad cultural benefit (Muecke 2004, McLean 2008).

## 1. Language and Cultural Revival Movements in Australia: The Ngarigu Corroboree

The team focused on language and cultural revival movements in Australia, particularly in the south-east, to document how communities are using public performance as a method for publicly reasserting group identity. Troy’s own community, the Ngarigu of the Snowy Mountains in south-eastern Australia, held a ‘corroboree’ on 7 April, 2018 at the Cooma Showgrounds, Cooma, on the lower western slopes of the Snowy Mountains. The community called the event a corroboree and it was documented by Troy (co-author of the current paper) who participated in the event as a community member and invited speaker.

The event was a gathering of clans who now live in Cooma, Tumbarumba, and Canberra in the Monaro district of New South Wales in south-eastern Australia. The public performance had most of the characteristics of corroborees performed by Aboriginal communities and documented material from the earliest period of the invasion of Australia by the British in 1788.

It began in the morning with a ritual smoking ceremony conducted by Ngarigu Elders. This is an event where participants pass through smoke from a fire created with fresh eucalyptus leaves for the purpose of purification and cleansing of distress and tension before the ceremony begins. Music played as invited guests, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, seated themselves in a large hall. As people passed into the hall they participated in placing their paint covered hand prints on a large canvas. This is a ritual that has been conducted throughout Australia over tens of thousands of years; many rock shelters still have hand prints stencilled onto them, recording human ceremonial practices since time immemorial.

Once everyone was seated, the event was opened and the audience was addressed about Ngarigu history and the future by Uncle John Casey, considered to be the most knowledgeable and senior Elder of the Ngarigu. More speeches followed, given by other male and female Elders and a youth representative. A ceremonial feast followed with everyone invited to eat, relax and mingle after the formalities were over. This was preceded by the cutting of a decorated cake by Uncle John Casey, a new tradition adopted through the influence of the English practice of cakes marking special events. Participants stayed for some hours after the close of formalities and then the clans left to attend more feasting and socializing at the home of a community member on the outskirts of Cooma. The formal and informal, feasting and incorporation of ritual and music are all typical elements of corroboree events, both ancient and modern. The event was highly significant as a deliberate re-assertion of Ngarigu identity and cultural connection to the Snowy Mountains following a long period of cultural and linguistic destruction due to the invasion and occupation of the Monaro district, within which the Snowy Mountains are located, by pastoralists in the late 1820s. It was from this period forward that the Ngarigu began to lose tenure on their lands and were forced to abandon many cultural practices as well as their languages. Recent events, corroborees, gatherings and the formation of corporations for the advancement of Ngarigu are the beginning of a movement for the revival of Ngarigu language and culture.

The Ngarigu corroboree was following a tradition of inviting the wider community, including non-Aboriginal people, to attend such events as part of Aboriginal hospitality and incorporation. It is the early colonial period that set the scene for Aboriginal people to engage non-Aboriginal people at their corroborees. In a paper written for the 1988 'festivities' around the bicentenary of the British invasion of Australia, Troy (1990) wrote,

While it never became commonplace for Aborigines to attend the Governor's table and high society festivities, colonists seemed to have readily availed themselves of the hospitality of Aborigines at their corroborees.

The participation of colonists in the festivities of Aborigines began within a few days of the First Fleet's arrival at Port Jackson. Collins (1798/1795/1, 29) noted that a 'family' of Aborigines was regularly visited in a cove of the harbor by large parties of the convicts of both sexes on those days in which they were not wanted for labor, where they danced and sang with apparent good humor. According to the colonists who attended them, corroborees were of varying sizes and held for many different reasons – spontaneously following a hunt and purely for entertainment; formally organized to welcome home young men following a stage in their initiation; to celebrate an abundance of food; or to collect people for the purpose of trading artefacts and cultural forms such as songs, stories and dances. It also became common practice for Aborigines to welcome colonial dignitaries to their countries with a corroboree. In 1821, on his visit to Wallis' Plains Governor Macquarie (1956, 219) noted in his diary that 'Bungaree and his tribe [the Boan people] entertained us with a Karaburie after dinner, and we did not go to bed till 11 o'clock'.

## 2. Australian Nationhood, 'Assimilationism', and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Performance

At defining moments in Australia's developing nationhood, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performers brought music and dance to national and local stages. In the middle decades of the twentieth century, a performance by the Wallaga Lakes Gumleaf Band from southern New South Wales heralded the 1932 opening of the Sydney Harbor Bridge. In the 1940s, Bill Onus from Victoria recruited interstate performers for tourist shows in Melbourne. Jimmy Little Senior led a vaudeville troupe along the Murray River during the 1950s and Aboriginal music and dance featured at the opening of the 1956 Melbourne Olympics and at diplomacy events coinciding with the various Royal Visits of the era.

The dates 1935-1975 encompass key political events leading up to the official adoption of Assimilation as government policy in 1937 through to the introduction of the Racial Discrimination Act in 1975. Haebich points out that though Assimilation was an apparent shift away from a white Australia, the paradox remained that 'its promise of universal equality came at the price of ... cultural obliteration' for Aboriginal people and immigrants (Haebich 2007, 11). Under Assimilation, Aboriginal people's ability to move freely across the country was restricted, and children were removed from family networks and cultural contexts and were schooled in European modes of servitude, employment and language. The best-known form of Aboriginal resistance to the constraints placed upon them was focused political action.

Outstanding examples of this action were: the 1939 'Cummeragunja walk-off' when Aboriginal people left the Cummeragunja Mission in north-western Victoria, in protest against the authoritarianism of the mission system; the Darwin corroboree strike of 1953; and the formation of activist organizations such as the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA), the Aboriginal Advancement League (AAL), Australian-Aboriginal Fellowship and the Federal Council of Aboriginal Affairs (later for Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders).

Public performance constituted another less well-known but powerful means of asserting cultural survival and creating arenas for engagement and communication with the general public. The appearance of Aboriginal performers in public events during this period is often framed as tokenistic. However, preliminary work by the investigators on this project suggests that from an Aboriginal perspective, these performances embodied serious and powerful expressions of enduring presence and social salience. The growing field of Settler Colonial Studies has sought to expose how the appropriation of Aboriginal cultures served to attribute creative, political, nation-defining agency to non-Indigenous Australians at the expense of Aboriginal people (Veracini 2015, Wolfe 1999). Healy has shown how appropriative arts enacted a radical forgetting of Aboriginal history and contemporary presence by replacing 'old' Aboriginal arts with 'new' hybrid creations (Healy 2008). McGregor suggests that even though white Australians engaged with Aboriginal art only on their own terms, the mainstream appropriation of Indigenous art forms indicated a growing realization that settler Australians must become more receptive to Aboriginal Australians and their culture (McGregor 2011, 136-40).

### 3. Emerging Histories – Accounts of Indigenous Performance Speaking for Themselves

This project offers a response to Read's call for emerging histories, which 'set the discussion in context, track down and analyze archival and other records, locate descendants, exchange information and establish a mutually beneficial relationship' between non-Indigenous and Indigenous accounts of nation-building and cultural agency (Read 2013, 39). Engaging with performances on their own terms allows us to go beyond appropriative readings and address questions of cultural agency by the performers. While a substantial literature has already documented Aboriginal corroboree performances and popular entertainments in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Goodall 2001, Parsons 2002, Casey 2015, Waterhouse 1990), scholarly attention to public performance in the Assimilation era of the early to late mid-twentieth century is still patchy.

Important work on individual performance works or groups of significance has been published by scholars of history, dance and music (Casey 2011, Hunter 2014, Kleinert 1999, Ryan 1999, Sullivan 1988). Walker published a thorough history of Aboriginal country music in 2000, and several influential publications focus on Aboriginal theatre from around 1965 (Casey 2004, Gilbert and Lo 2009). The lack of a broad-ranging cultural history of the Assimilation era live performance contrasts notably with work on the visual arts in Australia (Morphy 1991; Thomas 1999), and with Indigenous performance histories elsewhere (Balme 2007 on Pacific performance cultures; Shea Murphy 2007 on Native American dance). In this period, hybrid creations by non-Indigenous composers and choreographers figured prominently in the broader Australian public's imaginings of Aboriginal performance traditions, complicating the question of who had authority to represent Aboriginal culture during this period (Harris 2014). For example, multiple studies have focused on the 1954 performance of Dean, Carell and Antill's ballet *Corroboree* (Card 1997, Haebich and Taylor 2008, Haskins 2014, Magowan 2000, Vignando 1991), yet little attention has been paid to artistic work of Aboriginal performers appearing on the same stages in the same period, in part due to the lack of a coherent documentary record. One exception is the 1951 Aboriginal Moomba mounted by the Australian Aboriginal League for the centenary of Victoria and the jubilee of Federation (Kleinert 1999, Ramsland and Mooney 2007).

Numerous studies in recent years have dealt with Indigenous responses to the repatriation of heritage such as human remains, material culture and digital objects (M. Thomas 2015; Fforde, Ormond-Parker and Turnbull 2015, amongst many others). Today's Aboriginal artists—from Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal Elder Major Sumner narrating *River Songs* from Queensland to the Lower Murray, to Jessie Lloyd and her 'Mission Songs' concert performance project—demonstrate compelling interest in the recuperative power of reintegrating Aboriginal performance records from this time period and this region through present-day creative works. Indigenist research methodologies using collaborative participatory methods, often based on action research (Smith, 1999), have become one means of undertaking such work (Ford, Barwick and Marett 2014).

Performance histories from elsewhere in the world, particularly Canada, New Zealand and the United States of America, are directly relevant to this project, not only because of parallels in the social standing of Indigenous peoples, but also because of the influence of visiting US performers who often sought to interact with Aboriginal people throughout the Assimilation period. For example, while on separate Australian tours in 1960 (De Looper 2014) both Paul Robeson and Harry Belafonte sought out Aboriginal activists. American modern and contemporary dancers also interacted with Indigenous performers, whether from Ted Shawn's 1947 encounter with Wagaitj dancer

Mosek, or African-American Katherine Dunham's 1956-7 visit to Melbourne and Sydney. Leading international scholar and collaborator on this project (partner investigator) Shea Murphy's ground-breaking 2007 study of Native American Dance, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, showed that—in direct parallel with Australia—performance played a fundamental role in the legal, social and artistic formations of Native American identity in the United States and was not merely an exploitable tourist commodity. A direct outcome of this research was the Indigenous Choreographers' Network she established at UC Riverside in 2012, which has brought together North American, Maori, Philippine and South American Indigenous artists.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we, the research team, assert that through our project we are raising potential global research questions about how Indigenous peoples use performance practices to assert their identities and keep their linguistic, musical and cultural traditions strong in the face of oppression. We are uncovering clear evidence that Aboriginal people in Australia were able to keep their cultural and linguistic identities strong through the Assimilation period when extreme government pressure was exerted on Aboriginal people to conform to the national standard cultural and linguistic practices imposed by the British following invasion and occupation of Aboriginal lands in 1788. It is likely that Indigenous peoples everywhere have relied on musical traditions and performance practices to help them maintain their separate identities whenever faced with invasion and the imposition of oppressive colonizing regimes.

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# Ultimate Tolerance in Crisis: Jain Heritage in Pakistan

**Asif Mahmood Rana**

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## Background

Jainism is said to be the most ancient religion of India (Roy, 1984). Nude *Sramanas*, that is, the non-theistic people of the *Rig Veda*, who wandered in the forests, rejected the *Vedic* literature, the caste system, meaningless rituals and practised high ethical values, the major of which was *Ahimsa* or non-violence (Huntington, 2001). Naga Sadhus of the *Puranas* and *Upanishads* are also believed to be Jains. They recognise themselves in ancient literature as *Nigghanthas*, which means, free from bonds, in the *Acharanga Sutra* and the *Kalpa Sutra*, or *Nirgranthas*, that is, without any sacred book (Roy, 1984). Although the present form of Jainism goes back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the time of Mahavira who was the 24<sup>th</sup> *Tirthankara*, the ford-maker of Jainism, Jains consider their religion to be eternal (Roy, 1984).

## Historical Overview

There are some speculations on the basis of a few signs that point out the presence of this creed in Proto-historic Harappan times (2500-1600 BCE). Some Jains claim that the Harappan seal with the impression of a sitting figure in yoga style is of Rishibdeva or Adinatha, the first *Tirthankara* of Jainism and historic Jains are the continuity of Proto-historic Jain communities. The naked torso from Harappa is linked with the sky-clad Digambara sect of Jains (Chandra, 1985). The story of Jainism in the region that now constitutes Pakistan, starts with the historical beginning of Jainism itself in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Mahavira visited the Thar region of Sindh and Bhera of Punjab on foot (Qaiser, 2017), however, we do not find any remains to confirm the event archaeologically. The material remains started their appearance in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE for which there are some architectural remains in Sirkap, Taxila, where Sir John Marshall mentions a Jain Temple (Marshall, 1918), though modern archaeologists find the evidence to be insufficient to prove the remains to be related to the Jains.

On the other hand, their presence in the region has been confirmed by sufficient literary sources, that is, the memoirs of the Jain monks of that time. A later part of this ancient phase of Jaina presence in Pakistan may be seen in Murti, district Chakwal, from where the transferrable remains have been shifted to the Lahore Museum (Ahmad, 2015). Then comes the medieval phase encompassing a period from the 8th to the 12th century CE. In this phase, the religion celebrated its glorious time in Sindh, specifically in the Tharparkar region (Flugel & Ahmad, 2018). A number of elegant Jaina temples represent the zenith of the architectural and artistic expertise of the Jaina artisans and the wealth of the patrons living in this locality. The concluding period of Jaina presence in Pakistan is from the late Mughal period to the Partition of the sub-continent, when most Jains abandoned their homes and sacred buildings (Qaiser, 2017). Those who stayed had to leave in 1965 and 1971 due to increasing intolerance.

The presence of the Jain community and its participation in regional political and social affairs remained prominent in the Mauryan period (Sheikh, 2015), early Muslim (Lambrick, 1941), and Sultanate and Mughal periods in Taxila, Punjab and Sindh. During the Sikh and colonial period, the community started settling on the trade routes in Sindh. Before 1947, they were about one percent of the total population in this region but played a large part in the economic and social infrastructure. Almost all of them migrated to India, except for a few. Though they took as many sculptures of their deities, books and scriptures from their libraries on private aircrafts and trains as they could in that chaos, they left their immovable heritage.

Now only a few Jains are living in Mithi, Islamkot and Nagarparkar, unwilling to disclose their religious identity openly, without proper operational centres for religious practices. The case was not always so.

### Tangible Legacy

The tangible legacy of the Jains includes their places of worship, that is, temples, a few of which have been ranked as the *tirthas* because of their age and religious importance. Other Jaina buildings that we find in Pakistan are *Samadhis* (chapel-like buildings built in memory of spiritual teachers), community halls and schools for boys and girls.

The remains of the ancient phase of Jainism in Pakistan are not in the form of standing buildings.

Figure 1

Gauri Temple,  
Tharparkar.  
Photograph by  
author.



The Jain temple/stupa of Sirkap is now only in the form of a platform with ashlar masonry. Scattered blocks of red sandstone, destroyed sculptures of deities and a few architectural motifs are what archaeologists have so far recovered from Murti, Chakwal and displayed in the Lahore Museum's Jaina Gallery. The remains related to the medieval phase of the Jaina heritage are standing in district Tharparkar of Sindh with elegance, though deteriorating day by day. Three temples representing three altogether different schools of architecture are at Bhodesar at the foot of the Karoonjhar hills (about 8 kilometers from Nagarparkar). Gauri and Virawah temples on the Mithi-Islamkot Road in the villages with the respective names, two temples in Karojain near Nagarparkar and a magnificent Jain temple within the city of Nagarparkar, locally known as *Bazaar Mandir*, are some of the identified Jaina temples of the region constructed between the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D and the 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. All these temples show remarkable affiliation with the Gujarati and Rajasthani school of art and architecture with conventional north-Indian temple tradition. Gujarati inscriptions from *Bazaar Mandir* Nagarparkar and the use of Gujarati books by the local Hindu Brahmins are enough evidence of the fact. The Jain temples of Tharparkar are the only examples of this genre of architecture in Pakistan. Almost all of these edifices are in danger because of calamities and ignorance. Temple 1 of Bhodesar is about a thousand-year-old *tirtha* with a Nagara style tower. About ten years ago, the tower of the temple stood high in the beautiful landscape of Tharparkar, however, due to earthquakes and no salvage projects in the past, most of the building and its elegant tower crumbled. At present, a devoted team has been busy in restoring the temple. The situation reminds me of an Urdu couplet:

مرنے کے بعد آئے ہمارے مزار پر  
پتھر پڑیں صنم تیرے ایسے پیار پر




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 Figure 2
 

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Jain Temple  
 Bhodesar.  
 Photograph by  
 author.

The state of preservation of the other Jaina temples of this region is not different. Paintings from the walls of these temples have been scratched. Sculptures have been mutilated in the process of ‘purifying the land of the pure’. Marble from the floor has been removed. If the situation stays the same, Pakistan’s heritage will lose one of its history’s beautiful chapters.

The final phase of architectural progress left its monumental remains both in Southern and Northern Punjab. This class of architectural remains represents later Mughal and Sikh building tradition. Elaborately decorated Jain temples at Rasulnagar and Pipnakha, both in district Gujranwala, a relatively huge Svetambara Jain temple in Narowal city and the neighboring town of Sankhatra, temples of the same category in Bhera, Sialkot, Rawalpindi, a demolished Adinatha temple in old Anarkali Lahore, Kasur and Khanqah Dogran are among the temples of the northern parts of western Punjab. The Jain temple of Pipnakha is in the use of the local municipal committee; hence it is looked after regularly and is in a much better condition. On the other hand, the Jain temple of Rasulnagar is altogether abandoned. Weather, earthquakes, looters and visitors have damaged the building to such a level that conservation seems to be impossible. All the walls of this temple have been painted with scenes depicting Jaina philosophy, their pilgrimage sites and *tirthankaras* in meditation posture. In a scene, that has been repeated three times in the same temple, two men have been shown arguing with

Figure 3

Marble sculpture of a  
*Tirthankara*, Lahore  
Museum. Photograph  
by author.

each other as to whether the fruit picking or the branch cutting would harm the tree or not. With these diminishing narratives on the walls of Jaina temples, these values have also been fading away from our society.

In southern Punjab, Multan, there are three Jaina temples: the Parsvanatha Svetambara Jain Temple, Choori Saraey Bazar, the Digambar Jain temple in the same locality, and one in the cantonment, all representing very different architectural styles yet to be classified. Another prominent Jain temple of this region is the Jain temple of Dera Ghazi Khan that is architecturally the sister temple of the Svetambara temple of Multan mentioned above. Samadhis of Atma Ram in Gujranwala city and of Jin Kushal Suraj in Derawar, have a huge significance as both of these eminent scholars of Jainism promoted education and the Jain religion across the Punjab.



The Jain temples of Sindh are now fortunately under the custody of the Endowment Fund Trust for the Preservation of the Heritage of Sindh, and therefore, are being conserved and have a relatively safe future. On the other hand, Jain temples of the Punjab have been allotted to the locals for residence who use the *Gambhara*, the most sacred part of a Jain temple, as store rooms, *mandapas*, the prayer halls, as stables (Jain Hall Tehsil Bazaar, Lahore) or scrap yards as is the case with the Jain temple in Bagh Mohalla, Jhelum city. A sense of responsibility among the locals and local administrative authorities is needed to preserve or record these crumbling monuments lest they fade away completely from the minds too.

The art depicted on these monuments has a deep message of peace of the mind and soul through non-attachment to worldly bonds and non-violence, a message that every religion teaches but, which unfortunately, almost everyone has forgotten. Instead of swords, *trisulas*, battle fields, and skulls on spear heads as signs of victory, Jain temples have been decorated with the deities in meditation posture, noble men discussing the possibilities of not harming animals and plants, and the places where the great teachers



Figure 4

Miniature painted scenes in Gauri Temple. Photograph by author.

attained *moksha*, that is, liberation from worldly greed and bondage; it was the sign of their greatest victory after which they were called *Jinas*. Promotion of such art and the values that are reflected in its paintings can reduce the element of violence and extremism in our society.

### Intangible Legacy

Jains declare their doctrine to be the most ancient of all the religions and philosophies. Their claim seems to be partially correct as the roots of Jain elements can be identified in the earliest Indian societies. The antiquity of Jainism is a subject of great interest. Alexander's army witnessed naked monks in Taxila, who through evidence have proven to be Jains (Sheikh, 2015). The Essenes of ancient Israel are also said to be influenced by Jainism. Their strict rules of meditation, white clothing, non-attachment with material life and such others are clues which prove the link.

Presently, the followers of Jainism are comparably few but the deep effect of its philosophy has clearly influenced almost all the religions and ancient civilizations of the world. For example, *Ahimsa*, that is, non-violence, is somehow a part of all existing religions. In the same way, meditation, fasting, letting go of material bondage, putting on white clothes or in some cases practicing full or semi-nudity, trying to minimize one's own desires, seeking for an eternal truth, salvation, karmic power and its results, giving respect to spiritual elders in different ways even, long after their death,

pilgrimage to sacred sites, making local places for worship and keeping them clean, code of conduct for the worshippers and many other devotional practices and beliefs that can be observed in one form or the other in ancient and modern religions, are common to Jainism. For much of these practices, Jains claim the credit of their origin (Buhlar, 1903). Those, in some cases, have proved to be partially or completely true. Such impacts, when proved by evidence and logic, may solve the problem of unity of religions in their essence and the theological issue, which would be beyond the scope of this paper, that all religions have the same source, that is, one omnipotent Creator; the greatest source of unity and tolerance.

### Increasing Intolerance

Under the banner of religion, some entities have been spreading hatred and intolerance for others since the 1950s. Unfortunately, the number of people who consider absolute submission to the words they listen to from the *minber* (pulpit) is the only way of their salvation, without comparing them to the true teachings of their respective religions, has been increasing. To become a popular politician, a journalist or an anchor, to increase ratings of morning shows or discussion programs, people have to follow the paradigms that extremist clerics have set for them. As a result, we are not able to stand by the minorities or the suppressed ones as openly and vocally as we should. This is not the story of our country only; extremism and the Western extremist reaction to it have been increasing day by day. Hence, the need of the time is to highlight the teachings and philosophies that actually

Figure 5

Jain Temple Old  
Anarkali Lahore.  
Photograph by  
author.



call people of all affiliations, color, castes and creeds to work together for peace and eventually the betterment of mankind.

## Conclusion

Jaina heritage is a tool that may play the role of a buffer in our ever-increasing intolerant society. If we conserve their heritage, interpret the art depicted on it, and propagate the philosophy of their teachings, we may have multi-dimensional benefits. It would be a prominent addition to our heritage sites in a state ready to be visited and present knowledge of the community that once lived in the region that we now call Pakistan. It would also be a source to propagate their peace-loving thoughts in order to spread awareness about the links between our religion's philosophy and theirs, and the common message of tolerance. Many eminent scholars and historians have realized the fact that we have moved far away from the ideology of Quaid-e-Azam, the founder of our country. To realign our thoughts, we need to review the idea of the Quaid's Pakistan. In doing so, we have to make the unheard voices heard on a national level. Why did the Jains leave their homes and temples? We have to answer this with a solution, so that no other community leaves this paradise on earth, our beloved country, because of intolerance in future.

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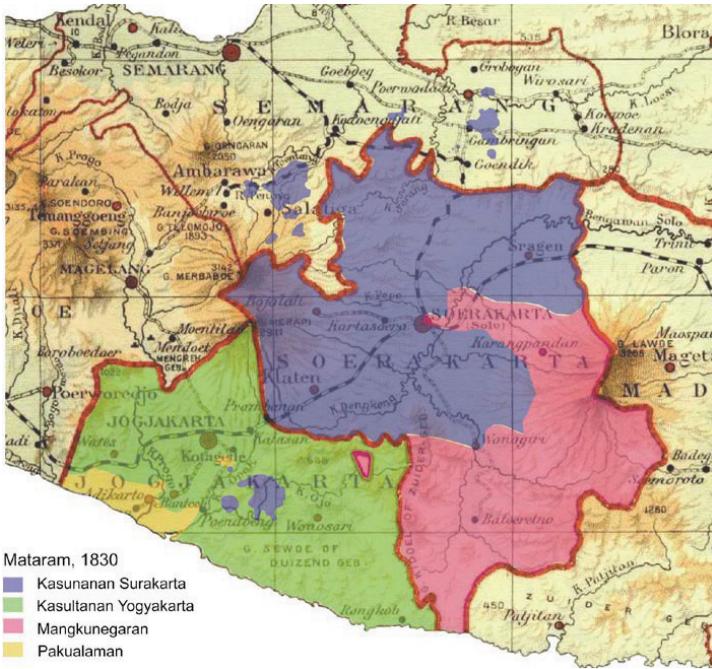


Figure 1

The territories of the royal courts of Yogyakarta, Surakarta, the minor court of Mangkunegaran and the minor court of Pakualaman (Yogyakarta) after 1830.

(Source: Purwani, 2014)



Figure 2

Surakarta and the adjacent areas which detached themselves from it in 1946.

(Source: Purwani, 2014).

# Arts and Democratic Spaces in the City of Surakarta, 2005-2018: Towards a More Democratic and Tolerant City

Ofita Purwani, PhD

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## Introduction

The city of Surakarta is located on the island of Java, the most populous island of Indonesia. It is one of the cities considered to be the cradle of Javanese culture. This city was first built and developed in 1745 from the royal palace where the Javanese royal court of the Mataram kingdom resided (Qomarun, 2000); it is from this royal palace that the city grew. In 1755 the kingdom of Mataram was divided into two: Surakarta and Yogyakarta. The former used the old structures in the same location, while the Yogyakarta court built its own palace in the nearby city (Association, 2002; Miksic, 2004; Saleh, Dewan Kebudayaan Kota Yogyakarta, Universitas Gadjah Mada Pusat Studi Kebudayaan, and Panitia HUT ke-250 Kota Yogyakarta, 2006).

Colonial occupation by Dutch and British governments brought to each of the royal cities another division. The royal court of Surakarta was again divided into two, in 1757, when the Dutch made a minor court of Mangkunegaran out of the royal court of Surakarta. Later, in 1830, the minor court was given the same amount of territory as the royal court. The palace of Mangkunegaran is also located in the city of Surakarta, making it an Indonesian city with two royal courts. With the equal territories each court had, both courts fell into bitter rivalry (Larson, 1979), an outcome clearly desired by the Dutch: *divide and rule*.

In 1945, Soekarno and Hatta in Jakarta proclaimed the independence of Indonesia whilst, at the same time, trying to gain support from other local leaders of the archipelago. As the wave of independence spread along the archipelago, the local leaders of Surakarta, the royal court of Surakarta and the minor court of Mangkunegaran failed to show enough support for the newly born nation. The main reason for this omission was that the two courts were busy with their own rivalry over several issues. This court-fuelled attrition made people dissatisfied and induced an anti-monarchy movement in the city of Surakarta (Anderson, 2005; Larson, 1979). The movement made the states under the territory of the royal court of Surakarta, and the minor court of Mangkunegaran, detach and dissociate themselves from the royal courts (Fig. 2); as a result both courts lost their territories.

In 1946, the capital of the newly created nation of Indonesia, Jakarta, was occupied by allies of the Dutch government who, by that time, still considered Indonesia as part of the Netherlands so the capital was moved to nearby Yogyakarta. The move of the capital to Yogyakarta resulted in several consequences, including the movement of radical groups to Surakarta, it being a city close to the new capital. The radical groups took power in Surakarta, bringing riots and violence into the city; including the kidnapping of Prime Minister Syahrir during his visit to Surakarta. This dangerous situation caused the central government in nearby Yogyakarta to take control of Surakarta, thereby diminishing the authority and territory of both royal courts (Larson, 1979).

Since then, neither of Surakarta's royal courts have had any political roles; they now serve only as cultural symbols. Also, neither court has any territory outside their royal palaces. The city of Surakarta has been absorbed into the province of Central Java and is now governed by a democratically elected mayor.

However, the city of Surakarta has suffered riots and violence more than 40 times since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the disturbances were related to local tensions, such as local political tensions, evictions, and disagreements between the municipal government and the people. Some of the worst riots, however, have been related to, or triggered by, the national political situation. The last two riots in 1998 and 1999 were examples of the riots related to national issues. The 1998 disturbance was the greatest, with many key structures in the city being burnt down by the rioters (Panggabean and Smith, 2011). Interestingly, even though the triggers of riots and violence might not be specifically related to racial issues, such issues were always raised during the riots. The Chinese minority was always the target; as a result buildings identified as belonging to Chinese people were burnt, and Chinese women were raped, during the riots.

One of the reasons why riots and violence occurred so often in this city is that this city has a long history of radicalism. The anti-monarchy movement, the communist party, and Islamic radical groups have been in Surakarta for years. When nearby Yogyakarta served as the capital of Indonesia, the radical groups which lived around the old capital Jakarta, before moving to Yogyakarta, moved to nearby Surakarta, giving that environment even more potential for riots and violence.

After 1999, however, there were no more riots in the city of Surakarta. There were several reasons for this, including the socio-economic and political situation of post-reformation-Indonesia and local policies. The national economic condition after 1998 was promising in that there were many new policies introduced to overcome the 1998 economic crisis.

The economy which was previously highly attached to the central government, or more specifically to President Soeharto and his cronies, was then distributed and decentralized in 1999. In 2004, the Indonesian economy had reached stability (Christian and Aswicahyono, 2017; *Jejak Pertumbuhan Ekonomi Indonesia dari Masa ke Masa*, 2018). The political situation of Indonesia after 1998 shows an extraordinary reform (“Twenty Years of Indonesian Democracy—How Many More?,” 2018). The authoritarian regime of the New Order under Soeharto was put to an end in May 1998. The new political system was then introduced which is more democratic. This includes direct elections for local and national leaders (“Twenty Years of Indonesian Democracy—How Many More?,” 2018). The situation at the national level has brought improvement in the political, social and economic aspects. At the local level, financial autonomy has made every city or district responsible for its own finance. This creates opportunities for local governments and their stakeholders to do something for their own cities and districts.

In the case of the city of Surakarta, the municipal government made several changes including transparency, participatory planning and law enforcement. The government put their financial report before the public for all people to see, therefore building trust between the government and the people. The government also conducted focus group discussions periodically as a means of participatory planning. Also, in terms of conflict, the government is more open to dialogue with the people<sup>1</sup>. The city hall is open to the public. However, this is also supported by law enforcement in that the people have to communicate with the government in the best way possible and if they break any rules they will have to face punishment.

What happened in the city of Surakarta cannot be separated from the socio-economic and political situation mentioned above. The rising citizens’ participation in politics and development, the improvement of the economy and the development of trust between the citizens and local government made it possible for the following phenomenon to happen.

While it has been widely known as the city of riots, the last survey on ‘livability’ of cities in Indonesia, conducted on February 2018, showed that the city of Surakarta is considered the most ‘livable’ city in Indonesia. This outcome is mainly because of its success in ‘managing diversity’ (Al Alawi, 2018). Diversity was always a problem for Surakarta, in that rioters always targeted ethnic minorities, regardless of the original cause of the riots. However, this city is now considered a diversity-managing success story; a conclusion based on the absence of riots and violence since 1999.

This, however, does not mean that there was no threat of violence during that period. Anti-Chinese sentiment and Islamic radicalism still exist as latent threats even though they do not appear as violence.

This city is the center of the Islamic-terrorist network in Indonesia (Welle, 2016) which shows a real threat of violence.

This paper focuses on how the city of Surakarta managed to reduce violence by using arts and spatial practices in its urban settings in addition to the economic and political reform at the national level and policies at the local level. The urban spatial practices, particularly those initiated after 2005, show differences from previous practices in that there are efforts to include and involve all ethnic and religious groups in urban spaces and urban events. The practices are best seen through the perspective of structure/agency as promoted by Giddens and Bourdieu which are discussed in the next section.

## 1. Theoretical Review

In this paper I use theories on the agency/structure division. This division is not a dichotomy. Instead, it shows two related entities in society which do not present a binary opposition. A structure refers to a social structure as a constraint for every single agency, which has a human being as the actor with a capacity to act, to perform social actions.

Parsons, Giddens and Bourdieu offer a similar division of structure/agency. However, Parsons considers each as a separate entity while Giddens and Bourdieu consider both of them as interrelated. I find the latter position more persuasive as social structure is not a static entity and it is possible for it to be changed by agencies' actions.

Giddens in his 'theory of *structuration*' (1986), underlines that agency and structure are closely connected instead of being separate entities, as suggested by Parsons. The structure, according to Giddens, is the outcome of the agency's action while at the same time it enables actions, which he called the 'duality of structure' (Giddens, 1986:25). The action of the agency is constrained and enabled by a structure, in the form of rules and resources, over which the agency has no control. The rules are gained through day-to-day experience of each agency, determining the motives behind every agency's actions. The agency is usually unaware of this structure, as it is mainly unconscious. In terms of actions, the agency is in a conscious state and every action is intentional. However, every action always brings unintended consequences which will contribute to the "unacknowledged conditions of further acts" (Giddens, 1986:8); that is, the reproduction of the structure. As mentioned before, Bourdieu shares a similar concept on the interrelation between agency and structure in his 'theory of field' or 'theory of practice' (Bourdieu, 1977). Like Giddens, he focuses on social practice, or 'actions' as in Giddens's term. One major difference between

the two authors is that Bourdieu focuses mainly on the unconscious, about which Giddens shows less interest. This is because Bourdieu focuses on the issue of social class, and the unconscious process behind it, that distinguishes 'high value'/'low value' and thereby forms social hierarchy. Giddens, in contrast, has deficiencies on social class (Atkinson, 2007:546). I will go deeper into Bourdieu's account on social classification because it is very important in dealing with power issues.

There are several key terms in Bourdieu's account: capital, habitus and field. Capital is an accumulation of efforts which, when being put in an exclusive space by agencies, "enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor" (Bourdieu, 1986:46). Habitus is defined as "a system of *dispositions*, that is of permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking, or a system of *long-lasting* (rather than *permanent*) schemes or schemata or structures of perception, conception and action" (Hillier and Rooksby, 2005:43). Field is defined as "a structured space with its own laws of functioning and its own relations of force" (Bourdieu, 1983:6).

There are two main processes in Bourdieu's account in relation to power relations. The first deals with the practice of agency in the field, whose structure has been established, and the second deals with the process of establishing a structure in the field.

In terms of an agency's practice in the field, Bourdieu underlines the importance of capital in social stratification (Bourdieu, 1986:45–58). Capital possessed by an agency works to locate the agency in the social stratification or the structure in the field. Bourdieu categorizes capital – also called 'power' – into three according to the fields in which it works: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Economic capital can be directly converted into money but sometimes can be present in institutionalized form such as property rights. Cultural capital needs particular situations to be converted into economic capital and can be present in institutionalized form, such as educational qualifications. Social capital, usually present as social connections or "membership of a group", also needs particular situations to be converted into economic capital and can be present in institutionalized form, such as a title of nobility.

Those types of capital are interchangeable. Economic capital can be transferred into cultural capital or social capital and vice versa. Bourdieu places his focus on cultural capital as the most important capital in social structure. This kind of capital can be present in "objectified", "embodied" and "institutional" form. This relates to the mode of acquisition of the capital.

Objectified cultural capital is present in the form of cultural goods such as books, paintings and monuments, which are material objects transferable into economic capital. Embodied cultural capital is the capital embodied as *habitus* or a system of disposition of an agency which determines the agency's practice. This kind of capital cannot be acquired instantly because it involves a long process of transmission and acquisition in order to be integrated into the agency itself; a process that takes a lifetime of a single agency. The transmission can be domestic, which is a transmission through family, or by acquiring it from a system of education, in which the system of thought – or the structure – belonging to a dominant class is embodied. Institutional cultural capital takes form in formal recognition, such as certificates and academic qualifications. Those forms of cultural capital are centered in the embodied form or *habitus*, since the objectified and institutionalized capital can only be defined “in [...] relationship with [...] [that of] embodied form” (Bourdieu, 1986:50).

When an agency enters a particular field laden with a structure, the capital possessed by the agency verifies their position in the field's social structure. The pre-existing structure determines which kinds of capital are preferred, and thereby is considered to have a higher value and to be more acceptable in the field. For example, a person with an ability to speak the Javanese language in the refined form (*alus*) and to use it according to the established standard or the 'structure' is more acceptable in the royal court, as that skill is very important for communicating with the royal court people. The ability to speak in refined form, and to use the language properly, is the capital of the agency which is preferred by the dominant structure in the field. This will put the agency in a beneficial position in the structure. In contrast, a person who does not have an ability to speak *alus* Javanese, or to use the language according to the established standards, finds him or herself unacceptable in the royal court. The inability to communicate 'properly' is the capital gained during his or her life, but is considered to be of low value in the royal court because of the pre-established structure. He or she, is then considered to be of a low class in this field.

Now I will move to the process of establishing a structure in a field. A structure is the dominant system of thought inherent in the field, which distinguishes high class/low class, and therefore determines the social hierarchy. The keyword to be the structure in the field is *domination* (Bourdieu, 1990: 24). At an elementary level, an agency can acquire domination by generosity and virtue in personal relationships (Bourdieu, 1977:190). For example, a noble lets his courtiers live on his land for free. This generosity creates a bond between the noble and his courtiers. The more he gives, the more tied his courtiers are. This will lead to voluntary submission of the courtiers to the noble. In this case, the noble acquires domination over his courtiers.

The domination, which at first occurs in personal relationship, may be developed into wider domination up to the point where it is being objectified by law and education (Bourdieu, 1977:187). By that time, the domination is disguised as something natural, or objectified. It is no longer recognized as domination. This occurs for example when the noble mentioned above has consistently given much generosity to many people in a particular area, which leads to the voluntary submission of the people. His domination over the people then can be objectified by a rule that gives the noble a privilege, right or honor. By this time, the domination is forgotten and considered to be something natural or objective.

Domination, however, is subject to challenges by other agencies and can lose its resources; therefore it has to be renewed by reproduction. This reproduction occurs when a structure is being put in social practice over and over again. Every practice by an agency, which fits an established structure, is a means of reproduction of that structure. To make sure if the practice is re-enacted, the structure needs to be unrecognized and to be considered as something objective and natural to do. Regulation and education, as a means to conceive the structure and to embody the structure into society, hold high importance in the process of reproduction.

When a structure is agreed by all agencies in the field, the structure is stable. This is due to the lack of challenges to its domination. In contrast, if the structure is challenged by many agencies, the structure will not be stable. A stable structure will ensure a stable community too.

In the case of the city of Surakarta which had suffered more than 40 riots in its history, we may assume that the structure was not stable. To understand the structure of the city of Surakarta, we have to map the agencies involved in the city of Surakarta. There are multiple agencies in Surakarta. Before the establishment of the city in the 1750s, there were already Arab and Chinese merchants with their own ports along Bengawan Solo River (Qomarun, 2000) living in this area. The royal court then came and built what is considered to be the core of the city and built its own port for trade. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch colonial government divided the kingdom into two, the major court of Kasunanan and the minor court of Mangkunegaran, and gave each of them a similar amount of land. This would then lead to bitter rivalry between both, up to the present. The presence of Javanese merchants, particularly in Laweyan was also considered as a rival to the royal courts. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the merchants were also divided into two: the 'white' and the 'red'/communist (Shiraishi, 1990). After 1945, the Dutch colonial government no longer existed in this city, and was replaced by an Indonesian government. Chinese and Arab communities still exist, along with Javanese merchants.

There are also other agencies including Islamic religious communities, including those of radical ones (Wildan, 2013), and the urban poor.

The government as the one in charge of the city has to make an effort to create a stable structure. The stable structure will make a stable community which is ideal for development. As mentioned before, to make it stable, the domination (by the government) has to be established and reproduced so the domination of the government will be agreed to by all other agencies. To do that, the government has to give virtue consistently to all agencies.

## 2. Art, Spaces and Democracy in the City of Surakarta

The spatial practices in the city of Surakarta show differences after 2005, which was the year Joko Widodo was elected as the city's mayor. In dealing with potential local tensions, the mayor made several changes in governmental policies over several issues such as transparency, relationship with stakeholders and the approach to development. First, he opened the city hall to the public. By taking this decision he opened up communication with the public by setting up regular meetings with the people in the city hall (Majeed, 2014). Second, he conducted a time-consuming dialogue with stakeholders when the municipal government needed to do something, such as evicting a particular group of people. One example of this particular issue was the eviction of the informal vendors in the Banjarsari area, a problem requiring the mayor to host hundreds of dinner events with the informal vendors before they finally agreed to move to Klithikan Market without force. Third, he accommodated people's aspirations through the process of *Musrenbang* or *dialogue for city development* (Majeed, 2014). Fourth, he let people invent/create urban festivals; there are now an increasing number of urban festivals conducted in the city. Some of them are organized by the government and some are organized by the people. Fifth, he closes the main road for three hours every Sunday morning; thereby creating a popular 'Car Free Day', creating a much valued and appreciated public space, where people of different backgrounds can meet and engage in a variety of activities.

Since 2006, cultural events in the city of Surakarta have been on the rise in addition to existing ones. The existing cultural events are usually rituals and events connected with both royal courts and which are still regularly held by the royal courts up to the present. The main ritual of the royal court is called *Grebeg*, in which the king of the royal court meets and gives alms to his people in the form of food. The most common offerings are those made of glutinous rice in the form of *gunungan* piled in a mound, for that is what people eat and enjoy. The food distributed is believed to have blessings so that people have to scramble to get it.

Meanwhile, the municipal government organizes new cultural events, mainly aimed at fostering tourists and tourism. Some of the prominent newly invented events that contribute to building tolerance in this city are *Grebeg Sudiro*, *Grebeg Pangan* and *Parade Hadrah*, all of which are held annually (Purwani, 2014a).

*Grebeg Sudiro* is an invented tradition created by copying the royal court's main ritual (*Grebeg*) and then adjusting it to satisfy the modern goal of social integration between people of Javanese and Chinese descent (Purwani, 2014a, 2014b). This event was 'invented' or created by people living in the Sudiroprajan neighborhood, which involves a mixed Javanese and Chinese neighborhood, in order to celebrate the Chinese New Year. The event involves the use of *gunungan* (mounds of food), made up of a mix of Javanese and Chinese food. It also involves the use of particular clothes for all the people involved, identifying the participants as belonging to Javanese or Chinese ethnic backgrounds and cultures. This event takes place in the neighborhood of Sudiroprajan, in front of the Big Market of Surakarta. The Big Market of Surakarta has a historical connection with the royal court, but since 1946 it has been appropriated by the state. Most people in Surakarta do not recognize this space as relating to the royal court.

Figure 3

*Grebeg Sudiro*, with people dressed up in Javanese and Chinese clothing. (Photo courtesy of Dominicus Danardono)



*Grebeg Pangan* is also an invented tradition, created by copying the *Grebeg* of the royal court, and adjusting it to a modern goal, which is to promote healthy food as a way to celebrate World Food Day (Purwani, 2014a, 2014b). This event is organized by the Office of Food Security, as part of the municipal government of Surakarta and supported by the government of the regions nearby, such as: Boyolali, Sragen, and Klaten. This event takes place during the Car Free Day on Slamet Riyadi Road, the main road of the city.



Figure 4

The *gunungan* of food offered in *Grebeg Pangan*, consists mainly of traditional foods not necessarily those made of glutinous rice. (Source: Solo Pos)

This road does not have any association with the royal court, or to the minor court of Mangkunegaran; instead, it is connected to the period of Dutch colonial occupation. The absence of the Dutch in the current social structure of the city makes this road a neutral space, where no agency or stakeholder can claim authority, other than the municipal government.

*Parade Hadrah* is a parade for Islamic groups to do *Hadrah*, a ritual performance by Sufi orders. Just like *Grebeg Pangan*, this parade takes place along Slamet Riyadi Road, the main road of Surakarta.

Car Free Day is one popular regular event for the people of Surakarta to spend their time every Sunday morning. The closing of the main road for three hours gives enough space for people to gather, do sports such as jogging and cycling, perform arts, exhibit artworks and other hobbies. This weekly occasion is prohibited to be used for politics and it has to be neutral and open to everyone and anyone.



Figure 5

*Parade Hadrah* to give space for expression of Sufism. (Source: Antara)

Figure 6

Car Free Day as a public space for all: every Sunday morning 06.00 – 09.00. People are free to do any activities as long as they are not harmful or political. (Source: Dishubkominfo Surakarta)



The first two events mentioned are events that copy the royal court's main rituals but for different goals. The events are also organized by the people and the municipal government, rather than the royal court. The use of old forms of ritual is to represent and re-affirm the identity of 'Javanese-ness' and authenticity, while at the same time the new traditions detach themselves from the old rituals by using different attributes, such as clothing, food and spaces. The goals of both *Grebeg Sudiro* and *Grebeg Pangan* show modern goals. The first is to include the people of Chinese descent, therefore making other people aware of their existence; thereby reinforcing the attitude and belief that ethnic minorities, such as the Chinese, can get along with Javanese people. The second *Grebeg*, which is to promote healthy food, is also modern in its goals.

While *Grebeg Sudiro* aims to promote social integration between ethnic groups, *Parade Hadrah* aims to give a space for expression by Islamic groups. As mentioned earlier, Surakarta city is also a base for Islamic radical groups, some of which are identified as terrorist groups (Majeed, 2014). *Parade Hadrah* is designed to bring Islamic groups into the urban life, so that they are not excluded. Again, the aim is for social inclusion and integration.

The Car Free Day is also important for social integration, in that it gives space to everyone, regardless of their socio-cultural and religious backgrounds, to meet each other and acknowledge each other's existence. The prohibition of this event, that it will not be used for politics, also supports this aim; politics in Indonesia at present usually use social and religious tensions to gain support from the people.

The cultural events referred to above are mainly about detaching the country from old power, which has been a source of bitter rivalry since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, today these new 'traditional' events are designed to promote social integration and, as a result, the urban life in the city of Surakarta has become more tolerant and democratic including all socio-cultural and religious groups.

There are other cultural events in this city which are more artistic in nature, such as: a) the umbrella festival b) the batik festival and c) the music festival. These events are mostly 'neutral' in that they are detached from any association with 'old power' in terms of the spaces/locations used for the festivals. In addition to this, these events attract more people and tourists, thereby giving chances to people from different backgrounds to meet. In this case, the events may be seen as a way for people to detach themselves from the 'old power' and, at the same time, it indirectly promotes social integration.

For the municipal government, the act of detaching itself from the 'old power' while still accommodating them along with other agencies is an act of virtue, given to all the agencies of the city. Virtue is the main method of domination. By consistently giving virtue to all agencies of the city, the government tries to make a stable structure.

## Conclusion

The city of Surakarta, which has a long history of violence and riots, has been changing since 2005. The changes have made this city the most livable city in Indonesia. While the changes were made possible by the national economic and political reforms, the mayor of Surakarta at that time, Joko Widodo, took several steps in relation to culture, arts and urban spatial practices to contribute more to the changes of the city. Some of the initiatives are newly invented urban festivals; there is also the Car Free Day every Sunday. There have also been increasing numbers of urban festivals in the city of Surakarta, since 2005, which contribute to promoting social integration between ethnic groups, religious groups and social groups. These invented initiatives have also contributed to creating a separation from the 'old power' of the royal court and the minor court, who have been bitter historical rivals since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Detaching the city from the 'old power' means that the city is now more inclusive, including other stakeholders of the city such as various social, cultural, and religious groups; it is no longer dominated by the 'old power'. As a result of this detachment, Surakarta has become more socially and politically tolerant, so that there is no longer any space for violence and riots.

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## Endnote

1. The dialogue is usually held while having meals provided by the government. This is one of the success stories of the municipal government in handling tricky issues such as eviction; the dialogue has to be held in a friendly manner and with 'full stomach' ("Ini kisah sukses Jokowi di Solo", 2014).

## Punjab 1984: A Plea for Tolerance and Democracy

**Dimple Oberoi Vahali and Diamond Oberoi Vahali**

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An analysis of the history of Operation Blue Star, an Indian military operation which occurred between 1 June and 8 June 1984, in Amritsar, reveals that the timing of Operation Blue Star was planned on a Sikh religious day—the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev. As is evident, Sikhs from all over the world visit the temple on this day. According to several sources, “Many Sikhs view the timing and attack by the Indian Army as an attempt to inflict maximum casualties on Sikhs and demoralize them. Mark Tully and Satish Jacob mention the use of tanks by the army at the Sultanwind area over the civilian Sikhs marching towards Amritsar. The government is in turn blamed for the inflated number of civilian dead for choosing to attack on this day” (“Operation Blue Star”, 2017).

No matter what the reason was, the sheer choice of launching an attack on the sacred day of a minority religious community signifies the insensitivity and a deliberate conspiracy to downgrade and humiliate the Sikhs by converting their religious day into a day of humiliation, defeat and backlashing. This further signifies an attempt to pass a message to them that both they and their gurus are ciphers in comparison to the Indian government who can humiliate them on any day even if it is on their most sacred day. It is to make a statement that they are allowed to live in India by the good will and generosity of the Hindu State alone which when displeased can show them their place as an emasculated, defeated community. The film, *Punjab 1984* (2014) questions the accountability of the unaccountable lives of Sikhs who had nothing to do with the Khalistan movement and in no way were associated with it and yet were massacred in Operation Blue Star and after that.

The decision to launch Operation Blue Star on the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev recalls the Jallianwala Bagh massacre that took place on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1919, where once again in Amritsar, within the close proximity of the Golden Temple, General Dyer had ordered the British Indian Army to fire machine guns into a crowd of unarmed protesters, along with the pilgrims. The sheer revocation of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, as inscribed historically in Operation Blue Star, becomes a signifier of the continuation of British colonial policies by the Indian government within which all minorities may be perceived as colonies of the dominant majoritarian discourse, ironically operative now in not so subtle terms as they once were in the pseudo secular independent Indian state.

*Punjab 1984*, a story inspired by true incidents, begins with the launch of Operation Blue Star and depicts the plight of innocent Sikhs who had come to pay homage to Guru Arjun Dev. They find themselves caught in this very precarious condition, locked and crammed in a room without food and water for two whole days, as the Indian Army has entered the Golden Temple and has delivered shoot at sight orders. The film begins with the wailing of a mother whose son is dying for lack of water, sitting as they are in a locked room. Eventually with great difficulty, some Sikh men manage to open the door. With much trepidation, as an elderly Sikh man volunteers to get water for the dying child from the holy Sarovar, he is gunned down by the Army. The mise-en-scene of the shot, with the old Sikh man framed next to the not so glorious looking Harminder Sahib, connotes the diminishing power of the Sikhs in contrast to the power of the Indian state. The Sikh gentleman, who dies in an attempt to save the child, is no other than the father of Shivajit Singh Mann, called Shiva by everyone, the protagonist of the film.

Even though *Punjab 1984* does not centralize the event of the 1984 Sikh carnage, the film focuses on the year 1984 and weaves a tapestry around the rising anger and the discontent of the Sikhs which finally led to the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the subsequent massacre of the Sikhs. The film takes an elderly mother, Satwant Kaur as its central character and depicts the agony of thousands of women, especially mothers of young Sikh boys who have all disappeared and are missing. Despite the fact, that the film is deeply emotional, it offers an analytical lens, as it delves into the formation of the terrorists, who were once young innocent boys, who became victims of the police and eventually were left with no choice but to choose the path of violence. In this context, the film offers a critique of India as a nation state which, though it operates on the principal of secularism, is absolutely intolerant of dissent. It silences all voices of discontentment and slots them into a single category of 'terrorism'. The film thus offers a critique of nation states which operate on the principle of homogenizing all differences.

*Punjab 1984* like Gulzar's *Maachis* (1996) shows the manner in which so many young boys for no reason and with no evidence against them, were taken away by the police who basically wanted to clear its records of tracing militants. It depicts how the police in the villages of the Punjab, under the pretext of combing operations, implicated Sikh boys in militant cases. In actuality, the police was misusing its power and taking bribes to settle family disputes in favor of moneyed powerful families. Moreover, in the process, it was gaining tremendously, for every boy that they implicated, the police officers were increasing their chances of promotions and other official benefits. These boys were either killed in fake encounters by the police or were charged and convicted as terrorists or escaped but were left with no

choice but to join the band of the Khalistanis. The film depicts several hard core terrorists and the infighting within the various sections of the Khalistani movement as Ammtoje Mann's *Hayawyein* (2003) also does; yet it also shows the human face of the militants. What is to be noticed in particular is that in both the films, the protagonists are neither the militants nor the police but are representatives of the people who are fighting the Khalistan militancy. These young boys eventually, especially after the incident when Shiva hides a bomb in a bus in which his mother is sitting, realize that senseless killing of innocents cannot justify the creation of any nation state and refuse to participate in this blood bath. The killing of Shivajit towards the end of the film by a police officer, after he has escaped from the hard core militants, depicts the way in which champions of non-violence are caught in the crossfire between the state and the militants. The film also shows the human side of the police in the form of Manjeet Singh who, after sadistically participating in the atrocities committed by the police officers, realizes the inhumanity of the police department. He develops an insight into the wrongs committed by his office after Satwant Kaur treats him like a son. In this respect, the film, subtly, especially through the characters of Satwant Kaur, Shiva and Bittu, depicts the path of non-violence and the manner in which one may collapse the boundaries between self and the other.

Developing a third perspective, the film shows the futility of the Hindu-Sikh divide by showing Shiva and Bittu as best friends. Bittu, a Hindu boy, is the greatest supporter of Satwant Kaur. After Shiva has been taken by the police, it is Bittu who roams the streets in search of Shiva along with his mother. A symbolic reading of the film suggests that Bittu's search for Shiva connotes the majority's responsibility to find and embrace other communities that it has expelled and exterminated.

In an ironical reversal of events, Bittu is shot dead by the Khalistanis in a bus, as he is returning after collecting Satwant Kaur's spectacles. He pleads that he is Shiva's friend, who by now is a part of the movement. The symbol of Satwant Kaur's spectacles (who herself is a Sikh woman) thrown on the road by the militants, as it reflects the image of the Khalistanis carrying guns and killing innocent people, becomes an ironic signifier of false divides, of lost friendships, once shared by Sikhs and other religious communities living in India. Though Satwant Kaur is not allowed to mourn the death of Bittu by his mother, who in this enraged moment, perceives her as the cause of her son's death, when Shiva is killed in the end, it is she who embraces and contains Satwant Kaur's inconsolable loss as she rocks her in her arms. At this moment, the two women from two different religious communities become one, mothers of sons who have been killed in this endless bath of violence.

In this depiction of friendship between a Hindu and a Sikh and in the final sequence where Shiva's mother is finally held by Bittu's mother whose son has been killed by the Sikh militants the film debunks and demolishes the State instigated divide between the two communities. It depicts artificial divisions. It implicitly suggests the futility of these divides; be they created by militant groups or the acrimonious politics of the State that divides composite people and cultures whether Hindus or Muslims<sup>1</sup> or Hindus and Sikhs. Nevertheless the hegemony of the State is so powerful that people eventually imbibe its formations and become one with them. In the process, they most brutally reinforce these divisions. This has evidently happened in the context of Hindu-Muslim hatred but it has also happened in the case of Hindus and Sikhs. Many Hindus, who were good friends with the Sikhs started hating and detesting them and began propagating hate speeches after the Punjab crisis in the mid 1970s and early 80s in India. This was very unfortunate as many Hindus began calling all Sikhs terrorists and justified the 1984 massacre of innocent Sikhs, stating that they deserved it. Despite this seething reality, the film revokes a second experience of Partition history, a history smeared not just by violence but also by an unwritten history of love and friendship.

The film offers a deep study into the psyche of Satwant Kaur, the mother of a missing son, who waits day after day for her son to return, waiting outside the police station in a silent mode of protest and resistance. She suffers abject humiliation by the police officials but does not give up, until one day when she is brutally beaten and abused by Deep Singh Rana, a sworn enemy of Shiva, the police officer responsible for Shiva's doom. He thrashes her and pulls her by her hair and threatens to break her legs. Satwant Kaur in the film becomes representative of mothers whose sons are taken away by the police and killed in fake encounters. The lack of information on the whereabouts of these boys is worse than death; for the families cannot even mourn the loss of their sons and therefore in no way can bring their grief to a closure. This state of living in perennial mourning inflicts incomprehensible trauma on the life histories of the families of missing people, whether these are families of missing boys in the Punjab, Kashmir or the North East.

The most poignant scene in the film is when Satwant Kaur and Bittu meet the Human Rights activist Baljinder Singh. In order to trace Shiva, they see albums of Sikh boys who have been declared terrorists and killed in police encounters. The film in this sequence bears testimony to the disappearance and killing of a mass of Sikh youth. The camera positions itself in such a manner that it embodies a witnessing consciousness as the spectators are implicated within the film space. Photograph after photograph of missing or dead boys are depicted.

The sequence highlights the anxiety and tenderness of Satwant Kaur, who, in this moment, becomes a mother to all the dead Sikh sons of the Punjab, as she moves her hands tenderly on each photograph. It juxtaposes shots of Satwant Kaur's loving hands, moving on these photographs, with shots of her anxious facial expressions to depict the pain and anguish of all the mothers who have lost their sons. In this montage, the history of State violence and atrocities committed against the Sikhs is historically inscribed, along with what it experientially means to lose one's child.

The film develops the gradual alienation of Satwant Kaur, a woman with an invincible, resilient spirit; she first loses her husband when he goes to pray at the Golden Temple and then her son; after that she loses Bittu, almost a son to her, and her major support in life; finally, she loses Jeeti, who is more than a daughter as she really loves and cares for her, yet she never, even for a moment, loses her humanity. Throughout the film, we witness the deep bond that Jeeti and Satwant Kaur share with each other. Jeeti is completely committed towards Shiva and is willing to put her entire life at stake to live with him. It is only after Shiva finally refuses to marry her, given his circumstances, that she gives in to the pressure of her family and agrees to marry elsewhere. Eventually Satwant Kaur also loses her land and property to Jaggi, who with the help of Rana, cheats and deprives her of everything.

Gradually, after the death of her husband, Satwant Kaur's life and Shiva's life, change completely. From a young carefree boy who loved listening to romantic songs on the radio and romanticizing his relationship with Jeeti, a gloom settles on Shiva's being. Shiva, who was still in the stage of infancy in terms of his relationship with his over-indulgent mother, enters the world of adulthood where in the recesses of his inner being, he realizes the non-compassionate and non-maternal side of nation states. The nation, which symbolically, in his perception, was his nurturing mother, abandons him in its most discriminatory manner. He understands that even though he, in his loyalty to this nation, is a son of the soil, and will continue to be so in his struggle to bring peace, unity and harmony, the nation has nothing but step-son like treatment to offer him. This is depicted remarkably in the 'mud embracing' sequence in the film when Shiva finally breaks down and mourns his father's death in the fields by smearing heaps of wet mud onto his face and body. Symbolically, he is submerging himself with the lost body of his dead father whose remains now he assumes have merged with the soil of the Punjab. The use of long shots in the sequence where Shiva is depicted as a small part of the fields and the earth of the Punjab cinematically depicts his diminishing stature where nothing but the remains of his dead father are left to hold and contain him as he seeks refuge in these remains.

Nevertheless, the image of the wet soil in the sequence becomes a signifier of fertility and resurgence, a resurgence of love and friendship between Hindus and Sikhs as embodied in Bittu's and Shiva's friendship and between the love shared by Bittu and Satwant Kaur.

After he is taken into custody, Shiva is brutally beaten by the police, especially by Rana for no fault of his. His only fault is his failure to comprehend that he is an outsider in this nation now and his struggle for his right to his land can be misconstrued as defiance against the State. Rana threatens that if he does not part with his land in favor of his cousin Jaggi who has heavily bribed him, he will be beaten up. Not realizing the power of the State and the consequences of his refusal, Shiva remains defiant until one day when he is brutally beaten up and locked behind bars. The condition for his release now is complicated by Rana, who not only wants him to sign the property papers in favor of his cousin but also wants him to confess that he was involved in the Taran Taran killings. His confession will evidently lead to Rana's promotion as it will add another feather in his cap. Shiva refuses to follow his instructions. As a consequence, he is declared a terrorist and is taken to a remote place to be killed along with other young Sikh boys in a fake encounter. As luck would have it, Shiva manages to save himself and his two friends, Taari and Parminder Singh also called Pindi. They roam the villages in hiding and finally realize the impossibility of their return as there is heavy patrolling all around. In anguish they suffer the angst of living in a no man's land, the pain of perennial separation, of never being able to return to their families. They are finally rescued by a group of Khalistan militants and are taken over by them. In this catch 22 situation, they are left with no option. The Ranjha's of yesteryears are converted into violent militants of today.

Using the narrative of Shiva as an example, the film portrays the life journey of many young boys in the Punjab who were perceived by the State and the majority as terrorists. Shiva, a young man who had nothing to do with politics, or even the thought of an independent nation state for the Sikhs, is compelled to live the life of a terrorist. Similarly, the film highlights the life story of Shiva's two friends who escape with him. Jagtar Singh Taari is a young poet, whose fingers have been broken by the police because he had composed poems around the movement. In actuality, he had nothing to do with the Khalistan movement, but was in love with the idea of revolution. Once he is caught by the Punjab police, after a situation of encounter in which the police try to kill him, he is compelled to hide and run to save his life. He is left with no choice but to join the movement. The third boy who runs along with Shiva and Jagtar is Pindi. Pindi's only fault is that he was in love with a girl. This girl is harassed by the son of a police officer. When Pindi tries to stop this boy from teasing his beloved, he is implicated as a terrorist.

He is taken in custody and there he is sexually abused by the police officers. Pindi is beaten up and gang-raped for more than a month. The torture is so unbearable that he pleads to be killed, for anything would be better than the humiliation of being emasculated night after night. Pindi escapes with Taari and Shiva, but later in a violent encounter with the police, he is caught once again. After enduring long torture which leaves him semi-paralyzed, Pindi's family manages to pay a substantial bribe and rescue him. It is in this semi-alive state, dead to the world and hidden in a dark room that he reveals to Satwant Kaur, Shiva's story after his abduction by the police, and his last meeting with him. He informs her that probably Shiva is no more. In the final confrontation with the police in which he was caught, Shiva was brutally shot. Listening to this narrative, Satwant Kaur, not knowing the whereabouts of Shiva, assumes that he is killed. Once again, the 'mud embracing' sequence is repeated in the film; this time it is Satwant Kaur who embraces the wet soil to her bosom, hopelessly seeking and holding the missing remains of her son in the once loving fertile soils of the Punjab.

The film goes on to portray the various shades of the Khalistan movement, the degeneration, the infighting, the futile killings of innocent people, the fight for power, the vested interests of the various sects within the movement, including the varied ideologies of the militants; Talwandi who is clearly for a violent movement; Sukhdev Singh who manipulates Taari, Shiva and Pindi, and many innocent young Sikh boys, inciting them to join the movement in the name of revenge and sacrifice; and Darshan Singh Bhool Puriya who under the guise of a nonviolent face hides the most hideous quest for power. His motive is to make all the groups within the movement fight each other, so that in the end he alone will come into power when Khalistan is finally formed. It also depicts the misplaced youth in the form of Taari who had celebrated the movement craving for a revolution to come. Finally, the film depicts the voices of dissent through the narrative of these boys who protested against the killings of innocents and were able to offer a critical perspective within the movement.

Though the film very analytically goes into the infighting within the movement, perhaps a critical perspective related to the response of the Sikhs against the Indian state's attack to crush Sikh culture and identity, on the basis of the Khalistan movement would certainly have added deeper, historical, political and psychological dimensions to an understanding of the movement. Historically, in the context of the Independence of India, one may trace the genesis of the Khalistan movement to the 1940s.

Following the example of the Muslim League, a few Sikh leaders too had put forward the idea of Khalistan and had demanded a separate state.

Further, the movement for a free independent Khalistan, even though highly objectionable, is historically far more complex, as it has been fuelled by various incidents of discrimination and humiliation by the Indian state than has been represented in the film under discussion. One such incident happened on 4 July 1955 when:

Hundreds of peacefully protesting Sikhs were humiliated, beaten with lathis and rifles, and arrested; this included several hundred Sikh women. For demanding Punjabi to be the official language of the Punjab, a total of 12,000 Sikhs were detained. (“Khalistan Movement”)

Another such incident happened when in August 1982:

The Akali Dal launched the *Dharam Yudh Morcha* to implement the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. Indira Gandhi considered the Anandpur Resolution a secessionist document and evidence of an attempt to secede from the Union of India. The Akali Dal was classified as a separatist party. (Giorgio Shani 2008, 51–60)

The Akali Dal officially stated that Sikhs were Indians and the Anandpur Sahib Resolution did not envisage an autonomous Sikh State of Khalistan (Harnik Deol 2000, 102–106). However as a consequence, security forces arrested over thirty thousand Sikhs in two-and-a-half months. The government then launched Operation Blue Star. The operation had two components—Operation Metal which was confined to the Golden Temple complex and Operation Shop. Operation Shop was later followed by Operation Woodrose.

The fact that the Indian government had launched a military operation in the Golden Temple offended the Sikh community deeply. This insult:

was profoundly made worse by the careless, en masse cremation of the dead whose number went unrecorded due to the many unidentifiable pilgrims who had gathered at the Golden Temple to worship. (“Operation Blue Star”)

Similarly under Operation Shop and Operation Woodrose:

...the army occupation of the Punjab continued to enrage and alienate the Sikhs. Authorities combed the countryside in a quest to quell the resistance, subjected young Sikhs to abuse and torture designed to elicit confessions, and jailed them for further questioning if they were unsatisfied with their answers. Once imprisoned, they were hidden from sight and nearly impossible to locate. (Nayar and Singh 1984, 124.)

Further the anti-Sikh riots totally demolished and alienated the Sikhs:

It is estimated that in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's murder, some 10,000 people were killed in the violence that gripped the Punjab, with many Sikhs being tortured and killed by mobs headed by Congress leaders. ("Khalistan Movement")

Ironically, in 2011, twenty - seven years after the riots, the Human Rights Watch reported that the Government of India had "yet to prosecute those responsible for the mass killings". Also in 2011, a new set of mass graves was discovered in Haryana, and Human Rights Watch reported that "Widespread anti-Sikh attacks in Haryana were part of broader revenge attacks in India" (Human Rights Watch 2011). Sadly, even today, thirty - four years after the riots, the families of victims are filing petitions and pleading justice, with absolute knowledge that justice will not be granted.

Though the film highlights the oppressive role of the State through the violence of the police officers, it does not go into any deeper structural analysis of the atrocities committed by the Indian state on the Sikh community which had eventually lead to their alienation and subsequent violence. Human Rights Watch reported that:

...since 1984, government forces had resorted to widespread human rights violations to fight the militants, including arbitrary arrest, prolonged detention without trial, torture, and summary killings of civilians and suspected militants. Family members were frequently detained and tortured to reveal the whereabouts of relatives sought by the police. Punjab Rights Forum claims that several Sikh women were reportedly gang-raped and molested by the Punjab police and the Indian security forces during house-to-house searches. It also claims that looting of the villagers' properties and the ransacking of entire villages occurred during this period. Amnesty International has also alleged several cases of disappearances, torture, rape and unlawful detentions by the police during the Punjab insurgency. ... Further, there were serious charges leveled by human rights activists against Indian Security forces, claiming that thousands of suspects were killed in staged shootouts and thousands of bodies were cremated/disposed of without proper identification or post-mortems. ("Khalistan Movement")

The film could have developed a wider lens by looking at the structural inequalities meted out to minorities in India by focusing on the history of the marginalization of the Sikh community in various forms. Moreover, it could have further connected the plight of Sikhs with the plight of Muslims, another major marginalized community in India, which is heavily discriminated against. It could have developed a discourse of solidarity as M. S. Satyu's *Garam Hawa* did so pertinently in its last sequence.

Paramjeet Singh<sup>2</sup> discusses at length the need for a critical political perspective in the film. Nevertheless, as its central argument, the film retains the soul of Sikhism that believes in equality of all beings, as all have emanated from the same creator.

Despite the fact that they are completely implicated, what is important is the journey that Shiva and Jagtar undertake. Shiva vows that he will not return home hiding himself from the police, as he is no criminal but will enter his home in complete daylight as a citizen of a free nation. He clearly states that since his home is his home, his village is his village and this country is his nation, why must he return to that which belongs to him, like a thief in the darkness of the night. His forced alienation from his mother and symbolically from his nation leads to his psychic disintegration, yet, despite everything, he does not lose insight and does not internalize the politics of othering. He still tries to convince his fellow Khalistanis not to indulge in futile violence and kill innocent Hindus. Though he believes that they have to fight for justice against the State, which is so brutally killing and victimizing Sikhs, he constantly engages in dialogue. It is only towards the end, when he realizes the strategies through which he and his friends are being manipulated by the Khalistani militants, who themselves are split into groups, that he declares a war on them to counter this movement. Yet he is perceived as a terrorist worthy to be killed because of his Sikh identity. The film ends, in a most poignant moment, after being battered by the militants and after killing Rana, when Shiva in broad daylight, asserting and celebrating his identity of being a Sikh, a son of the soil, returns to his mother's arms to finally rest in peace in her bosom, is shot dead by a police officer, ironically the husband of his beloved Jeeti. The officer, in this case a representative of the State does not allow Shiva a moment of union with his mother or symbolically the nation, who has longed to hold him in her arms. Even a moment of union and love is not granted to this man who has spent his youth convincing his group against processes of dissent and the futility of violence. Instead, the State uncritically submerges his identity, as he is a Sikh, in the identity of all terrorists, thus implying that all Sikhs are terrorists by virtue of being Sikhs; in other words by virtue of being different and hence non-Hindus.

Just before the police officer kills Shiva, something very significant happens in terms of the film narrative.

Titli, the dumb boy, who cannot speak and thus has not spoken a single word, attempts to speak in excitement when he sees Shiva returning. Eventually, he is successful. Titli's muteness and his attempt at speech, signifies the attempt of a muted, repressed community to finally come into being. The symbolic resonance of Titli's "*Jo bole so Nihal*", and Shiva's response echoing "*Sat Shri Akaal*", depicts how the community yet holds

its head high. The sequence thus connotes the reassertion of identity, the final resistance of the Sikh community in the looming large shadow of death as Shiva's bullet ridden body finally collapses.

Ironically, the last words of the police officer as he shoots Shiva are: "Bloody terrorist! People like him have spoiled the environment of the Punjab". The officer shoots Shiva in his back just as the Congress party had shot the Sikhs during the 1984 Sikh carnage while maintaining a secular front. Though the Congress party does not ideologically propagate India as a Hindu state, in terms of their actions they did not prove to be any different from other parties with a clear Hindutva agenda.

The film ends with a song as we see screen shots of young Sikh boys who have all been implicated and have either been killed in fake encounters or have gone missing. The parents of these young boys sit silently with vacant eyes awaiting the return of their children, day after day, month after month, year after year, silently perhaps hoping an end to their mourning, a closure; perhaps death would be better than this long, never ending wait. We see the image of Kundan Singh as we read that he was killed in a fake encounter in 1990; he was innocent; we see Sardar Savan Singh, son of Kundan Singh; he had joined the movement for revenge and was killed in an encounter in 1993, just as his brother Sardar Balkar Singh had also joined the movement for revenge. He was killed in an encounter in 1992. We witness the ruin of complete families. We then see Jagir Kaur with vacant eyes; her son killed in a fake encounter and his body not handed to the family. We are told that Sardar Balwinder Singh, a young boy of 16 was working in the fields when he was killed as Sardar Kabal Singh was picked up in a police vehicle when he was working in the fields; he was never returned. We then see Pooran Kaur; her son Sardar Dalwinder Singh was killed in an encounter in 1992; she is mentally unstable and is cared for by the neighbors. We are told that they do not keep any photograph of her son because she becomes agitated upon seeing it. The next photograph that we see is of Bagwant Kaur; her son Sardar Jaswinder Singh, a police officer, was shot dead in 1990 while on duty.

We walk along with the parents of the disappeared, missing children who were taken away as terrorists; certainly killed in encounters, their bodies were never returned.

Without blatantly stating it, the film develops the narrative of non-Hindus in a country that calls itself secular and yet works within a majoritarian discourse where all communities other than the majority are subjected to constant subtle insidious humiliation and in some historic moments and events to blatant violence. Cinematically speaking, throughout the sequences related to Shiva and Satwant Kaur, the camera dominantly

positions itself through top angle lens compositions, denoting their miniature stature as compared to the many close-up, frontal shots that frame Rana, connoting symbolically the power of the State as embodied in the police forces, that compel people to bow in front of them. In the same way the shots of the Khalistanis are composed through positioning the camera in mid close-up compositions, once again centralizing the negative power of violence. On the other hand, in shots depicting the open landscape of the Punjab, the camera usually uses a wide angle lens and long takes to situate the characters within the context of their beloved Punjab in which the characters are submerged within the fields, not acquiring any dominant position but a position, connoting love, respect and submergence.

The film is mostly shot in a yellow hue that pervades it with a feeling of maternal warmth and love. The role of lighting adds to the dimension of the all-pervading love of the mother represented through Satwant Kaur who is not merely the mother of Shiva but also of Bittu, Titli and Jeeti. Throughout the film, the body language of Satwant Kaur embodies the longing and the waiting of a mother. She eventually comes to symbolize the eternal mother of young Sikh boys of the Punjab, living in longing for a never returning son. She thus embodies the tragedy and the realization of the impossible union within her being, given the discriminatory practices of India as a nation state.

As Shiva dies in his mother's arms and as we see the screen shots of young missing boys in the background we hear a poignant song composed by Taari:

Be strong mother, don't grieve my death; leaves fall inevitably, trees don't become barren, nowhere had I felt the peace that I felt in your lap ...  
Give message to the breeze blowing, I will merge in it one day, become one with it ... I will be back reduced to an urn of ashes ....

The urns of ashes of these boys are still awaiting justice, still awaiting an embrace from the mother who has been compelled to part from them because of the repressive State order and the discourses of discrimination existing all around. They have been left abandoned, amidst strangers in strange alienated taverns, where ironically they cannot even die in peace; for in order to die in peace, a last union, a last embrace of a *hamdard*, a *hamsafar*, a nation that tolerates differences, understands and embraces, is essential.

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## Endnotes

1. It is important to state here that though historically Hindus and Muslims have had a difficult history, in terms of their day to day interaction many Hindus and Muslims have shared deep love and friendship and have come to each other's rescue in critical historical moments as well.
2. The reference here is to Paramjeet Singh's article "Punjab 1984 Movie-Why do I have Objections to It."



## Hence, a Protagonist - Searching Traits that Define a Protagonist

**Naintara AbulFazal**

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In the Beginning there were two of us. She, who came before, had all of their attention and I, who followed, wanted to take it all away. I screamed and cried but things never used to go my way, so I broke those things. She was different from me. The sun was not always cruel to her while it was always hard for me to get out of it.

And the rain also did not seem as noisy and harsh on her as it was on me. She was always so pretty and shiny and they were always happy to meet her but why her and not me? I used to think. Was it only because of the way she looked or how she smelled? I admit that it was nice ... I could tell even from afar ... it was like an old wooden box hidden at the bottom of a carton filled with dry clothes. I have smelled one of those before, so I know. I didn't smell that way, no matter how much I tried. I heard someone talking the other day of how the Creator made us both as equals. I think that is rubbish. The Creator might have tried to make us as equals but failed at it. There is more to equality than appearance you know. For example, I was always a sensitive soul while she, a tough one. Anyone could have easily seen that we were not equals. I once tried to copy her but that didn't work either; they still weren't as comfortable with me as they were with her.

I knew I had to do something to make them like me... and I had the perfect plan. After this, they will see me in a different light. They will write about me to others and the memory of this will stay with them. They will see only me, I giggled, as I made all necessary arrangements. Then on a fine day, a day they had been planning for a long time, I did it to them and they bled before my eyes...

In the middle of the road, I held on to a nail and ripped that sensitive soul out from my body and they tripped on it.

'When you're angry, you'll make the best decision you'll ever regret'- someone said once, passing by me. There was a shoe shop nearby and it was *Exchange Your Old Shoe with New Ones on Half Price Day*. She and I both now sit in a storage smelling like the same old leather and dirty water.

- The End -

You might have heard many stories throughout your life and in that time, you might have thought about the origin of those stories; what kind of a person would tell such stories and why? Was it to feel something or to be felt by someone? Did someone ask for it? if yes, who did or was it told on purpose? These stories and their characters that are constructed sometimes, out of fear, sometimes to be feared and sometimes against that fear, mean something in our lives. We follow them willingly in the form of ideals and unwillingly in the form of forgotten memories, memories that have stories from the religion of the brave and the good, of the bad and the cowardly, names from history associated with certain movements; someone in love dying or

living, others in search of fragrance, of texture, of color, of a safe space, with sometimes height, width, length, girth and sometimes none; listeners of sound, singers of sorrow and of happiness and most of all, of a life that has a PATTERN. When we believe in these stories they stay with us while living life; in the moments of losing life and perhaps after we're gone, giving our souls a safe passage to the underworld.

More often than not, these stories are told around a character known as the Protagonist. What is a protagonist? And why does the story revolve around it? You might have a vague idea about it since it is a widely used term in critical reviews and a popular subject in researches about storytelling but to answer this question more precisely, the author of *The Modern Library Writer's Workshop*, Stephen Koch provides his definition, saying:

The protagonist is the character whose fate matters most to the story.

Some other more general definitions to be found for a protagonist are:

- a. The principal character in a literary work (such as a drama or a story).
- b. The leading actor or principal character in a television show, movie, book, etc.
- c. An active participant in an event.
- d. A leader, proponent or supporter of a cause.

After going through all these definitions, I started seeing a protagonist to

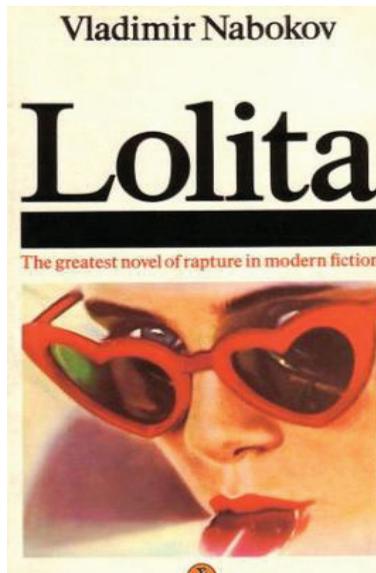


Figure 1

*Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov, 1955.  
Source: Goodreads.  
Retrieved from <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/960512.Lolita>

Figure 2

Mary Poppins (1964).  
 Source: YouTube.  
 Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS6Rz2s\\_A2k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS6Rz2s_A2k)

a story as what a nucleus is to a cell, controlling and directing all the activities in its genetic material. Its authority in terms of attention and narrative is given but the nature of its character is not, giving a storyteller all the margin to produce characters that are sometimes so possessed by a child (*Lolita* - 1955 ) that they are willing to do anything to have them.



Even after reading this unconventional tale of love, the fate of this gruesome character is something that matters most in the story and to us.

In another example, when a cross man, preoccupied with work, wanting order and largely ignoring his children and wife in the process, *MENDS* a kite in the tale of *Mary Poppins* by Disney (1964), why do we cry tears of joy?

When a cartoon lion cub cries over the dead body of his father (*Lion King*, Disney 1964), why do we feel his pain? When a greedy industrialist cuts down all of the beautiful, multi-colored Truffula Trees (*The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss - 2012) to make a peculiar garment known as a Thneed, why do we feel bad for him after the factories close down and he is left alone?

Figure 3

*The Lion King* (1964).  
 Source: YouTube.  
 Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHGvYO-a4Mg>



Figure 4 (Right)

Once-ler from the 2012 adaptation of Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax*.  
 Source: Heroes Wiki.  
 Retrieved from [https://hero.fandom.com/wiki/The\\_Once-Ler](https://hero.fandom.com/wiki/The_Once-Ler)



Figure 5 (Left)

Tree from the 2012 adaptation of Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax*.  
 Source: Keeping it Reel. Retrieved from <https://keeping-it-reel.com/2012/03/06/dr-seuss-the-lorax-2012/>

Sometimes as a hero defying evil in the face of good, sometimes as a narrator giving an account of his observation and at other times as a villain, fighting against the code of conduct provided by any establishment, why do they have so much influence on our life's decisions?

Once a dear friend, after reading *A Man Called Ove* said to me that before reading this novel she would never have paid attention to a character like Ove. "I would have ignored him as the cranky old man I do not want to spoil my day for. But now that I think I know him", she smiled for a pause and then continued saying, "I see this character as someone I would like to spend my life with, or better, someone I see myself as, when I'm his age."

How could she change her point of view on the basis of a novel and above all, start relating her life to it? Is it possible that through creating or detecting certain similarities, we begin to see ourselves in a larger narrative and we hope in our stories, despite our trials, we will overcome them and have our version of a successful ending just like the characters we see? And is it also possible that this is why these characters are made up of several elements or traits so everyone can find something for themselves to relate to. So, what are these traits is my question.

"The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes", said the French novelist, critic and essayist, Marcel Proust.

I need those new eyes if I want to find the traits of protagonistism in time, so I decide to go back and begin by looking for the origin and literal meaning of the term and see if there is a clue. Like any other internet child, I Google the term, from where I learn that the earliest known examples of a character called a Protagonist are found in Ancient Greece about 536 B.C. Greek for *prōtos* meaning, First and *agōnistēs* meaning Actor, *First Actor*.

Now, from the beginning of human history there must have been many people, each of them in their time, who acted for personal or commercial reasons, so where do we draw the line and what is *First Actor* supposed to mean? It turns out that early dramatic performances in Greece involved merely dancing and recitation by the chorus. Then in his *Poetics*, Aristotle describes how a poet named Thespis (you might have heard about him as the inventor of tragedy) introduced the idea of one actor stepping out and engaging in a dialogue with the chorus.

The actor who indulged in this performance was none other than the poet Thespis himself. This begins to show that introducing and playing this character was in itself an Act; in fact the First Act made by Thespis against the plain chorus culture of that time, making him the protagonist of that historic reference.

This also means that a protagonist is required not only to precede an idea but actually work on it as well, which in fact is the definition of a Catalyst. So, what are the rest of the traits since a Catalyst alone would be just a catalyst? Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or the soul is susceptible, which one shall I, on the present occasion, select? – asked Edgar Allen Poe in *The Philosophy of Composition*.

I wonder if Poe was thinking about the same traits that create a composition which in this case is a protagonist.

*Trait stands for a distinguishing quality or characteristic, typically one belonging to a person.*

Traits can also be defined as habitual patterns of behavior, thought and emotion. They are aspects of personality that can be relatively unstable over time, differ across individuals (some people are outgoing whereas others are not), are relatively inconsistent over situations, and influence behavior.

For example, a story told by a grandmother belonging to a middle-class family living in rural Punjab might be different to the stories told by a 25-year-old aunt belonging to an upper-class family living in urban Sindh.

We see that difference clearly, when the same stories are told by storytellers from different locations, who grew up around different people and see things in a different light. Waris Shah, when writing *Heer Ranjha* established and popularized the characters of Heer and Ranjha to express anti-establishment principles and true emotions that defy organized religion, trading systems, the judiciary, the feudal class and ultimately the state. This may reflect his experience and longing for love and unity and how establishments in many forms regulate something as simple as that from happening. In the beginning of the story, Waris Shah uses the love between God himself and his beloved prophet, demanding his readers believe in the concept that Love is. It goes like this:

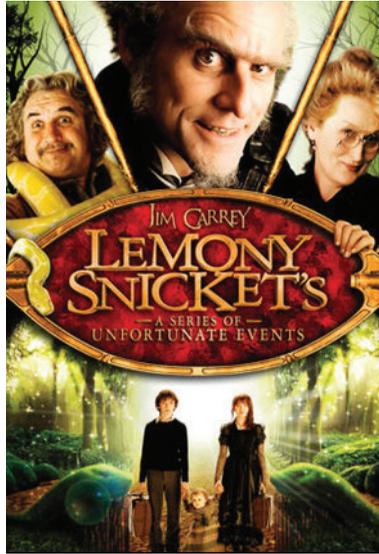
*Awal Hamd Khudai da wird kijey, Ishq kita so Jag da Moal Mian  
Pehle App hi Rab ne Ishq Kita, Mashuk hae Nabi Rasul Mian*

Praise be to God who made love the foundation of the world; God Himself was the first lover for He loved the Prophet Muhammad (Usborne, 1874 – 1919).

These details in Waris Shah's *Heer*, although being the soul of this story, are now only remembered by a relatively small group of people. This is when time starts to show its course; in order to break that barrier and reach a wider audience these books are retold in many other ways, translated into other languages or turned into films and as a result, many details are left out.

In the case of mainstream cinema, you can clearly see that gap in the body language of the actors presenting the characters. You can clearly experience that change from the title of a Punjabi movie released in 2009, which is *Heer Ranjha: A True Love Story*. The second part of this title implies the authenticity of the Story which is a huge change when compared to the emphasis on Concept in the version told by Waris Shah as mentioned above. However, these changes do not always meet with success.

One cinematic example of this is *A Series of Unfortunate Events* written by Lemony Snicket, the pen name of American author Daniel Handler.




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 Figure 6
 

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*Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events* (2004). Source: Rotten Tomatoes. Retrieved from [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/lemony\\_snicket](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/lemony_snicket)

When the classic tale was turned into a film in 2004, Jim Carrey was cast to play the role of Count Olaf, a distant relative of the three orphans coming to stay with him. Olaf is a cruel, scheming man, after the inheritance of the children and he is characterized as the Protagonist Villain of the film which turned out to be a hit. The cast compilation became a trademark digital image for the stories. But then in 2017, Netflix released a series following the storybooks in which the character of Count Olaf, although played by award winning actor Neil Patrick Harris, did not have the same effect. To perfect their performance according to written words, actors sometimes use an acting technique called Method Acting in which they live the lives of the characters they are about to play and try to manifest themselves in the traits of that character completely.

Traits may be so precise that a minute difference in time, space and performance or physical attributes by the actors, who are playing them, may change the way we perceive them. This difference may be less evident when occurring in transactions between mediums depending on the viewership of the medium from which the transaction is occurring.

When a painter learns about the power these characters hold, he turns it into a mysterious woman with a smile and when touched by a scientist it is turned into *LIFE* itself. Maybe just like the painter, scientist and the poet, a storyteller can appear within any medium and it is actually the storyteller who portrays him/herself differently every time the light changes.

Figure 7

Left: A Series of Unfortunate Events (2017). Source: Netflix  
 Right: Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events (2004). Source: Amazon



## Conclusion

There are still many questions that need to be asked about a protagonist but at this point the only possible answer I'm able to give myself is that it can be possible that a protagonist is not a specific person but an idea which emerged as a voice in the midst of a tune and gradually became an expression of ideals for every storyteller and as a result he shapes the listener, the way he thinks of himself and everything else in every way imaginable from shape, size, width, height, rich, poor, fun, dark, happy, sad, angry, tasty, ugly, beautiful. In short, I believe it to be a longing, a wish which comes with a promising possibility that some day or in another world these characters will turn into a reality and will take it away from what it is, chanting:

*"To infinity and beyond"*  
 Buzz Lightyear, Toy Story (1995)

In the end, we all want to be taken away from ourselves, adopted into a God-like being but whether or not this wish comes true is another question.

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# Cinematic Subtleties and Visual Veracities: The Politics of Aesthetics in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Padmaavat*

Siddharth Pandey

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## Introduction

Since January 2017, when Sanjay Leela Bhansali's ninth directorial venture *Padmaavat* (2018) was still in the production phase, the film started garnering media attention for all the wrong reasons. A relatively unheard of right-wing fringe group called Karni Sena took offence at Bhansali's distortions of the 'historical' portrayal of Queen Padmavati, and as one month gave in to the next, this hate-spewing faction successfully sowed the seeds of anger, frustration, and violence in many parts of the country, with a litany of vandalisms of public property, open death threats to the director and the film cast, and a postponing of the film's release from October 2017 to the end of January 2018. Much has been written about this phase (see for instance Saberlin 2017, Parihar 2017, Nair 2018), with hundreds of articles pouring in from the left, liberal and secular sphere, condemning the Karni Sena for disrupting peace and threatening creative expression. Hindi cinema is no stranger to controversy and from classics such as M. S. Sathyu's *Garam Hawa* (1973) and Gulzar's *Aandhi* (1975) to more recent productions like Rahul Dholakia's *Parzania* (2007) and Anurag Kashyap's *Black Friday* (2007), numerous films have regularly ruffled the feathers of the common public, politicians and law. However, *Padmaavat*'s case stands out not only for the battling-positions prior to its release but also for the vastly divided perspectives spilling out afterwards. For all was not over with the Karni Sena becoming the eye of the storm in the pre-release period. Once the film was screened after the green signal given by no less an authority than the Supreme Court of India, another set of write-ups started pouring in, again from the left and liberal sphere, that overwhelmingly condemned the film for its perceived Islamophobia, misogyny, homophobia and virtually every imaginable wrong in the name of political and ideological (in)correctness. Post-release therefore, the right-wing carried on with the display of its own sense of hurt, and the left, secular side also spoke vocally against the alleged prejudices of Bhansali. Nonetheless, the film went on to win some appreciation from another quarter of the public and critics and became the sixth highest grossing venture of Hindi cinema.

This paper tries to make sense of these widely divergent views without falling prey to the often-banded solution of 'to each his own', notwithstanding the subjectivity inherent in any position-making.

It argues that both viewpoints are necessarily limited in their scope, for *Padmaavat* is too complex and sophisticated a story to be accommodated within the two perspectives, that are themselves rigidly deterministic. Such determinism goes against the constantly exploratory and creative impulses of Malik Muhammad Jayasi's 16<sup>th</sup> century epic poem as well as its subsequent literary and aural renditions over the years, from which the film derives its inspiration. Jayasi, a Muslim saint, chooses to narrate the story of a 13<sup>th</sup> century Hindu Rajasthani queen Padmavati for his epic *Padmaavat*, who, according to historians, never existed in reality but is nonetheless regarded as a historical figure by millions of Indians. As a narrative that traverses the delicate ground between history and fiction while simultaneously aspiring towards a mythological sensibility, Bhansali's rendition is a fascinating exercise in historical fiction and myth-making that unsettles any notion of ideological purity whilst weaving a complex tale of desire and beauty. By teasing out the numerous intricacies of dialogue, characterization and materialistic craftsmanship, which may be further placed within Bhansali's auteur stylistics and oeuvre that have regularly shown minority communities of India in an empathetic and richly textured manner, the paper makes a case for interpreting the 'artistic' potential of *Padmaavat* on its own terms; one that is inextricable from its craftsmanship. By doing so, one may discern the director's politics of aesthetics as finely eclectic and even democratic, which is a far cry from the accusations of blatant misogyny and Islamophobia.

## 1. The Story and its (Dis)Contents

As derived from Jayasi's epic and its renditions in the common folklore and song culture of Rajasthan, the legend of Padmavati in a nutshell largely revolves around the married life of the titular queen of Chittor in the west Indian region of Mewar (Rajasthan). Padmavati (or Rani Padmini) is brought to her new home by the King of Mewar, Maharawal Ratan Singh from the Kingdom of Singhal (Sri Lanka) as his second wife. Famed for her beauty and wit, Padmavati gains the love and affection of the people of Mewar in no time. The then residing Muslim king of the Delhi Sultanate Alauddin Khalji, a real historical figure, also learns of her beauty, and wages two battles in order to win her: the first unsuccessful, the second successful, but only partially so. For, as the legend goes, when Khalji enters the fort of Chittor having destroyed its massive ramparts, Padmavati has already slipped away by performing the ancient practice of 'jauhar', whereby women, in order to save their honor and dignity without falling prey to the hands of the victimizer, killed themselves by jumping into a communal fire. It is important to remember here that Padmavati lore has existed for centuries precisely because of this ending which valorizes the queen's *jauhar* along with 16,000 other women.

As the film historian Sharmistha Gooptu said much before the film was released: “With Padmavati, the issue of glorifying *jauhar* is as much a non-starter as the Rajput honor issue. The Padmavati legend exists *because* it already glorifies women’s self-immolation at the altar of honor and the film draws on the legend” (Gooptu 2017, in-text emphasis). Empirically speaking, this is all a part of fiction; however, like the persistence of many myths and legends across South Asia, countless people regard this legend as a ‘truth’ in its own right, with Padmavati being venerated as a goddess queen in various parts of Rajasthan. Bhansali adapts a story already in circulation, and like every adaptation, there is no right or wrong manner of making it, but only a new interpretation of an old story with the signature of the maker. In the words of another film historian Shohini Ghosh: “Like creative imagination, legends are impossible to control” (Ghosh 2018).

Yet, the furor over the ‘rights’ and ‘wrongs’ of the much prevalent legend were also triggered because of the creative adaptation. The self-appointed representatives and custodians of Rajput honor, the Karni Sena hectored against the director for, first and foremost, a rumored intimate dream-sequence between Padmavati and Khalji, which Bhansali repeatedly denied (even in the form of a public statement on YouTube), and which finally got debunked by the film itself. But there were other matters as well that rattled the right-wing sensibility: the depiction of Padmavati dancing to the famous ‘Ghoomar’ number, as this was considered ‘unqueenly’, and also the portrayal of Khalji as a powerful and mighty Sultan, basking in his own masculinity. Since the time it gained center-stage on every news channel, the hitherto unheard of Karni Sena did its best to add to its repertoire of hurt sentiments and magnified their demand for a complete ban on the film. While liberal critics such as Gooptu, Ghosh, and many others continued to offer unstinted support to the film and argued for its release, post-release however, another large set of liberal critics appeared on the scene who trenchantly denounced the film for its allegedly ‘discriminatory’ politics. Based on their arguments, a standard liberal viewpoint could be constructed. This viewpoint doggedly held Alauddin Khalji’s representation as ‘villainous’, with his scarred face and meat-eating tendencies being heavily relied upon as the fundamental reasons for his ‘disgusting’ appeal. Further, the viewpoint regarded the portrayal of the Rajputi Hindu King Maharawal Ratan Singh as ‘pious’ and ‘heroic’, thereby casting him as the film’s ‘hero’ (against the villain Khalji), who serves as the heroine Padmavati’s husband and loves mouthing idioms about Rajputi might and valor. Finally, the representation of Padmavati herself was criticized as subservient and analyzed entirely through a patriarchal lens, primarily because of her ‘wifely’ role and the notorious *jauhar* scene at the end, whose ‘glorification’ was arguably the sorest point of contention in feminist debates.

Purveying such a viewpoint were established critics and journalists from both India and abroad, such as Barkha Dutt (2018), Anna Vetticad (2018), and Rachel Saltz (2018), all of whom were convinced about the film's binaried vision that promoted nothing but "pure misogyny" (Dutt), "Islamophobia" (Vetticad) and "useless beauty with the depth of a children's pop-up book" (Saltz). Thus, whether it was the right or the left, the film's contents turned into an endless source of discomfort and discontent.

## 2. From Controversy to Complexity

Given the sheer variety of opinions that oddly converged at the point of blatant denunciation, this author was left curious about the film's narrativisation even before he watched it for the first time, for it was intriguing to imagine the potential of a filmic narrative that could rile both extreme ends of the political spectrum in such a dramatic manner. Bhansali's films have always been exceptionally layered, which goes against the routine assessment of his cinema as typically commercial and therefore banal. As Varsha Panjwani, one of the few film academics who has incisively dealt with his cinematic style, observed:

There is no doubt that Bhansali works through excess and one may be tempted to relate this to post-liberalization of Bollywood's propensity for celebration of consumerism and affluent lifestyles. However, any such linkages will be thwarted by the fact that Bhansali's films contain no product placements at all. Rather, his style mixes fantasy, indigenous theatre forms and paintings, and thus, demands to be studied as apart from Bollywood's glorification and consumption (Panjwani 2017, 110-11).

*Padmaavat* similarly demands to be studied 'apart' from what is commonly considered as the trap of 'glorification and consumption' in the Hindi film industry, that is often equated with deep-seated prejudices, overt discrimination, flimsiness and glossiness. Since the conventional liberal viewpoint noted above identifies *Padmaavat* with all of these attributes, it is important to begin an alternative reading of the film with an assessment of the very assumptions that undergird the making of such a viewpoint in the first place. Contrary to the ease with which the characters are assigned the traditional roles of the 'hero' and the 'villain' by the conventional perspective, the narration of the film increasingly makes it difficult to regard Maharawal Ratan Singh as the 'hero' and Alauddin Khalji as the 'villain'. In fact, the film hardly has a hero. Simply being the male head of a kingdom whose wife is the lead female protagonist does not make a character a hero, even though it is traditionally considered one of the factors that allows for such a perception.

Except for the first few minutes of the first attack by Khalji, when Ratan Singh demonstrates a cunning disposition by orchestrating the death of a number of Sultanate soldiers in an invisible abyss, the major portion of the film depicts the Hindu king as an exceptionally imprudent monarch and decision-maker. His brilliantly rendered character by Shahid Kapoor loves spewing dictums about the legendary valor and courage of the Rajput community with repeated emphasis on the words “*aan, baan, shaan*” (“honor”, “prestige” and “pride”) and their synonyms. However, it is remarkable that this pride hardly ever indexes a sustainable intelligence or shrewd judgment on his part – something that is overly critiqued by Padmavati herself, in spite of her love for him.

As Ratan Singh confidently denies that Khalji will acquiesce to his conditions of entering Chittor alone and without arms, an irritated Padmavati perspicaciously foresees that of course he will, given that he has waited for months together in the heat of the desert to enter the fort’s premises, which is what exactly happens within a few seconds. Then again, Ratan Singh refuses to heed Padmavati’s advice of carrying his sword while visiting Khalji in his camp, for it is against Rajputi rules to accept a meal-invitation in the company of a weapon. As a result of this second misjudgment, the Hindu king eventually gets captured and taken to Delhi to be incarcerated in inhumane conditions. His insistence on rules and decorum again assumes shallowness about itself when Padmavati decides to show her face to Khalji, and Ratan Singh agitatedly forbids her do so. Feminist historian Charu Gupta, in her acerbic critique of the film, lambasts Bhansali citing this scene (among others), arguing that “Padmavati is categorically told that she cannot interfere in political matters of the state by her husband” (Gupta 2018). She further adds:

Many other periods, mythical and historical films – from *Mughal-e-Azam* to *Jodha Akbar* – have given space to multiple voices and perspectives. There can be many lives of the queen and diverse narratives. However, Bhansali has chosen to adopt a singular, unilinear narrative, with no complexities or nuances.

However, it is astounding that while seemingly giving a nod to the complexities of a number of other Hindi films, Gupta herself chooses to overlook the nuances that are strewn across the narrative of Bhansali’s work. As she says, Padmavati is indeed told not to interfere in political matters, but she (Gupta) does not discuss what happens in the very next moment: the queen staunchly refutes her husband’s order and decides to enter the game of politics herself, entirely out of her self-conviction and courage. This is the same courage that further leads her to plot the release of Ratan Singh by going against the orders of his ministers who try to exert their political significance as her concerned “brothers”.

As she stalwartly makes it clear to them, she is not “requesting” them for their help as a “sister” but “ordering” them to carry out her strategic plans in the capacity of the ‘Queen of Mewar’ (“*yeh binti ek behen ki nahi, aadesh hai Mewar ki Rani ka*”). Remarkably, when Ratan Singh uses the ruse of Rajputi “*aan, baan, shaan*” to prevent Padmavati from showing herself to Khalji, she defiantly retorts that “if your values (*usools*) are so dear to you, then you must chop off my head here and nip this episode in the bud [otherwise, it is indispensable for me to enter this political fray]”. And so enter she does, subtly rendering Ratan Singh as immature and exceptionally limited in his worldview, as well as making the viewer question his position as a ‘hero’. In this way, complexities and nuances shape the characterization, quite in fulfillment of Gupta’s wish.

Akin to Padmavati, Khalji also makes fun of these very values (“*usool*”) in a sardonically powerful dialogue, when he out-right mocks Ratan Singh by saying “*kitney achchey ho tum, aur kitney achchey hain tumhaare yeh usool!*” (“How good you are, and how fine are your values!”). Bhansali may have decided not to show the intimate dream sequence between Khalji and the queen but the film does shrewdly raise the temptation to think about both of them together, at least at similar levels of cunning and foresight, as against the foolish king. As the film critic Subhash Jha writes: “Though they [Padmavati and Khalji] sing the same song from different scales, they are like the earth and sky never destined to meet” (Jha 2018). If anything, Khalji is not a hero but an *anti-hero*, who unusually creates a space for himself on his own terms even as he enacts a wildly savage persona. In a number of interviews, Bhansali and Ranveer Singh (the actor who plays Khalji) have repeatedly stated that neither Padmavati nor Ratan Singh are the filmmaker’s favorite characters. It is Khalji who exerts a different kind of power over the directorial imagination, which seductively spreads towards the audiences. Even in the assessment of his character, there is a strange kind of confusion that persists within the critics. An article titled “‘*Padmaavat*’ twists Alauddin Khalji’s Portrayal, Say Some Historians” (2018) interviews a number of Indian historians, who in their efforts of presenting a nuanced perspective, speak about the multiple sides of Khalji. Very interestingly, one of the historians, Rana Safvi, argues that Khalji was a “cruel imperialist and a good military strategist who wanted to crush Mongol invaders and was only interested in expansions and conquests”. She also adds that “Khalji was aware he was cruel but he was not the kind to be running after women and then conquering kingdoms”. While Safvi’s nuancing is appreciable, it is also inherently contradictory in its disallowance of creative experimentations. On the one hand, she (like many historians and common audiences) fully acknowledges Khalji’s cruelties and desires for expansion; on the other hand, she is unwilling to allow Khalji’s portrayal as someone running after women.

However, as we know, the legend exists regardless of historical veracity. For storytellers, whether centuries old or contemporary, it is not difficult to draw connections between social cruelty and sexual desires, so that Khalji's fictionalization becomes possible in the first place. It is equally important to remember that it is, after all, a *Muslim* saint who is converting this historical figure into an enraptured admirer of Padmavati.

Reading historians' complex views on Khalji further becomes a productive exercise because of their expressed concern for nuance. And yet, as in the case of Charu Gupta's critique, Bhansali is himself aware of this complexity. Whatever Safvi says regarding Khalji's expansionist desires is already depicted in the film, as for instance, the unforgettable scene where Khalji claims victory over the Mongol army, using his prowess (however malignant) to full effect by raiding into a gigantic cloud of dust and hitting the bull's eye. Even while orchestrating such plans, he is often shown to care for his soldiers and pets while receiving unconditional love from his slave-servant Malik Kafur unhidden from the eyes of Khalji's wife, thereby normalizing bisexuality in an uncomplicated fashion. The scenes capturing his clever tactics of uniting his soldiers, whether through '*kushti*' (wrestling) or conjuring respect for the Sultanate flag, actually proves the Karni Sena right that Bhansali is indeed interested in depicting Khalji 'heroically'. Like Safvi, other historians claim that Khalji was a promoter of arts, particularly song and poetry, implying that Bhansali isn't aware of this. But this too appears as an observation of willful blindness. Throughout *Padmaavat*, Khalji is shown bonding closely and affectionately with the great poet Amir Khusro, and in the second half of the film, becomes a lyricist and choreographer himself (of the song 'Khalibali'). In fact, it is his appreciation of the fine arts that makes him welcome the ostracized Hindu priest Raghav Chetan, to whom the Sultan is introduced via his flute-playing. This author finds it remarkable that while in the beginning it was the song 'Ghoomar' pictured on Padmavati that drew massive appreciation, later, the fame shifted to two songs depicting Khalji ('Binte Dil' and 'Khalibali'), enticing the nation and the world into a rapturous fold. The creative effort that was put into the making of 'Ghoomar', right from a fine understanding of Rajasthani architecture to musical and dance aesthetics, was superbly equalled by the creative efforts that went into the making of Arabic sounding 'Binte Dil' and the lushly done Islamic architecture of Khalji's palace – the stage for the lyrically-nuanced 'Khalibali'. Fed upon a diet of easily-interpretable characters, many audiences found it difficult to understand the grey and in-between realms that Bhansali masterfully navigates. An irritated Arvind Singh Mewar, a member of the panel created by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) to deliberate upon the modifications of *Padmaavat*, said: "They [the filmmakers] are clearly not with the Rajputs or the Muslims, so who are they with?" ("My grandkid won't trust our stories..." 2018). The subtlety of the narrative was lost on him.

Another member, a historian named K. K. Singh, raised worry over the mixing of “history” with “fiction”, and in a television interview went on to discredit the genre of historical fiction as rubbish and even non-existent!

Even so, were we to follow the arguments of critics such as Vetticad (2018) and Gupta (2018) that the film promotes a disturbingly and staunchly ‘binaried’ vision of good Hindus versus evil Muslims, it would simply be difficult to accept them. Had that been the case, then the Muslim queen Mehrunissa, Khalji’s wife who rescues both Padmavati and Ratan Singh from being further tormented by Khalji, would not have been depicted in an angelic light. She is fully aware that in doing so she is preventing her husband from committing evil on moral and ethical grounds as well as putting her own life at stake. When Khalji learns of this treachery and sends her away to the dungeons, Mehrunissa calmly and prophetically prays that all his desires come true *except* for his wish of attaining Padmavati. Bhansali, throughout his oeuvre, is enchanted by female bonding and uses it to significant effect, whether it is during the meeting of Paro and Chandramukhi in *Devdas* (2003) or the slowly developing bonding between Sophia and Devyani in *Guzaarish* (2010) and Mastani and Kashibai in *Bajirao Mastani* (2015). The same sense of respect emanates between Mehrunissa and Padmavati as well and the fact that the film fulfills Mehrunissa’s prayer by not letting Padmavati meet Khalji creatively upends any supposition that ‘all’ Muslims have unfavorable depictions. Further, if Mehrunissa internally critiques the Muslim camp, then the elder queen of Ratan Singh does so for the Hindu camp. The latter, as we regularly see, is hardly ever satisfied by Padmavati’s presence, always exuding a control and defiance of her own. Mehrunissa point-blank blames Padmavati’s beauty for the mess and her final dialogue again cuts through the younger queen’s maneuverings: “*Saamp par paer dhar kar aayi ho, yeh toh hona hi thha*” (“You have fiddled with a snake; of course it would come back to attack”, referring to Khalji). Another internal critique draws attention to the (in)famous meat-eating scene, where Khalji is shown savagely ripping through huge pieces of meat in his burned-down camp: a shot that received colossal criticism right from its depiction in the film’s trailer. But on a closer viewing, one realizes that Bhansali is simply not making a ‘general’ remark on Muslim’s meat-eating practices (a view perpetuated by most liberal critiques). Rather, he inserts the scene to both show Khalji’s anger at losing his camp in the aftermath of Ratan Singh’s attack as well as to critique the Sultan from his own people. The scene comes at a pivotal moment when most of his soldiers are hungry and deprived of food, because ration has run out during their long camp in the heated desert outside the Chittor fort: “*Sainik bagaawat par uttar aayein hain, Sarkar*” (“The soldiers are becoming disloyal, Sire”), reports a Muslim commander to Khalji. Here, what is also noteworthy is that a scene depicting Muslims delicately and daintily eating fruits and wine (quite like the Hindu king) is placed in the beginning of the film as well – a shot that to my knowledge was not mentioned in any article or review, which once again adds to the question of liberal-prejudice.

What does the lack of a clear-cut 'good' or 'bad' side do to the film? It paves the way for the navigation of a highly sophisticated terrain of beauty and desire. As a rare nuanced article by the feminist-queer historian Madhavi Menon sharply notes, the film is unique because of its *lack* of ideological purity, where everything is about desire (Menon 2018): desire for beauty, for power, for rights, for values: "*Saara masla khwaashon ka hai*" ("everything is about desire"), remarks Khalji's uncle at the outset, which Khalji repeats in his own way: "*Sarhadein bahut phelaa di. Ab ek jung husn ke naam*" ("Many borders have been won. Now one battle in the name of beauty"). Khalji's wars have nothing to do with conquest in terms of religious conversion or loot. Importantly, if there is a villain in the film who is the source of all this mess, it is the Hindu priest Raaghav Chetan, the fountainhead of Hindu religion in Mewar, whose lecherousness is punished in terms of an exile, who is then avenged by collaborating with Khalji and triggering his lust for Padmavati. This fundamental point again topples a clear-cut interpretation that regards the film as valorizing Hinduism over Islam, reminding us also of Bhansali's previous venture *Bajirao Mastani*, where too a Hindu priest was depicted in a negative light. The occasional references to gods and goddesses mouthed by Padmavati and other women do not emerge in opposition to the religion of Islam but rather as a part of a culturally rooted vocabulary of the times. And even though Khalji occasionally refers to '*Khuda*' (God), he emphatically maintains that he is above '*Khuda*' – a point well documented historically. It is therefore counterproductive to think of Khalji as the representative or custodian of Islam. In fact, it could be argued that it is his *non*-allegiance to religion that lets him embrace the Hindu priest in his court with the same ease with which he has him beheaded, for the only thing that drives him is the madness for expansion and beauty (hence also his iteration of the word '*nayaab*' – unique – throughout the narrative). In the film, therefore, the very idea of Muslimness is shown to be applicable differently to characters: while Khalji denies being rooted in any god-fearing identity, his Muslim wife urges him in the following words: "*Khuda ka khauf khaaiye*" ("Beware of God"). Even as the Pakistani writer Haroon Khalid joined Vetticad and others in excoriating the film for its alleged Islamophobia (Khalid 2018), more sophisticated critics such as Rahul Aijaz (Aijaz 2018), again from Pakistan, lauded the film in glorious terms for this very complexity, lavishing it with four and a half stars out of five. Likewise in India, few critics such as Girish Shahane and Abhijeet Singh Rawaley recognized that Bhansali's "sympathies" actually lay with Alauddin (Shahane 2018), even as the film proved an "intellectual delight" from a lawyer's point of view, where both Padmaavati and Alauddin were correct in their respective positions and choices (Rawaley 2018).

The quest for beauty and the fascination with Islamic aesthetics goes back to Bhansali's 2007 film *Saawariya*, which oozes with a generous love for everything related to Muslim cultures: alluring architecture, beautiful music, elaborate festivals and a variety of professions such as weaving and cookery. Set around the festival of Eid and made as an homage to the Islamicate cultures of Hindi cinema whose list runs long (*Mughal-e-Azam*, *Pakeezah*, *Umraao Jaan*), *Saawariya* is a brilliant exercise in eclecticism of various cultures where the minarets of mosques sit comfortably with Christian architecture and Buddhist imagery. In the 2010 *Guzaarish*, it is again a Muslim student Omar Siddiqui who learns magic from a Christian teacher Ethan Mascaranhus. *Bajirao Mastani* is explicitly a plea for Hindu-Muslim unity, a fact that comes out most evocatively in the hauntingly beautiful song 'Aaj Ibadat Ho Gayi' sung by the Pakistani singer Javed Bashir at the end, that entrancingly interweaves Hindu chants with Islamic prayers. Christian cultures fascinate the director too, as evident through his first film *Khamoshi: The Musical* (1996) and his most well-known, internationally applauded work *Black* (2005). The two ostensibly Hindu-based songs in *Padmaavat*, 'Holi' and 'Ek Dil Ek Jaan' also bear Muslim influences: the first is based on a local Rajasthani folk number, Manganiyar and Langha, sung for centuries by the Muslim community, while the second breaks into a *qawwali* in the middle, like other songs from Bhansali's previous films. "Beauty", as the Harvard critic Elaine Scarry has noted, "is sometimes disparaged on the grounds that it causes a contagion of imitation, but this is just an imperfect version of a deeply beneficial momentum toward replication" (Scarry, 1999, pp. 6-7). Some of Bhansali's favorite motifs — inspired and self-created — include his love for the shutting and opening of doors, windows, and gates (*Devdas*, *Saawariya*, *Padmaavat*); women contemplating via weaving (almost every film has a weaving reference); lovers dancing and singing as expressions of celebration, bonding, and separation; the statue of the meditative Buddha as a symbol of grace, poise, and purity (*Saawariya*, *Guzaarish*, *Padmaavat*), and endless nods to weather and natural landscape; the awareness of the last flourishes in *Padmaavat*, where the heat and dust of the desert and the beauty and appearance of the moon are evoked time and again. Instead of creating a 'fear' of Pakistan through the crescent flags of Khalji's army (as some discussions seemed to suggest), they are used as symbols of the moon to undermine the significance of the Rajputi sun at an artistic level, and in doing so, Bhansali harks back to his *Devdas* by turning it into a 'blot' ('*grahan*' and '*daag*').

### 3. From Complexity to Controversy (and Back)

The most controversial scene of the film — the denouement depicting the *jauhar* (mass sacrifice) of the women and queen — demands its own subsection.

Among the many reasons that were forwarded against the conclusion, one of the most recurrent was of Bhansali's internalization of the 'correctness' of the act, whose glorification was necessarily a regressive act on the part of the director, particularly in the contemporary age. The argument went that such a prolonged and valorous depiction of mass-suicide sends a hopeless message to the women of today, which would bolster the patriarchal mindset and its millennia-old treatment of women as objects for consumption. On the other hand, the director for his part continues to find value in this scene as does Deepika Padukone, as evident from the interviews and newsbytes they gave after the film's release. For them, it is impossible to question the 'courage' and 'might' of these women who refused to submit themselves to Khalji's desire, instead choosing to die in the name of honor. Again, these diametrically opposed positions add yet another complexity to the debate, and therefore require a keener look into the narrativisation of both the scene and its critiques.

In India, the actress Swara Bhaskar's criticism of the scene was the most vocal, laid out in an otherwise respectfully written open letter to the film director praising *Padmaavat* for most other technical aspects and artistry (Bhaskar, 2018). However, the *jauhar* scene, for Bhaskar and many others, went against the very idea of 'life' that is intrinsic to feminist and indeed any other liberal politics, for it found value in death by glorifying it in red saris and operatic music. Bhaskar signed off her letter as 'Desirous of life', asserting that women had the right to live. There cannot be any doubt of such a right, but Bhaskar's critique, as much as it is made from an emphatically emotional and politically correct vantage-point, misses out on the richness of the scene. As this paper citing Gooptu (2017) earlier argued, the legend of Padmavati exists because of this scene. While the concern about its contemporary ramifications and messages are understandable, contemporaneity itself is not necessarily supposed to overpower ancient content. Bhansali too knows that women have a right to live, and his oeuvre is an ode both to the fierce power of womanhood as well as the life of art in all its myriad forms. If anything, it is a woman (Sophia) played by Aishwarya Rai Bachchan in *Guzaarish* who decides to help the film's male protagonist (played by Hritik Roshan) fulfill his desire of dying by carrying out euthanasia. To believe that one cannot find value in death is to underestimate the value of human creative thought. The majority of Bhansali's films end in either separation or death, even leading the Pakistani critic Kamran Mehmood to wonder if Bhansali has "replaced Shakespeare as the king of tragic romance?" (Mehmood 2018). *Padmaavat*'s dying sequence also fits this repertoire of tragic endings. True, the scene looks grand, but then it is meant to look grand both imaginatively and empirically. How does one show 16,000 women collectively walking towards death? The irritation with grand architecture and red saris implies that Bhansali 'suddenly' discovers a grandeur in the last minutes of the film.

But as Bhaskar herself notes, and as this paper has also been arguing, beauty and grandeur are inherent to Bhansali's stylistics, not separate or kept 'aside' for particular scenarios.

The enormously portentous yet moving soundtrack that accompanies the flight of the women adds to the aspect of bravery – a quality visible on every woman's face. The firmness and conviction of this emotion written large across the faces of the thousands of women goes against the expectation that they should be cowering in fear. The visual depiction of suicide generally assumes a history of depression and oppressiveness of being, which can easily be identified through facial expressions. However, here, Bhansali is doing something entirely new: in order to lend the legend a larger-than-life, mythological spin, he makes sure that none of the women, once they have blocked out the assault, show any fear. Instead of letting them simply jump in the fire, he even orchestrates an overpowering scene of the domestic women (for these aren't 'warriors' in the typical sense of the term) hurling copious amounts of coal in the face of Khalji to blind his '*nazar*' ('vision') – another word that keeps cropping up in this tale of beauty. Even though it is not shown, it is not hard to imagine that this coal might have come from the same pyre in which they finally throw themselves. Interestingly, when Khalji enters the Chittor Fort for the first (and only) time to meet the king at the latter's invitation, it is the *jauhar* chamber through which he makes his appearance, literally from the chimney above the area where the pyre is made at the end. Khalji's entry thereby brilliantly foreshadows the *end* of his quest through the conduit of smoke. Thus, the setting of death in material terms and its visualization are themselves intricately nuanced. However, it needs to be remembered that this is not the first time that death has been glorified: Indian culture after all openly celebrates the death of the freedom fighter Rani Laxmibai by raising numerous statues of her leaping horse with a child tied to her back and face exuding defiance and fearlessness.

Contrary to what some critics have advocated, this author feels that the suggestion that even a small dialogue critiquing *jauhar* would have made the scene more amenable to contemporary audiences, is limited in nature. If anything, such a dialogue would have gone against the fabric of the legend itself. This is not to say that another film cannot be made on the epic with a new, overtly radical denouement (that directly speaks to our time in the way some liberals understand radical politics). However, for a director to be interested in a legend that still circulates among a significant number of common people owing to the lure of its ending is equally permissible. To assume that such people are necessarily regressive regarding every aspect of womanhood and advocate or practice 'mass-suicide' in every-day life (as evident through some critics' fears regarding the potential of the film that this author found in personal discussions) is immature and ungenerous.

The human mind is capable of negotiating many kinds of realities at any given moment, so that even the most 'rationally' minded person can have a belief in God (another instance of 'regressive' thinking according to one kind of progressive opinion) and a feminist can uphold the values of marriage (yet another institution routinely regarded as regressive by another group of feminists). The diversity of radically progressive opinions with innumerable claims within their ambit unsettles the 'objectivity' demanded of a creative venture. It could, for instance, be argued that the fundamental flaw of the entire venture is simply that Bhansali *chose* to make a film out of it, for the times that we live in are already entrenched with right-wing acrimony (evidenced through the rise of fascist regimes all over the world at the moment), that makes it not only impossible to appreciate the film for its nuances but also to dissociate it from its context. Here, however, I am reminded of the contemporary philosopher Graham Harman, who remarks that while there is nothing wrong with "socio-political interpretation[s] or effectiveness of art", it is equally true that

*not all* of the elements of the context of an artwork are relevant to that work, and that an artwork either admits or forbids its surroundings to enter through a fairly rigorous process of selection. The effort found in some quarters to reduce both art and philosophy to the handmaid of political revolution misunderstands the mission of art, which can include politics and anything else, but only by first aestheticizing it" (Harman 2018, p. 102, in-text emphasis).

This 'anything else' is what Bhansali is interested in, composed as it is of ideas such as beauty, desire, and their complex unfolding through filmic narrativisation, given the director's auteur sensibility.

That said, it can still be argued that Bhansali has nonetheless considered the final scene in some detail. The fact that he does not choose to depict the burning but only imply it, is probably the subtlest achievement of *Padmaavat*. As he pointed out in an interview with the film critic Anupama Chopra (Chopra 2019), he did not want to depict the gory violence of actual burning. This elision is important because it immediately creates the space to let the narrative be considered or potentially transformed into a myth. Choosing not to show the violent burning does not underestimate the power of the sacrifice but in turn mythicizes the event, which is why Padmavati is regarded as the 'Goddess-Queen'. History mixes with fiction and becomes something larger as the audience is left to imagine the fantastical underpinnings of this 'realistic' tale via the currency of sound: Bhansali, after all, knows that in the non-technological era like the 13<sup>th</sup> century, even before a tale was written or recorded in the visual format, it was first sung and heard. Interestingly, we already 'hear' the ending of the film at its very beginning, when the cast and crew are unfolding to the haunting soundtrack interlaced with the crackling of the pyre-fire.

In this way, despite all its insistence on visual beauty ('*nazar*' and '*nayaab*'), *Padmaavat* becomes a fitting adaptation of the primitive legend by privileging the form of sound over sight. No wonder then, that it is its haunting soundtrack and songs that have captured the imagination of people the world over.

### Of Creativity and Controversy, by way of Conclusion

This paper has dealt with the significant controversies that impacted Bhansali's magnum opus by seeking an artistic response to them from *within* the narrative. By dealing in detail with the intricacies of liberal and right-wing responses to the film's making and circulation, it has shown the limitations of both sides, arguing that Bhansali's version of the age-old tale is much more sophisticated than that presented by these viewpoints. If this author regards anything controversial about the film, it is its hurried promotions after receiving the green signal from the Supreme Court of India in early 2018. The two dialogue promotions and the long list of disclaimers that got published by the producers of *Padmaavat* in major newspapers of the country at the moment of the film's release deliberately focused on only one aspect of the film – Rajputi pride – thereby undercutting its own complexity. This directness evident in the promotions and disclaimers is understandable, given the horrifyingly uncouth atmosphere created by the right-wing for months and the pressure of finding a large, acceptable audience. Nonetheless, they do not do justice to the overall narrative, towards which this author has tried to draw concerted attention. However, it is appreciable that in all the major film awards that have taken place in the Hindi film industry this year (2019), *Padmaavat* has won credit both for its music and the best male actor for Ranveer Singh's role (and not of Shahid Kapoor's Ratan Singh), proving that despite being a villain and an anti-hero, he was appreciated as a 'hero' by the respective juries. It is hoped that by teasing out the nuances of his latest work, Bhansali's cinema will receive the credit for its subtle artistic maneuverings and not just the overtly grand material and emotional sphere, which too, after all, is redolent with insightful depth.

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# Cultural Formats for Intercultural Opportunities: Can Curators be Peace-Workers?

**Gudrun Wallenböck**

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Socio-cultural relations between the Middle East and Central Europe have historically deep roots, rich connections that somehow were 'forgotten' in the wake of events such as in 2015, when refugees began fleeing in great numbers from the Middle East, notably Syria, Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. The long-standing crisis in the Middle East had finally leapt off the television screen and entered European lives. Though migration from the Middle East had been going on for some decades, for many communities of Europe this newer wave of extremely desperate people precipitated anxieties. Thus, despite their rich cultural historical relationships, prejudice and fear were allowed to precipitate as hopes and dreams of the refugees clashed with the anxieties of local people about jobs and space. As a crisis, the question of how to negotiate it provided a political opportunity, such that the issue was used as a tool for those wishing to divide the population on issues of socio-economic stability, particularly European governments keen to assert themselves through a focus on borders and border patrol.

## Introduction

This paper addresses the above as part of acknowledging the arguably often underestimated power of art to enlighten, connect and heal misunderstanding and conflict. Understanding that many artists in Europe and in the Middle East have been working with issues arising out of the conflict zones, including diaspora artists, and embracing the idea of the curator as peace-worker, the study asks how curatorial practices may work towards a vision of empathy, mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue. In this context, curatorship is dynamic and responsive, evolving and self-reflexive, compassionate and inspired. At the heart of this study is the idea that particular curatorial responses and ways of working have peace-building capacities and may perform the essential work of bridge-building as they connect artists working for peace and understanding, and their works with ordinary people through exchange and public exhibition.

'Cultural encounter' is a concept that has appeared in current public and academic discussions about the conditions of modern societies. How are we to define this concept of cultural encounter? What does it mean to have 'cultural' encounters? What does it mean when we claim cultural

encounters to be 'dynamic'? What are the consequences of viewing historical developments as the result of some sort of cultural encounters? How does this influence our thinking of the past and the present? And if our own preoccupation with history (as teachers and researchers) may be termed a cultural encounter, how do we practically embody this in our practice and work? The Danish Centre for Conflict Resolution<sup>1</sup> (DCCR, founded in 1994 as a non-profit organization for the promotion of peaceful conflict resolution) and the professors of intercultural communication, Judith Martin and Thomas Nakayama (2010) discuss and propose a threefold approach towards intercultural encounters and a critical development of cultural competence:

1. Knowledge/understanding and self-reflexivity: We begin to develop our awareness and understanding of ourselves and our own position in society. Through the aesthetics of artworks, and the relevant discussions that these may generate, we can learn much about ourselves, which paves the way for understanding. This approach leads us to number 2.
2. Learning about others and self-understanding: When we begin to learn about other cultures and cultural practices, we also learn about ourselves. Many immigrants often state that they began to empathize with people from their own nationality when they left their homeland.
3. As a last approach we acquire a sense of social justice and the ability to act: We acknowledge that this educational experience is not just transformative for the individual but should also benefit the society at large and other cultural groups in the world. Here, the work of a curator extends beyond the usual work associated with curating such as of networking with artists and moving objects around spaces: it becomes the work of connecting with people, visiting their places, learning languages, listening to stories, documenting art practices, and becoming an increasingly skilled communicator, creating awareness within and across communities, towards laying foundations for intercultural understanding.

I have long been fascinated in intercultural curation between the Middle East and Europe, and I come to this study having worked in this field for many years. My interest began in 2009 when I was invited to show my video installation 'Walking Skirts', created in 2008. 'Walking Skirts' is a virtual fashion show not featuring any human figures. As a work that appealed to Iranian cultural sensitivities, it caught the attention of then-Austrian Ambassador to Iran Dr. Thomas Buchsbaum, who became keen about displaying the work in Iran. The installation was shown in Tehran in 2010 and as an event able to be attended by men and by women, it generated attention. The exhibition allowed me to meet Iranian art professionals and local artists, connections that led to a project in which I curated the first Austrian-Iranian Exhibition at Azad Gallery, Tehran, which also travelled to Vienna.

Figure 1

'Walking Skirts',  
Tehran, 2010. Source:  
Hinterland Galerie



This was a seminal experience, beginning my journey with thinking about intercultural curation. As an experience that brought both positive and negative responses from audiences in Iran, and in Vienna, it revealed some of the challenges and problems with intercultural curation.

Fascinated and encouraged, I began developing a practice that has since then seen me working as a curator mainly between Austria, Iran, Turkey, Syria and Pakistan.

Figure 2

Workshop with  
artists from Iran in  
Tehran, 2010. Source:  
Hinterland Galerie



My main interest in founding Hinterland – a non-profit (contemporary) art space based in Vienna – was to foster better mutual understanding between these parts of the world, a better understanding of the Other. My ongoing research emerges out of my curiosity about the way curatorial practices may enhance intercultural community relations and contribute to processes of peace. One of my key questions concerns curators and whether they can, in their capacity as arts workers, be peace-workers. What, if anything, can exhibitions achieve across cultures? I ask about the meaning of curating intercultural exhibitions. Might this involve working not only with artists, but with the nuances of different venues and the proclivities of diverse audiences? And significantly do curators have a responsibility to be adapting/rethinking their own ways of working to new situations and cultures?

I want to examine particular intercultural curatorial projects that have been developed from non-monetary art associations or single curators between Austria and Iran. I wish to better understand the issues and effects of such projects. Further research will include thinking about the intentions of these projects versus their quantifiable outcomes, the better to gain insight into particular challenges and potential pathways of success/failure.

A number of theorists believe working interculturally is working with differences, but it is based on similarities as well; we are all similar to and different from each other simultaneously. Humans have similar wants and desires, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Intercultural relationships can be very enriching and enlightening, as we learn not only about other people and their cultures but also, significantly, about ourselves and our own cultural background; we begin to perceive things that we generally overlook.

There is an attitude of ‘us versus them’ and a culture of fear and ethnocentrism. The concept of ethnocentrism is the tendency to see our own (European) culture as the center of the universe, that is, as the standard by which other peoples and cultures are to be evaluated. To change our perception and overcome our fears of the unknown, the other, exhibitions can help us to serve as mediators, organizers, translators and so on.

There is no culture without art and there is no art without culture. This is reason enough to explain why art is a powerful instrument to foster intercultural understanding, communication and appreciation of diversity. Art mirrors our mindsets, worldviews and perceived realities ... we can use it to explore, to understand and to get better acquainted with the cultural diversity, cultural watch and dialogue ... art also fabricates new possible worlds and realities. (Gonçalves, 2016)

## Curating / The Curatorial

The Curatorial is a jailbreak from pre-existing frames, a gift enabling the world to see the world differently, ... a practice of creating allegiances against social ills, a way of caring for humanity, ... a political tool outside of politics, a procedure to maintain a community together, ... a sharing of understanding, an invitation for reflexivity ... (Martinon, 2013: 4)

**curo** (Stowasser, 1987: 119)

- I. **sorgen, sich kümmern, sich angelegen sein lassen, sich zu Herzen nehmen, besorgen** (to arrange, to take care, to look after, to worry about, to concern, to see about, to take to heart, to provide).<sup>2</sup>
- II. 1. **besorgen**; 2. **warten, pflegen**; 3. *occ.* a. (Opfer u. dgl.) **besorgen**; b. **verwalten, befehligen**; c. (Kranke) **behandeln, kurieren**; d. (Geld) **besorgen, herbeischaffen, auszahlen** (1. to provide; 2. to care for, to look after; 3. a. to provide, to attend to; b. to administer, to manage, to command; c. To cure, to heal; d. To produce, to provide, to disburse).<sup>3</sup>

Curating means caring. Curators take custodianship for artists, audience and institutions. Artists and their issues, topics and ideas need to be presented in the best possible conditions. At the heart of this paper is the idea that particular curatorial responses and ways of working have peace-building capacities and can perform the essential work of bridge-building as they connect artists working for peace and understanding and their works, with ordinary people through exchange and public exhibition. Curators' tasks are in constant negotiation between responsibility and conviction. Ethics are a fundamental part of curation as it is about the constant questioning and reconsideration of duty. The curator has to work within an ethical framework of interpretation, display and context of the chosen artworks. An exhibition is the meeting place/an area of contact between different ethic demands. The philosopher Simon Critchely (Hernández, 2010: 12) mentions that an exhibition is "the formalization of the ethical conflict" because of "a perpetual imbalance of demands ... Every exhibition is therefore an ethical device that brings into play infinite demands that are impossible to fulfil completely". And these demands also vary between cultures and disciplines. Therefore, the role of the curator is a very delicate and sensitive one. Miguel Á. Hernández Navarro (2010: 5f) cuts the curators' demands down to three essential ones:

1. The curator is the promoter of the institution that gave him/her the assignment for the exhibition. S/he has to make the institution speak.
2. The curator is in charge of the artist and his/her artworks. S/he needs to put it in the right context and to discuss and consider the options with the artists.

3. The curator also has to fulfill the demands of the public. S/he has to communicate the content to the wider public, to critics and all other interested audiences in the right way.

The curatorial work starts with a research process, with lots of investigation but also discoveries and critical reflections. These processes at the end have to be communicated to the audience and should create (in the best case) a prolific dialogue. The first director of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York, Alfred Barr (Carter, 2014: 232) even calls a curator a 'social agent' that has the power "to initiate and engage in stimulating debate". Curating an exhibition means taking responsibility and at the end "not the good intention counts, but the overall result"<sup>4</sup>. The well-known curator Walter Hopps (Obrist, 2008: 16) considered himself as the "artists' accomplice, who requires a broad and sensitive understanding of the artists' work", trying to keep an intense dialogue with them. Dialogue in my opinion is the main need for a curatorial project because ultimately it is all about communication and dialogue: "To hold a dialogue is to suppose a third man and to seek to exclude him; a successful communication is the exclusion of the third man." (Serres, 1982: 67)

By means of an exhibition/any curatorial project, the curator starts a dialogue between him/her and the artists, between him/her and the audiences, but also within the audience. Here I would like to refer to Michel Serres' idea of the third 'le tiers' (Serres, 1982) that makes a dialogue between two (persons): a curator is starting a conversation, a dialogue while researching, setting up an exhibition, organizing events, getting artists in touch with the public, with collectors, with different people and building bridges between different cultures, backgrounds and disciplines. The exhibition is this element in-between: *le tiers*. Michel Serres considered himself a means of communication between the sciences and the arts – the 'Hermes of modern scholarship.'<sup>5</sup> I would consider the curator as a means of communication between the exhibition and the audience, the different cultures and 'art worlds' (Becker, 1982): a new 'Hermes of intercultural communication'. In mythology, Hermes is not only considered as the guide of travelers, but also as the geographer of spaces (Serres, 1982: xxxiii), constantly on the move – a messenger, a herald – guiding us along and across spaces, the philosopher of plural spaces. He connects, disconnects and reconnects the spaces he traverses. He is known for his qualities of inspiration, invention, innovation and independence (Serres, 1982: xxxii). All these attributes are necessary for a contemporary curator who would like to create a dialogue between different cultures and identities and work on the 'critical issues of our times' (Staniszewski, 2009: 2).

Apprehending exhibitions and any curatorial projects as a generator for new dialogues and possibilities for a better understanding,

I am positive that curatorial work can help build bridges between cultures and foster mutual understanding between cultures as well. Exhibitions are a primary site for exchange in the political economy of art, where signification is constructed, maintained and occasionally deconstructed (Obrist, 2008: 7). If we think about this possibility of exchange and understanding in an international way we can try “to unzip the conventional hierarchy between local and global” and create a “new conceptual framework” (Mosquera, 2014) for the globalization and universalism of (contemporary) art and its intercultural understanding.

As a curator wishing to develop conscious and responsive curatorial practices across cultures, one of the aims of this study is to explore operating from the premise that (contemporary) art constitutes a ‘common language’, and thus has a capacity to bring people together and into experiences of understanding. Johann Gottfried Herder appreciated the work of raising levels of understanding about foreign cultures, because, as he saw it, knowledge of the other promotes better mutual understanding and compassion (Löchte, 2005). Herder’s belief in mutual influence as necessary for the evolution of mankind may be considered as a first step towards intercultural thinking (Löchte, 2005: 54-55). This idea finds support in the ideas of Francois Jullien (2017: 71) who suggests that the differences ‘l’ecart’, between forms of human culture should allow us to configure new possibilities. Thinking about mutual influence as part and parcel of human evolution, I find support in the ideas of Hamid Reza Yousefi who considered interculturality as the basis of intercultural philosophy (2005: 28). He emphasized its positive nature saying, “to live the idea of interculturality, there is cultivation of respect, the culture of peace and dialogue”.

## The Other

While curating, I have a sense of my personal identity as being in constant dialogue with other’s identities. There has been and still is a long and ongoing discussion on the Other. I will focus here on some distinct examples: Emmanuel Levin’s philosophy is considered ethics that includes the encounter with the Other.

“It is an interpretive, phenomenological description of the rise and repetition of the face-to-face encounter, or the intersubjective relation at its precognitive core; being called by another and responding to that other.”<sup>6</sup> Other psychoanalytic discourses mention that “desires are the subject’s attempt to reunite the Self with the Other; as the Other is the missing half that makes the Self whole and complete (again)” (Scheiwiller, 2014: 34).

“The moral function of art itself is to remove prejudices” (Baban et al. 2018: 45). When it comes to visual representation of the Other, Western societies are obsessed with visual representation of the Others in a victimized position (Möller, Ubaldo, 2013). Lack of information, communication and fear are the main problems causing a lack of cultural understanding. Art projects may also help to increase cultural networks and create a better basis for collaboration internationally. “The power of art is similar to the power of travelling: with such experiences we may well become the different, the Other...” (Gonçalves, 2016).

Art that comes from ‘the Others’ was considered world art until the late 1980s, while global art demanded equal acceptance with Western art. World art only turned into global art in 1989 when the exhibition “Magicien de la terre” at the Centre Pompidou and La Grande Halle in la Villette in Paris took place. The director of these museums, Jean-Hubert Martin curated this show exhibiting Western and non-Western artists equally next to each other. For the first time, an exhibition was giving a global overview trying to overcome geographical and cultural boundaries as well as prejudices.<sup>7</sup> Since then, the ‘otherness’ of art has been in debate, but global art is still under the guidance and control of the West, a ‘geo-aesthetic’ brand (Belting, 2012) and the differences of art from a foreign culture became a perfect marketable label (Belting, 2012).

Joaquin Barriendos defines global art “as a postcolonial *lingua franca* offered up by the West to the world” (Kim, 2010: 122). Inclusion and visibility are important weapons for artists from non-Western regions to enter the contemporary art world(s). But how to create this visibility? Drawing on the thinking of Michel Foucault, who wrote that he hoped that his writings would be used by others as a theoretical ‘toolbox’, a source of concepts and models for understanding the world (Foucault, 1998), part of the curator’s work is establishing a personal collection of experiences, such as artistic works, artists, and philosophers, that together form a formidable resource for his/her work. For many years, the focus of my work has been the relation between the so-called West and the so-called Orient. My main interest in founding Hinterland – a non-profit (contemporary) art space based in Vienna – was and still is to foster better mutual understanding between these parts of the world for a better understanding of the Other.

### View of the Orient – View of the West

The first ideas from other parts of the world apparently came from scientists traveling with traders and religious missionaries wanting to conquer other parts of the world with their religious beliefs.

Trade routes have always opened passages for ideas, information and exchanges. Histories from travel diaries, exotic scenes from paintings and miniatures are well known in diverse parts of the world. Edward Said elucidates in his famous book, *Orientalism*, the cultural resistance of the 'Oriental' countries and the dominant role of the West. In this paper, I would like to focus on my personal experiences with curating shows between the East and the West. As mentioned earlier, I founded the non-profit art association Hinterland in 2011 to establish intercultural dialogue and to foster intercultural understanding, in the West as much as in the East. Hinterland is thus an international meeting point where social, cultural, political, creative and other relevant contemporary topics are discussed and put into practice.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the curator is able to travel, to move, to put together exhibitions in different places and spaces, and importantly to make partners of artists and audiences such that they are able to understand in sophisticated and surprising ways the relevant issues of the world. As mentioned earlier, like Hermes, curators have to travel, to "bring different cultural spheres into contact" (Obrist, 2011). At Hinterland, we mainly use Édouard Glissant's theories as our toolbox for curating: Édouard Glissant proposes in his writings a global dialogue to overcome homogenization, his so-called: *Mondalité* (Obrist, 2017): "the human diversity connected deep and wide across the planet" (Obrist, 2017: 31). Everyone should preserve his/her own identity. Global differences are necessary to create an exchange, to foster a global dialogue. We need to establish more and better relationships. Independent art spaces such as Hinterland are perfect venues for dialogue as "the idea today is to bring the world into contact with the world, to bring some of the world's places into contact with others of the world's places..." (Obrist, 2017: 15). Exhibitions are not only assembling artworks and shipping them somewhere else, but a possibility to enable conversation, dialogue and relations. Drawing on Hans Ulrich Obrist's and Édouard Glissant's ideas, I seek to develop exhibitions that "build a relation to their place", and "change in response, and sometimes permanently, to their different local conditions; that create a changing dynamic, complex system with feedback loops" and "to enable conversations and relations ... to disseminate new knowledge, new thinking and new artworks in a way that can seed future cross-disciplinary inspirations" (Obrist, 2011). I agree with Harald Szeemann's point of view that "the most important thing about curating is to do it with enthusiasm and love – and with a little obsessiveness" (Obrist, 2008). It is precisely that passion and enthusiasm that make projects such as Hinterland, a non-profit association organized by voluntary members, possible.

I believe that such projects help to foster tolerance and intercultural understanding.

I feel that being in constant dialogue with different parties is the curator's job. I sense that in order to understand each other we need to use respectful language. We can learn such languages through interaction, and as we develop our own identities, simultaneously we are recognized through respectful exchange with the other (Taylor, 2009).

### Hinterland

To understand some of my work better I would like to take one exhibition as an example: 'Where are we?' is a series of exhibitions designed to promote intercultural understanding. The first exhibition took place in June 2015 in Tehran, Iran, then moved on to Vienna, Austria and an extended version of the exhibition was shown in Lahore and Islamabad, Pakistan in 2016. Artists living in Vienna were invited to create works based on their personal understanding of identity: their personal perception of historical understanding and/or image of an (national) identity. At each venue, in each country the exhibition had to be adapted to the local audiences, languages and culture. Each exhibition was accompanied by an interesting complementary program: film-workshop (Austrian and local artists), talks, lectures, guided tours and so on. With this program, we faced various issues and problems regarding censorship, bureaucratic issues (transport, visa, tax...) and such others.

Artists and also the curator had to adapt to different concepts on how to install an exhibition, the possibilities of media and exhibition tools and local help available. At each venue everything was different, we had to adapt to the situations. To be able to finish such a project successfully everyone has to be equipped with a lot of energy, lots of tolerance and last but not least a lot of love for realizing such



Figure 3

'Where are we?' exhibition. Visitors with the artwork from Nives Widauer, Tehran, 2015. Source: Hinterland Galerie



Figure 4

'Where are we?' exhibition. Workshop about identity with artists from Austria and Iran and professors of Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, 2015. Source: Hinterland Galerie



Figure 5

'Where are we?' exhibition. Workshop with students from National College of Arts (NCA) Lahore, the Austrian Ambassador and Professor of NCA, Lahore, 2016. Source: Hinterland Galerie

an important message of intercultural understanding: not only for the audience but especially for all the people involved. Intercultural project management arises as a subtopic in the context of curatorship, intercultural education and communication between participants. A primary concern with intercultural curatorship is to engender mutual understanding.

Critical to achieving this aim is the curator's ability to wield the exhibition space and available resources towards generating an experience for the audience in which understanding and empathy, as products, are prioritized.

Curating an exhibition or working on an art project internationally requires sophisticated levels of understanding about the topic. It needs a high level of cultural understanding as conducting work across cultures entails navigating diverse identities, traditions, cultural codes and behaviors. It is not only about the curator; now the public is no longer a 'passive receiver'; it takes an active role as an active co-producer.

We are being touched and influenced by other cultures and by the cultures of the Other.... The power of art is similar to the power of travelling: with such experiences we may well become the different, the Other .... As artists and curators became more aware of their role as active citizens, able to use art to disseminate ideas and information, galleries and museums all over the world became places where cultures and multiculturalism are exhibited and recognized, where global and multicultural citizenship is discussed and where discrimination, prejudice and social injustice are responded to ... (Gonçalves, 2016).

Art and exhibitions are, in my opinion, agents of change: change of perception, of ideas, and of prejudices. Art always remains a latent form of resistance and should offer critical challenges to the elitist culture (Fisher, 2003: 69). With this knowledge in our mind, Hinterland and anyone else should encourage people to invest in art and to support intercultural and international contemporary associations to make it possible for them to continue their programs. 'Non-Western' art should be freed from the 'exotic' and ethnic idea and immerse into their traditions and develop their own cultural identities. J. W. Stella, founding director of JW Stella Arts Collectives in London, mentions her concern "about the current geopolitical and social circumstances between the Middle East and the West and the rise of nationalism as a dominant discourse, often justified as a sense of self-protection of the people under the same collective identity against 'otherness'"<sup>9</sup>.

## Conclusion

Susana Gonçalves states that “art projects or art (are) used as complementary resources for learning. Art can be a pamphlet for peace and harmony, hidden and apparent messages decipherable worldwide, softly spread, slowly contributing to a change of mentality, denouncing injustice, prejudice and discrimination, and celebrating diversity and the values of democracy and human rights” (Gonçalves, 2016).

In regard to the questions that I have raised in the beginning of this paper, I would like to briefly mention my experiences with Hinterland. When I went to Iran for the first time, most of my friends and family were concerned about my idea and I have to admit that even I - shortly before leaving - was a bit scared, because I did not know anything about everyday life there. As soon as I got involved in the art life in Tehran I was confronted with my own but also with the Iranians’ prejudices and stereotypes. Each of us had his/her own perceptions of ‘the other’ and there was a lack of understanding due to cultural differences and/or prejudices. Talking to the artists about their art, working together and sharing ideas made me understand a different Iran than I was expecting before arriving. Art and dialogue make cultural encounters possible in a positive way. Both sides need to learn and find the best way of approach and understanding. There are ups and downs, regarding co-operations, financial issues and especially bureaucratic problems, but I still believe in the power of art and dialogue. Hinterland’s idea is not to go to an artist’s studio, choose the artworks and put together an exhibition and send it to another place. Hinterland gets to know the artists, discusses and works with them for a while until a common idea is born to be presented. An interdisciplinary and international approach and/or exchange should be the result. Hinterland is already able to provide a broad network for artists, curators, galleries and cultural workers in general, to exchange, to meet and to collaborate. However, there is also an audience that should be reached: in Vienna, Hinterland has a small space that acts as a meeting platform, a space for discussion and dialogue. An open space for everyone, no borders, no barriers: everyone is welcome. “Cultural institutions are vessels where human relations are made possible. Cultural institutions are spaces for art, encounter and communication, a democratic space, where everyone can participate and exchange” (Knava, 2019: 9).

Since Hinterland had its own small public garden in front of the gallery (only in summer time), the real dialogues started – neighbors meeting each other for the first time, (international) artists meeting people from the neighborhood, artists meeting each other, curators meeting artists and so on, offering not only exhibitions, but talks, screenings, discussions, performances and music.

Hinterland tries to get in touch with as many people as possible.

To create a space where everyone is invited is a big issue in countries such as Pakistan. Hinterland was denied exhibiting there in large and high-end galleries but chose to show in public art spaces and university galleries. During installation, many people and students passing by were curious and were immediately involved in the project by asking questions. During open hours people were invited to ask questions. They came in groups to discuss and debate about what they had seen.

Cultural institutions are educational institutions where education is seen as cognitive knowledge, new food for thought and reflection, positive encounters and feelings of success, creation of values, personal development and sensitivity, as well as quality time, identity work, self-identification and encounter of diverse people. (Knava, 2019: 17)

Hinterland creates these dynamic cultural encounters – encounters between different cultures that are active, powerful and progressive; including everyone around, allowing a critical dialogue with the general public – an endeavor that may only be achieved with many small steps.

In the last ten years, Hinterland was able to create around seventy intercultural projects in various countries. Hinterland started as a small association paid for by the initiators. Now Hinterland gets subsidies to pay for the rent and various daily costs. Young and enthusiastic students are supporting the work for free as the Board and everyone else does. Members who are contributing financially allow Hinterland to pay some (small) fees for the artists and if possible travel costs. Hinterland established important partnerships in various countries to exchange ideas, projects and artists. New relationships and friendships arose. Just a couple of days ago, I had a talk on the freedom of arts and afterwards I was asked if I see myself as a social activist, concerning my work for Hinterland. I actually denied this in the first moment, but after a while I figured out that it might be true – trying to connect people and cultures through art may probably be considered as social activism. And with this activism Hinterland tries to raise awareness and appreciation as proposed by the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV) in their statement in 2018, “It is important to build up a stable structure, rather than a one-off engagement. Smaller more localized cultural projects can lead, over the long term, to audience development, through arts awareness and appreciation. It can also encourage a greater sense of belonging and civic engagement in society. People start trusting each other, they become empowered – bringing arts and culture into communities!” (IKSV, 2016: 105).

Following this advice and recommendation out of the recently published report, Hinterland – as a small, local association with (for the time being) a stable structure – will try to continue its work as long as possible.



Figure 6

'Being Kurdish'.  
Kurdish poems on  
shop windows in  
Vienna, 2015. Source:  
Hinterland Galerie

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# Laying the Foundations: A Case Study of the Karachi Biennale 2017 Educational Program

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## Introduction

In the absence of public museums, art galleries and similar institutions, it is not surprising that there exists an ambivalent attitude towards Art and Art Education. More so, the lack of an art educational policy in our schools has meant that it is, more often than not, reduced to a skills-based subject, where drawing is considered the epitome of creative expression. It is reduced to an aesthetical tool without any understanding of the role it can play in the emotional and intellectual development of an individual, particularly a child. This is indicative of a much greater problem, specifically how much value is placed on cultural institutions and artistic activities as means of bringing together communities and developing a relationship between society, art and critical thinking.

It therefore became imperative to keep this situation in mind when designing the Educational Program of the Karachi Biennale 2017, the first ever contemporary art exhibition of its type and scale. This paper presents some of the strategies that were employed by the Educational Team of the Biennale and were rooted in the environment which it meant to influence. And while they in no way represent the ideal route to take, it does present an approach that succeeded in creating a genuine interest in art. It laid down one of the many possible ways in which art may be used for discussion in classrooms in relation to the overall curriculum, thus going beyond simple drawing and craft approach. The methodology undertaken here was put to test almost immediately and verified through constant feedback from the student participants and the teachers, and proved to be instrumental in a constant understanding of the effect of techniques used.

## 1. The Ground Reality

There are 24 public and 3 private museums in this country (Pakistan G. o., n.d.). Only 5 of these are Art Museums, which include,

1. The Chughtai Museum,
2. The Shakir Ali Museum and Art Gallery,
3. The Fakhir Khana Museum, and the two Public Museums
4. Mughal and Sikh Galleries at the Lahore Fort, and
5. Art and Craft Museum in Lahore.

The list though has not been updated to include the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) located in Islamabad, the Mohatta Palace and the recently opened but private Jamil Naqsh Museum in Karachi; a grand total of 8 then for a population of 207 million people of this country (Rana, 2017).

With a lethargic curatorial approach, these museums and galleries can hardly be accused of being innovative. They rarely change their display<sup>1</sup>, the result being that any school trip is limited to taking a particular class only once and never again. Descriptions of scenes witnessed by teachers on a school trip to the National Museum in Karachi revealed shock and horror as the students started shouting 'infidel' at the Buddha and Gandharan sculptures, revealing the lack of sensitization to religious and historical artifacts. More so, these institutions are not equipped to provide a critical tour to the students, making the experience a dull one, filled with falsified narratives of our history, or one that further reaffirms biased world views.

At a community level, there is never uproar when the budget of such institutions is cut down, except by a particular demographic<sup>2</sup>.

At the state level, the Government's Educational Policy does not give much weightage to art. The subject is not compulsory; it is only introduced at the class 6 level, that too as optional. In the entire 'National Education Policy 2017' proposed by the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training Government of Pakistan (Pakistan M. o., 2017), the word 'Art' does not once appear in the context of creative or visual or cultural or heritage. However, a breath of fresh air is provided by the 'Early Childhood Curriculum' which stresses creative arts and identifies a total of 7 competencies, under various headings of Visual Arts, Sound, Rhythm and Action and Dramatic Play. However, there are no concrete measures anywhere in this policy that may guide curriculum or course development which utilizes field trips or museums as a source of information and knowledge creation. More so, limiting arts to only the first 2 years of a child's development further diminishes the status of the subject as having anything valuable to contribute. In the current scenario, it may be simply discarded as a child's play appropriate till a certain age and not beyond!

Such a situation also means that art is not something that comprises our consciousness when we think about our society. There have been recent works that have explored the idea of Public Art – this includes work done by Saima Zaidi and VASL. However, they are far between, and are only able to target a select demographic due to its locale or intimidation factor and hardly ever have an associated educational component. Professor Sajida Vandal's paper which she presented in 2004 at the 'UNESCO Regional Expert Symposium on Art Education' in Asia still holds the same relevance and urgency as it did 14 years ago.

The only other detailed look at the art education in Pakistan may be found in the paper by Alan Peshkin published in the year 1964. I am certain there are other individuals who are doing work, and are continuing the struggle, but since art education has yet to take the form of a full-fledged discursive agenda, there is little research that is published or available.

## 2. Karachi Biennale 2017

It was in this context that the first ever Karachi Biennale was to take place, from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October till the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2017. These two weeks were scheduled with discursive events comprising talks and keynote speeches, panel discussions, performance arts and tours. This paper however will only take into account the work, goals and objectives of the Educational Program which I led in my capacity as the Head of the Educational Program.

The sponsor for the Educational Program was National Foods, which allowed for a link to be developed between Karachi, the food of our communities and art – and how both, food and art, have the power to tell stories about us. This connection via personal narratives was an important factor in the overall program and led to defining our main objectives, that were,

1. Making a personalized relationship between Art and its viewers.
2. Making inroads into communities so that it is their interest that drives them to this new experience.

Before the program could be tested on the ground, there were some key concerns and issues that had to be addressed.

1. How do we create faith in a new program and learning experience that no one has witnessed before in this country?
2. Are we going to use the same run-down policy of co-ordinating with the Government Educational Department and bus students to the venue without them having a choice or interest?
3. Or are we going to then completely ignore the government sector who, due to limited funding, would be unable to come to the venue anyway, and just focus on the private sector schools, who comparatively, already have a lot of opportunities at their disposal?
4. How do we ensure that the sponsor does not dictate our entire program?

Most of these concerns became a living reality the minute we started reaching out to schools, who in most cases had no idea what a Biennale was, what its purpose was or what they should expect by coming to it.

The conceptualization of the Educational Program began in September 2016 – a full year before the main Biennale was to happen, while the actual reaching out to schools began in July 2017. This one year allowed time to develop a comprehensive program which targeted primary schools all the way to university level and also the students' families. The constraints on the budget and experience meant that while we would have liked to work with younger members of our society, particularly young mothers and children, this had to be shelved for now.

By the time the program was launched it had the following key components,

1. Pre-Biennale Workshops:
  - a. KB17 In Your School
  - b. Art Think Tank I
  
2. During Biennale Workshops
  - c. School Tours
  - d. Art Teachers' Workshop
  - e. Art Think Tank II
  - f. Weekend Program, which was integrated with the Collaborative Work, where we joined hands with the Manchester Art Gallery.

From very early on, one of the key priorities was tracking our progress to ensure we were working in the right direction. This was done in the shape of assessment forms, taken from both the students and the teachers throughout the program. This allowed us to keep a close check on our work and to fix any glitches that we may be having. The feedback forms also allowed us to get a better understanding of how these young visitors and teachers were thinking about this new experience and many a time provided a direct glimpse of the traditional mindset that has been at play in our schools and educational system.

To elaborate on the discussion above, I would like to delve deeper into three of our programs here. I think they best reflect our work and the strategies which were employed to counter the many challenges.

### 3. The Programs

#### 3.1 KB17 In Your School

It was decided that from September 2017, that is one month prior to the actual Biennale, our focus would be on workshops in which we took the art and our program, to the schools to generate interest. This would mean that we would have just enough time to talk to schools about our work, work with the students themselves and let their interest decide about them wanting to visit the venue.

A program was designed titled 'KB17 In Your School', whose main objectives were:

1. Develop relationships with schools to generate interest in our work.
2. Educate about art and the purpose of artists.
3. Publicize Karachi Biennale 2017 and its work.

To this end, an interactive workshop was designed comprising a PowerPoint presentation and activity sheets, which made connections with the curatorial theme of Witness, the city of Karachi, food and art. The workshops started out by asking one simple question – what is the one thing that worried them and their parents about Karachi?

The responses varied but revolved around the basic issues of childcare, education, job, security, traffic, and so on. The next question was how do you deal with it? The responses ranged from being resigned to the situation to being outright hilarious, with one child exclaiming that his father would just come home and take out all his road rage on them by muttering about it for at least an hour. That led us to our main point – how do you think artists respond to the world around them? For our workshops, we ensured that the word Artist was not restricted to a visual artist – instead we focused on the diversity of the word by talking about poets, writers, photographers and many others and by proxy on the multitude of talents and capabilities present in children themselves. Once we had this groundwork laid out, we entered the world of art history – starting out from cave paintings, where art performed a more ritualistic function, all the way to contemporary art, where it holds a position of self-expression making a statement.

Throughout this workshop, the answers came from the audience. We ensured that no answer was considered wrong, that no idea was made to sound absurd. Instead what it all came down to was how you relate to a piece of work through your own understanding of the world. This sort of dialogue went a long way when the schools finally came to the venues for the tours.

During the course of this one month of workshops, we reached out directly to a total of 1109 students in 13 unique schools, out of which we received a feedback from 270 students. 87.7% of all the students enjoyed the workshop tremendously, with 81% learning something new from it. 63.2% gave the workshop 5 stars, while 29.5% gave it 4 stars. The children however did not appreciate the workshops taking place during their break or Physical Training period, hinting to the very limited time they get in their school hours to express themselves or move around and which is considered unnecessary enough to be filled by some other activity.

Some of the points that were a big hit with them included, the connections with food, the images of artworks they saw, discussion as a group, expressing themselves with art/poem, Imran Qureshi's piece on MOMA's rooftop – the children loved how on close up it became a flower.

Twenty-six responses were received from the teachers with 50% ranking the likability of the workshop as "very much", while 46.2% said that they learnt something new.

### 3.2 School Tours

After general interest had been created and we had showcased to the schools our work and what to expect, it was encouraging to note that the schools themselves came forward to register for the school tours.

It was also a learning experience for us to discover that schools do not like to use registration forms. Half the time when the forms with clear instructions were sent out, they were not signed or returned or confirmed. In fact, the business of logistics and scheduling took place over the phone – which in an event like the Biennale can be quite a task.

The school tours were being offered at 4 out of the 11 venues that the Biennale had. The selection of the locations for the tours was based on a number of factors, including accessibility, number of artworks at the venue<sup>3</sup>, how the venue itself may add value to the experience and ensuring that every locale was in a particular part of Karachi, thus allowing a greater number of participations. This resulted in us selecting,

1. NJV School – which was the central site of the Biennale.
2. Alliance Francaise
3. VM Art Gallery
4. Karachi School of Arts.

Four venues also meant that we needed a large number of human resources to manage them.

Figure 1

Foundation year students of Karachi School of Arts after one of the many workshops. Source: Karachi Biennale Trust



Half of it was to be managed by allowing only 30-40 students per venue per day; this strategy did not work every day, because as mentioned earlier the schools did not read the guidelines sent to them. It was therefore our second strategy that became our saving grace, which was to train young art students in giving tours.

Two weeks of an extensive training program was conducted with the Foundation Year students of Karachi School of Art. This collaboration allowed us to see that even at this level students were not entirely sure how to talk about art, or how to ask the right questions. Again this is indicative of having gone through an educational system in which giving answers is considered more important than being able to formulate a question.

More so, there is always an underestimation as to whether children can grasp the more complex elements in an artwork. In the two weeks of the training program, we focused on how to lead a conversation with children so it allows them to notice the work critically themselves, instead of giving them a version of what the artist wanted to do. The task turned out to be much more challenging than we had anticipated but without these young students we would not have been able to do the work which we were able to do.

At each venue the children were divided into two groups, with one being taken to the artworks and the other to the Spice Garden, before switching places. The Spice Garden worked twofold, for it not only allowed us to explore a sensory experience with the visitors and school children, to emphasize how art has to be experienced much the same way. It also took the product of the sponsor and converted it into a creative exercise.




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 Figure 2
 

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Students listen to Karin Kasböck of the artistic duo Bankleer. Source: Karachi Biennale Trust

With herbs, plants and spices, the sensory exploration was introduced on how art is also about an experience which is not only one-dimensional, but requires a combination of our senses to get to the deeper meaning.

For artworks, we decided to limit our focus to 5-6 works at each venue, discussing each of them in considerable detail. Questioning was our only tool during this time – and it worked brilliantly. I will present examples of two works.

Ayessha Quraishi's photographic work traces the rise and fall of the billboards in Karachi – their fall being a result of a Supreme Court ruling in 2016 which concluded that there was no law which permitted this medium of advertising. The ruling had been a result of deaths due to their lack of structural soundness. The work is presented as a series of images in which Ayessha explores the carcasses of these structures that lie around on vacant plots or as is. When a group of children saw this, they were quick to pick up on what it was, before slowly and gradually coming to a point where someone shouted that they had to be taken down because of the ruling. This was an experience with a group of 5<sup>th</sup> graders, aged between 10 to 11 years old but what they had done in that moment was creation of knowledge through debate and discussion, through their own thinking, reasoning and deduction, providing them with a sense of achievement. This was complicated work and yet the students came to a point where they understood what the artist was pointing towards.

Another example was that of an experience with Noorjehan Bilgrami's work, where she documents the evolution of a piece of cloth into *Ajrak*, a symbolic icon for the province of Sindh. Yet, many of the private school students failed to recognize it.

These two artworks presented a remarkable contrast and made a strong case for events where art and its manifestations may be brought to the public eye for discussion and deliberation.

However, this approach was not always appreciated. Many of the teachers who accompanied the students on these school tours complained in their feedback forms about why we were not simply telling the students about the works. Many of these teachers felt compelled to tell the “correct” answer to the students or to guide them towards their own interpretation of the work, instead of letting them have the time to form their own opinions. This again is symptomatic of how our education system functions and the need to rectify it.

In the two weeks, the School Tours were offered from Monday to Thursday, attracting a total of 2000 and more students, 154 teachers and 43 parents.

### 3.3 Art Teachers' Workshop

It was critical that if art is to be our agenda, then we have to empower those who are at the frontlines of disseminating this subject in our schools. The workshop’s purpose was to empower these teachers who are usually at the bottom of the food chain, are the least paid in our schools and are often burdened with the duties of “beautifying” any school event. The structure of the workshop was based on case studies where the power of art as a medium to connect with all other subjects could be presented and to ensure a holistic educational experience.

The workshops started out by understanding some of the problems that the teachers face in their schools, ranging from:

- Feeling that they lack respect in their organizations compared to other departments in terms of the importance of their subject matter, which eventually trickles down to the students as well.
- The subject of arts in schools is primarily skill-based, having no relationship to historical development.
- The lack of exams, usually considered a benchmark for the superiority of any subject, gives the subject less importance and respect.
- The cost of art supplies also contributes to being a problem.
- There is absolutely no training of which art teachers may avail.
- There is a lack of awareness for the practical application/importance of art which effects how the subject is perceived by the students and the school itself.
- The general attitude of schools towards art teachers may be seen by the salary structure where the art teacher is paid the least amount and more or less considered a decorator for any event or function in the school.



Figure 3

Art teachers' workshop. Source: Karachi Biennale Trust

While we understand that a single workshop is not the answer to all the problems, we did try to present real scenarios where certain strategies worked in raising the profile of Art as a subject which may then aid in contributing to the overall development of students. Four case studies were presented for this, which included a historian, a photographer/artist, a Head of Arts Program in an A-Level School and two horticulturists. They provided and talked about tools that they themselves have designed and employed to teach their subject and how it impacted their students. The case studies were diverse in their subject matter, in their target demographic, and in the socio-economic conditions which they had addressed.

## Final Words

Within this context, it makes sense to go back to our initially identified key issues, and see if we have resolved them.

Problem 1: How do you create faith in a new program? You do so by taking the program to the audience; by letting them see your work and giving all involved time to develop trust. The "they-have-to-come-to-us" strategy would never have worked in this case since it takes time to understand a new idea, and the Biennale was just that.

Problems 2 and 3: Transporting students to the venue and the issue of government schools. After trust has been developed, we did not need to bus anyone in. The schools came themselves. However, the question of how you work with the majority of government schools is still critical. While this remained somewhat unresolved, we did a major chunk of our workshops in government schools to ensure that they are in some way part of the project.

The Weekend Program was also a great occasion for students of these schools to attend. With the Biennale being a free event and having been publicized in their schools through our initial work, the children came with their parents over the weekend and were able to be a part of the Program.

Problem 4: Striking the right balance with the sponsor. In our case, we were very lucky with having a sponsor who understood our boundaries and respected our work. It also helped that we looked at it from an opportunist point of view – how to use their product to our advantage. Food became a theme which allowed us to explore the stories of our communities, in terms of how food defines our family's history, where they came from and what the changing trend is reflective of.

In total, the Karachi Biennale Educational Program reached out to 5000 and above people in its two weeks. We came out of the experience with valuable lessons. For example, in the first few days, children were eager to touch the artworks, which is understandable. Therefore, for next time, we need to be looking at how we embrace this curiosity without stifling it. However, the greatest learning experience is to never underestimate children. Children today are keenly aware of the world they live in and the issues and problems that surround them. What we need to do is acknowledge this fact and ensure that any educational Program takes a bottom up approach and not the other way around.

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## Endnotes

1. Mohatta Palace is the exception in this case, which routinely changes their display, and puts up temporary exhibitions.
2. A case in point is a recent petition against the possible demolition and shifting of the National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi (Rafi, 2018) from its current location signed by a total of 178 people. The numbers were noted down in November 2018, and may have changed since then.
3. The number of artworks as a criterion was adopted to ensure a diverse range of discussions which may take off about the works. This strategy was taken to make sure that a wide range of interests, depending on the group, may be catered too.

# Urban Tactical Interventions Redefining the Role of Architects: Examples from Cairo and Karachi towards Southern Urban Theory

Samman Qayyum

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## Introduction

This paper examines the role of urban design interventions in promoting a more inclusive, diverse and democratic public space. Looking at two case studies from Cairo, Egypt, and Karachi, Pakistan, the paper draws parallels between institutional frameworks, legal constraints and financial limitations in both cities framing the emerging alternative urban practices. By analyzing the tools and methods (critical mapping, stakeholders' analysis and tactical interventions), as well as the new role of architects and planners as negotiators and mediators, the paper attempts to link the specificities of these projects to a broader political landscape and societal changes.

Cairo Downtown Passageways, a project developed by CLUSTER between 2012-2016, offers an example of proposing an alternative vision to reimagining the city from the inside-out, capitalizing on the role of art as an urban catalyst, while implementing two pilot projects (Kodak and Phillips passages, 201-15) to validate the above hypothesis. The process of research, design, implementation and management entailed engaging stakeholders in the absence of functioning local councils as an attempt to develop an alternative model of urban governance.

Pakistan Chowk, Karachi, renovated by Marvi Mazhar provides a lost identity to a historic 'Chowk'. Along with the revitalization of the Chowk, the community center has also developed in the same location. The purpose of the community center, as mentioned by the initiation team, is to provide an opportunity to rejoice in their culture. Pakistan Chowk constitutes multiple small initiatives, ranging from historical walks in the same vicinity, mapping heritage sites and a community center for different art and cultural activities. In doing so, the Pakistan Chowk mediates with the stakeholders, in the absence of state provision, to support the delivery and transfer of urban services in the surrounding neighborhoods.

In looking at the main projects above, this research will make critical analysis of the local interventions in the different contexts of Cairo and Karachi where local governments failed to deliver and local groups emerged to function in an alternative way; and how successful these initiatives were in the two different cities.



Figure 1

Pakistan Chowk before renovation. Source: Pakistan Chowk. Accessed from [www.pakistan-chowk.com](http://www.pakistan-chowk.com)



Figure 2

Kodak Passageway during revitalization phase. Source: CLUSTER. Accessed from <http://clustercairo.org>

This paper looks at two projects in varying contexts to examine the role of urban design interventions in promoting a more inclusive, diverse and democratic public space. Looking at the Cairo Downtown Passageway (CDP) in Cairo, Egypt and Pakistan Chowk in Karachi, Pakistan, this paper draws a comparison of emerging trends of new urban practices. In doing so, I look at the five aspects of comparison, actors or stakeholders involved and finally the scale or impact of policy. Lastly, I draw conclusions for the role of architects and planners in the context of looking at urbanisms from the Global South.

## Comparative Analysis

### Context/Goal

Pakistan Chowk is known as the educational center of Karachi because of its proximity to medical and engineering schools; in the 1880s the Sindh College Association was initiated here (Alvi, 2017).

Located in the historic Ram Bagh Quarter of Saddar, Karachi, Pakistan Chowk holds the memories of first-generation writers, doctors and engineers of post-Partition Karachi. The Chowk housed the busiest taxis and Victoria station in the city, which was popularly known as the Purana Tonga Stand, used by tourists and locals alike to visit nearby cafes and restaurants. This area in the coming years became a tourist hotspot as well as a breeding ground for arts and culture in the city.

The space served as a public space for the students from nearby institutions. It was considered an interactive hub during the lunch breaks and became a prominent place for academic interactions.

The area housed many middle-class and upper-middle-class migrants post-Partition. It was a vicinity that defined the face of a quintessential 'muhalla' in the urban space of the city (Humanyun, I. 2017). Soon after Partition, Pakistan Chowk became an industrial hub where printing presses and small industries were established. Today, the area hosts numerous derelict colonial buildings and old structures which continue to be torn down to make space for wholesale markets and commercial activities to thrive.

Pakistan Chowk has long been a cultural heritage site of great significance, bringing people of varied cultural and religious backgrounds for debate and discussions together. The Chowk faced a phase of deterioration and fell victim to urban decay.

When discussing the Downtown Cairo Passageway, the most prominent similarity here contextually would be deterioration and urban decay. Downtown Cairo was partially modeled after European cities, including Paris and Vienna, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The key urban typology was to put a commercial arcade within, or between many buildings Downtown. Over the decades, after going through the process of prosperity and deterioration, many Downtown passageways serve today as sites of rich and diverse activities.

These activities extend to the gaps between buildings, setbacks, courtyards and several side streets. The uses of these spaces range from food places, coffee shops, retail and trade. The Downtown passageway gives diverse, accommodative and inclusive escape from the increasingly polarized society and exclusionary public spaces of Downtown Cairo.

In both situations, the context served as a socio-cultural hub initially and later faced a phase of deterioration.

Drawing comparisons between the two case studies displays a great deal of resemblance in terms of being economical hubs, having cultural diversity, heritage and absence from increasingly polarized society and exclusionary public spaces.

### Condition

Pakistan Chowk went through urban decay, in spite of the fact that it was not just a 'Chowk' but had its heritage value attached to it. Many other chowks in Karachi go through this kind of decay and deterioration. The Chowk had graffiti, political slogans and posters plastered on the walls and electricity pylons. The fate of this space, which was once a socio-cultural hub went from accessibility to broken grills, garbage and political vandalism.

This place was not a mere junction to connect different roads; rather, it had increased economic activity with small vendors and printing presses near the Chowk. As a result, the beautiful colonial architecture receded into the background. Due to lack of proper waste disposal it became a dump yard. The rising inequality between classes led to the restriction of culture and arts to the private sphere.

As an urban typology, CDP is not a mere gap, or physical container between two buildings. Rather it is an in-between space with dynamic processes between various socio-economic and cultural conditions: public versus private spheres, formal versus informal economies, professionally designed versus vernacular architecture. Figuratively speaking, it may match the experience of the past few years in downtown Cairo.

### Vision/Framework

Pakistan Chowk demonstrates multiple opportunities; ranging from providing a platform to the people living in the vicinity to reconnecting with their lost culture, giving an experience rather than just a public space which does not connect to its surroundings, bringing the lost historical value to the place.

Chowks are not just crossroads for the passer-by; rather they can be a public space to connect people living around it. Chowks are a good example of old places, of strongly knitted heritage and thick layered urban fabric with spaces of socio-economic diversity and inclusivity.

Cairo Downtown offers a number of opportunities;

1. First, it offers the possibility to experience and reimagine downtown 'from the inside out'; rather than viewing downtown as a space of threatened architectural heritage. Passageways demonstrate a clear example of living heritage, of a complex and layered urban fabric and of spaces of diversity and inclusivity.
2. Secondly, it provides an alternative framework for development and regeneration. Passageways are complete opposites to the current trend of beautification that faces façade painting and cosmetic improvement.
3. Thirdly, passageways and in-between spaces offer an arena for a whole array of artistic, cultural and environmentally friendly practices.

#### Actors/Stakeholders

There was a layer of stakeholders involved in the project. CLUSTER took the initiative to act as a mediator between multiple stakeholders. The team spent an entire summer acquiring the necessary permits from relevant local and municipal authorities. It became clear that different stakeholders require different approaches, including diverse interests, tailored language and presentation materials.

The conceptual design and later development was presented to several stakeholders. As the construction proceeded, some of the smallest details faced objection. In the layers of stakeholders, the next one was engaging the wider public, unlike the private projects the construction process in public space was exposed to a whole range of 'interested citizens'. The importance of this stage was to avoid alienating some of the neighboring community, so that they felt their views were being taken seriously.

That is what defines the new approach and positioning of the architects, designers, urban developers and researchers when the local public is taken seriously. As they are the main stakeholders of the public space, they are the users and they need to get the 'right to their city' in all prominent decisions in the neighborhoods. Towards the end of the construction process, CLUSTER's team helped set up a board of maintenance for the passageways. Each building has a tenant, officially recognized as responsible for its maintenance. This develops a sense of ownership which stops the public spaces from falling into disrepair.

Pakistan Chowk also demonstrates a vibrant mix of stakeholders at different stages. The funding was provided by the Sindh Government and the initiative was taken by architect Marvi Mazhar. There were multiple people involved in the execution of the project, including activists, architects, visual artists and designers.

It seems that the involvement of the stakeholders in this context was not profound during the proposal period of the project as compared to the Downtown Passageway. The Downtown Passageway was a pilot project to a research initiative and to understand a new type of public space and through that initiative, to revive the surrounding culture. However, in the case of Pakistan Chowk it was more like reviving the old public space and then involving the community to bring back its lost identity.

Community engagement was encouraged once the project was executed. There was almost no involvement of the surrounding community in the design process. The surrounding neighborhood actively participated in the later events that happened and are happening till date.

### Scalability/Impact on Policy

The scale of the Downtown Passageway pilot was kept in the pockets of the neighborhoods to engage and test the socio-cultural catalyst. It was thought that the passageway would offer an opportunity for pilot art and cultural programs that may potentially spill over the passage, integrating all premises and engaging these programs with the wider public. This pilot project was thought to have a greater impact on the policy of public spaces in Downtown. As there are no designated spaces which are considered as public, why not change the policy of using these residual spaces for the good will of the cultural and social development of the surroundings. Downtown Passageway aims to extend the definition of in-between spaces from passageways and back alleyways to rooftops, as semi-public spaces of common use.

When looking at Pakistan Chowk, it is evident that it was intended to have an impact on the daily users as well as the surrounding premises. The events that had happened in the Chowk condemned the idea of a polarized society and investigated the bigger picture of bringing back the real identity of the place. The much bigger impact could be on redefining the ideas of 'Chowks' in Karachi and using all these lost spaces as creative and socio-cultural hubs for the communities. However, this project does not have any growing agenda other than just bringing in more activity to it.

This makes Pakistan Chowk a redundant approach in terms of its growth as an incubator project. It was probably thought to be just a revitalization project, whereas, it could have been a pilot project or a catalyst to understand or define public spaces through it.

## Conclusion

The two projects provide a wide range of lessons to architects, designers or developers. The similarities these projects draw from each other in a very contrasting manner, itself is a learning experience. Even though Karachi and Cairo are two different cities in different parts of the world, they have a very similar aura and this makes it interesting to compare them. The case studies which were discussed above are two very exciting examples of looking at the role of designers in Southern urbanism. I would argue here, in this paper that in the global South there is a distinctive 'type' of human settlement. I would say that it becomes a great learning experience when these cities of the south are seen from the same lens but different perceptions to learn from each other.

Pakistan Chowk and Downtown Passageway, both draw their roots from the concept of promotion and revitalization of socio-economic development of the cities. The wider impact in both cases was to help surrounding neighborhoods flourish through social enterprises and the purpose of the public space was not to just provide recreation to the public but to engage the public with the space or design process, revitalizing the past at different levels.

The idea behind the projects was to make more inclusive and less polarized spaces which could be the 'spaces for all' kinds of ideas. These projects mainly indicate how important it is to introduce the idea of 'a sense of belonging' and 'right to the city' to its residents. In today's world, urbanism is not just about redeveloping the cities but about making them livable for their residents with their participation.

Both projects can learn from the hypothesis of each other and can use the ideas of other projects to fulfill the gaps in research and approach to the design. For example Pakistan Chowk could have been a pilot project or an incubator project for the rest of the Chowks in Karachi rather than being a sole initiative, whereas Downtown Passageway could have been more interactive in terms of economic activities than just being an art and cultural catalyst.

The key lesson learned from both the cases is that the emphasis should be on the process rather than the design aesthetic. In both the cities, it is evident that if there is an absence of functioning local forms of governance, one could find one morning a whole transformation of the neighborhood, without knowing why or who made these decisions.

### New Roles for Architects/Planners

Another very important aspect which is highlighted in the cases and I personally believe is the sole purpose of this paper, is to understand the role of architects and planners. These projects do not follow any strict institutional policies but give us the notion that it is highly important to adapt to the new role and position as architects and planners.

These projects emphasize the solutions in design with a bottom up approach rather than being at the top and planning the cities. Public engagement and making them part of the design process at every stage should be considered as their fundamental right, as they are the users and main stakeholders. All of the stakeholders from the top to the bottom need to work hand in hand to make these places liveable.

### Towards a Southern Urbanism Theory

These cases critique the dominance of western models by providing examples from the contexts which show and identify alternative thinkers and issues that have been overlooked in the academies. There are specific issues which lie in the South and cannot be overlooked anymore, may they be political or social. Southern Urbanism is the key towards the solution of urban development in the South as it defines and focuses on the experiences of their place.

There are multiple factors which include population expansion, fuelled by internal and external immigration, consolidated urban traditions, rising class segregation, polarization, real estate speculation, informality, planning deregulation, political influence, and restricted participation of public decisions on land use. These are the key factors which make the Southern Urbanism theory valid for cities such as Cairo and Karachi. The solutions lie within the context rather than implementing western models to gentrify the urban decay or deterioration of the social, economic and cultural activities in the cities.

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# Art and the Idea of Spatial Autonomy: A Case Study of the Lahore Fort

**Amtul Mateen Ayesha**

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## Introduction

The idea of the urban dispossession of spaces has always been discussed and debated in the field of architecture. In the context of ancient historic urban regions of potentially rich, social and political orderings, the phenomenon of tangible conservation is on the rise and a global attraction created by it has thus called for a high economical investment to the cause. Though the aim is deep-rooted in securing these structures from natural and cultural deterioration, the process has subsequently imposed a different set of inclinations. Following which, the focus has shifted gradually from a sustainable cultural revitalization of these monuments to making them work beyond the local socio-economic fabric as a significant tourism product with simultaneous involvement of political agencies to maximize the benefit out of the situation. Falling a victim to this model of cultural production, marked by dominance of economic values, more sites are being plagued with rampant commercialization, leading to the subsequent involvement of political agencies to exercise cultural control over the area, thus, equating the buildings to life-less objects of consumerism or a brand to augment their national or global profile.

Altogether, these factors leading to the increasing socio-political disenfranchisement of heritage sites, the Lahore Fort, urges you to question its own identity and forces you to ponder if such notions have been producing a rather contrived character of the space. Besides the physical conservation of the Lahore Fort, which is a marker of centuries of tangible and intangible cultural growth, deep-set in the consciousness of the city and generations of its inhabitants, is there a way to conserve the intangibilities?

## The Lahore Fort

The site of the Lahore Fort, meanwhile constituting a standing reference collection of wonders and traditions of architectural and artistic nature over centuries, presents a thematic case for urban metamorphosis. From the times of existence of a pristine Vedic city to a flourishing Mughal citadel to now an icon for national identity, holding the remnants from the above and in-between periods, its presence has always been felt and acknowledged strongly by historians, authoritarians and the public, even if not always fully understood.

With assemblages representing all spheres of life beyond the architectural and aesthetic value, the historic significance and political use of the space along with all the changing narratives, the Lahore Fort stands for social and cultural value for past, present and future generations, holding as many associations and meanings with it as the generations who have lived in and around it.

The Lahore Fort is the foremost Mughal monument of Pakistan, imbued with layers of historical and spiritual meaning for locals and visitors alike. Inside its walls are preserved numerous examples of the apogee of Mughal arts, building crafts and architectural skills in a single complex, enriched by temporal depth and continuity from prehistory to the present. The changing and evolving styles throughout the period and into the Sikh and British eras are richly preserved ... In addition to providing an oasis of green and calm in the crush of urban Lahore, the site has great didactic potential to teach all ages about the wealth of the past and its relevance and value to the present and future (Fielden and Jukka, 1993: 59).<sup>1</sup>

The following statement by Samina Quraeshi marks the cultural significance of the space:

The Lahore Fort is one of the noblest structures of its kind in the world. Rising out of the northwest corner of the walled city, it has been a symbol of its earliest days. If it could speak, it would tell such things that would leave the listener breathless. It could tell of love, romance and adventure, of dark eyed beauties and fierce-browed warriors, of queens in flowing silks and kings in shining armor, of poets, actors, slaves and concubines, of soldiers and rebels, of revolutions and court intrigues, of coronations and assassinations, of treachery and black revenge (Quraeshi).<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 1**  
Fortress of the city of Lahore. Source: Safi Ullah Khan (2015). *Public Open Spaces as an Urban Prosperity: Case Study of Walled City Lahore, Pakistan*. Published by Polimi.

## Increasing Commercialization in the Lahore Fort and a Case for Misplaced Identity

However, the increasing commoditization of the Lahore Fort over time has led it a little far from the association that it once held. The changing economic agendas and political narratives have created ambivalences, thus highly compromising the autonomy of the space.

In modern times, when the quest for an associative linkage between history and a 'place-making' approach for the heritage sites, mapped on the contemporary is rising, the uses and abuses of history are being simultaneously revealed. This presents a need for the understanding of embedded temporal and cultural systems, the tensions between progress and tradition along the underlying forces masked by the union of ideologies, preservation and politics, to make nuanced decisions about the impact of conservation in complex urban places as such.

As the city Lahore itself and the identity marker of the city, the Lahore Fort, both adopt a misplaced conception of development while withholding the remnants of their past, they gradually fall into a state of dual existence. An increasing disregard for the past along with the urgency of remembering the foregone has led it to the outset of 'an urgent conservation', to save itself from looming amnesia. During this outset, some of the myopic conjectures made along the way are turning the heritage site into a commercial enterprise.

The determination of whether positive or negative consequences accrue from the resulting activities (associated with the heritage sites) is quite critical and debatable in its own regard, as it is quite contingent upon the monetary and non-monetary inducements and the degree of concern shown for the stakeholders in these measures. Though it is irrefutable that heritage sites, while being of historical and cultural wealth, are also a key economic asset, sometimes the microeconomics of these operations show a blithe disregard towards its most note-worthy stake-holders, the public at large, which makes it quite unsettling.

The endeavors made by the governmental apparatus aiming at preservation of heritage turns out to be more advantageous towards the elements of organized capitalism than towards the people. The process, though directed towards the social interest in its emerging stage, sometimes seems unperturbed to public stakes or the urban consciousness of the city.



Figures 2 & 3

Activities being carried out in Lahore Fort showing dearth of a strategic economic approach. Source: Author, 2017

The rampant commercialization of spaces in and around the Lahore Fort leads you to wonder if the notion of authoritarian control for protective or other measures is producing a rather contrived character of this space. All the inconspicuous divisions that have been created by different care-taking authorities feed you a narrative that is more of a political and commercial nature than one of a social and theoretical sense.

### On Belonging in a Quasi-Public Space

In a context of where management of this quasi-public space has become highly politicized, the practices of quiet encroachment, of a mental and physical nature are being carried out daily.

A day visit to the Lahore Fort with the current 'defined' experience of the space really leaves one wondering about association with it or how one may place oneself in this narrative to own it as an icon of ones identity. A plethora of narratives and images sold and advertised now, by the 'officials', the decision - making bodies, the text books, of this space really leaves one wondering which one is true.



Figures 4 & 5

Clear and unclear boundaries marked in Lahore Fort. Source: Author, 2017

Well, they could all be true or they not be true. But what is more worrisome is that their 'truth' might have nothing to do with the experience that you or I would have in that space, not just as mere consumers of this nascent configuration of commercialization or an on-looker but as a part of the continued history, as a part of something larger, which essentially 'represents' us.

Therefore, bearing this case of misplaced identity and a loss of spatial autonomy in mind, the question is always that besides its physical conservation as a tangible heritage site, how are we conserving it as a memorial and cultural palimpsest?

### The Role of Art

Here, the role of art arises to examine the possibilities of being emancipatory of this spatial control, a crossing point between the collective memory and the socio-political interventions, towards culture hegemony. Taking into account the pedagogical potential of art to help alleviate the potential control, physical and mental, and re-envision the socio-cultural landscape, a certain power exists in art's potential to produce new subjectivities, not just an institutional or ideological critique (O'Sullivan, 2006: 1).<sup>3</sup>

As a medium for the ineffable and a laboratory for tolerance, art becomes an essential tool in mitigating the ambivalences and offering expanded vision and autonomy. Space when studied beyond its marked dimensions on a Cartesian plane or of its control by the governing bodies, through the lens of art, becomes a language which communicates the intangible and unimaginable, in times when the association is being lost. Directing the idea that we live foremost not by what we visually configure or the parameters of space we inhabit, but by the meanings and associations we deduce out of it, art has helped throughout human history to communicate the power of the invisible over the signified visible. Thus, leading this concept forward, the role of art becomes vital in studying the totality of our environment and the impacts and issues in regard to physical and non-physical states of man and space in relation to the world. Storytelling and visual representation of the unrealized and fictional in architecture in this regard then effectively bring the sensitive and complex issues to light while also focusing on the societal and individualistic, emotional and intellectual concerns.

## Using Art as a Medium to Revisit the Lahore Fort as a Memorial Palimpsest

This paper aims to expedite the same idea by reviewing a series of illustrations developed along narratives of the ephemeral produced by the author in order to use art as an alternate medium to study the space of the Lahore Fort beyond its physical presence and to re-envision its socio-cultural and historiographical landscape. This exercise aims to let art offer a constitutive way to document the intangible and contest the notion of space as a pre-defined territorial entity or a post-territorial flow of power relations.

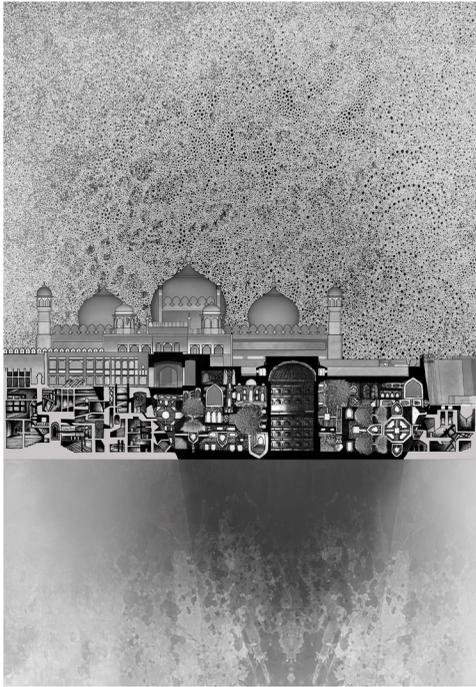
Studying the city as a metabolically vital and an ever-evolving organism in the medium of architecture, the architectural heritage is not just reduced to dead matter; all that either is in shambles or stands tall in its glory. It rather holds the vitality of a conscious being, carrying within it the multiplicity of layers with all its non-physical states. In a symbiotic relationship between citizens and their architectural heritage, the documentation of the shared urban memories and human experiences, from a micro to a macro level, bridges the gap and eases the restrained public association with the space of the Lahore Fort, that comes forth with political control – one where the citizens can relate to it in a cognitive way that does not entail commodification of space and fulfills the imperative need for belonging in a quasi-public space, in a way that is more inclusive and all-embracing.

Taking the lead from Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, Elliot Gaines' *Communication and Semiotics of Space*, and Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, to study parallel spatial realities, to document the intangible and latent aspects of a space, a symbolic expression of graphics has been used along the narratives to comment on the conflating and conflicting theories related to a space.

In his novel *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino narrates the seemingly ineffable aspects of urban developments by portraying a series of imaginary "cities". Elevated to the realm of the fantastical, these cities are conceived as more than just physical structures but a confluence of ideas and emotions: the built crossroads of multitudinous lives. They function as a dialectic that burgeons from the synthesis of conceptual and visual realms, driving us toward a more holistic interpretation of space. It is important to understand how the associations between symbol and the signified are formed.<sup>4</sup>

## MEMORY-AMNESIA

(What is remembered/What is forgotten)



**A storehouse of memories?**

The image of this city, as it existed in the fables and old wives' tales, was of one where memories were carved, forged, erased, traded. It was a repository, its inhabitants collecting memories in instances and fragments and weaving them together in a tapestry. Sometimes storing them in engraved wooden boxes, sometimes locking them away in their chests. There is no telling whether the image the city currently holds is a layered memorandum of an imagined future or grown through successive superimpositions from historic past.



**Or a sufferer of amnesia?**

But the city, that long existed in urban consciousness gets struck by amnesia with passage of time. The carved and connected memories now fading, deformed and mingled, their associations lost and their place in history uncertain. The city, once harbouring the complete memoirs in its veins, now holds fragmented instances in form of isolated, cloistered experiences, the moments amiss. The city of memory now lies as a forlorn, dissected body, surviving the obscurity of present while carrying the burden of past.

One city bears the recollection of past, the memories, the long-forgotten stories while the other lies in a state of an unbidden forgetfulness, oblivious to its past, uncertain of its present. The two cities take their turns in overwhelming each other.

**Figure 6**

*Memory, Amnesia* (2017). Pencil, pen and ink on paper, digitally rendered partially. Source: Author, 2017

## CELESTIAL-INFERNAL

(What becomes divine/What becomes tormenting)



**A heaven, protecting all that is superlative,  
incomprehensible, unmitigated?**

Far away on horizon, you can see the slender pinnacles and spires of the divine city rise, designed in such a perfection that the sun and moon in their journey could rest upon them. The stilts rising from the palace seem lost above the clouds, as heaven looks down upon the majestic white marble onion domes and serene gardens. This city is a haven for desires; trees of abundance growing tall, their branches upholding the blue sky and water of mercy trickling down their roots to existence underneath.



**Or a hell, embodying all that is downcast and  
dejected?**

But as you keep your eyes fixed upon it, soon the divine city fades before your eyes and a new city appears, an ugly, revolting form that refutes all the desires and invalidates all the dreams. The clouds now cast a shadow above the infernal city; containing all that is refused and discarded; the rubbish heaps, rotten beams and wooden planks bent under the weight of time, pipes rotten black with soot and blind walls with fading signs, all that has now occupied the blueprint of the once glorious city.

One city is a sight of a garden, symbolic of life and all that is fertile while the other of necropolis, an epitome of all that is dead and dreary.

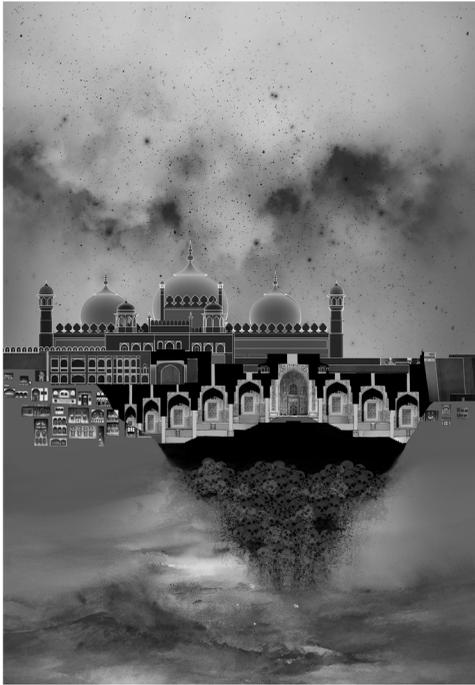
The two half-cities live within one another, unparalleled in their image yet quite inseparable from each other.

**Figure 7**

*Celestial, Infernal*  
(2017). Pencil, pen  
and ink on paper,  
digitally rendered partially.  
Source: Author,  
2017

## POWER-SUBJUGATION

(What prevails/What forfeits)



An epitome of glory?



Or a sign of surrender?

On the hour of daybreak, you can see the city that was manifestation of a king's dream, the image of paradise with spectacular arcades and magnificent facades, holding beneath its surface all the layers of history; the ruins of fortified castles and glorious temples once built by its previous rulers. At fortnights, the full moon in this city illuminate the opulence and glory but also marking the sky with stories of all the sins, brutality and destruction that was undertaken to build them.

No more, no less the city of power gets evaded by its own subjects; the city whose fragments can be found humbly tucked in between the huge structures of dominion. Its inhabitants, though crushed under the weight of materializing others' dreams, clench to the memories of the times bygone firmly, sometimes submerging the sky-high city in its own past, while at others painting the night sky with their own long-held dreams.

One city transcends to heavens but lies on the foundations of gruesome proceedings while the other descends down to depths, still upholding its honor. The two cities live for each other, their eyes locked, but there is no love in between them.

Figure 8

*Power, Subjugation* (2017). Pencil, pen and ink on paper, digitally rendered partially. Source: Author, 2017

## CORE-PERIPHERAL

(What is fundamental/What is incidental)



**A veritable core?**

As you entered this city, its presence undeniably surrounds you. This city is the pivotal knot tying all that is prime and indispensable, inhabiting all that is cardinal and necessary for its existence. All that exists therein, whether it affirms life or negate it, is consequential to its bearing and an important piece of the puzzle. The ones that ensure life are sensitively designed and the ones that defied it are perceptively placed. All the links and pieces eventually being strongly connected to its core.



**Or an ostensible periphery?**

But just when your mind starts comprehending the hidden, peculiar order beneath of the city of essentials, along comes a tidal wave of anomalies rising from the far end of the city. Soon as you leave the previous city behind, you find its alter-ego; the city of non-essentials, with the centre being not central anymore, edges ambiguous, with an unseen beginning and an unknown end. This city carries all that is extra and venial, not necessary for its survival though. All exceptions and exclusions resting along its tattered edges.

One city represents all that is primary and fundamental while the other all that is marginalized and estranged. These two cities follow one another on the same site and under the same name, sometimes avoiding each other, at others drawn to each other.

**Figure 9**

*Core, Peripheral* (2017). Pencil, pen and ink on paper, digitally rendered partially. Source: Author, 2017

## HARMONY-CHAOS

(What synchronizes/What contends)



**A messenger of peace?**

Fording the river, you arrive at the city of harmony that holds together contesting notions and dissimilar realities but all acknowledging and nurturing each other. This city though displays various elements and patterns of thought at work but all co-existing and growing with their identities still resolute and their purity intact. Its inhabitants celebrate diversity and cherish individuality. All humming to their own unique rhythms to produce one soulful composition in unison.



**Or a harbinger of chaos?**

However, anyone reminiscing the city of harmony cannot bear to acknowledge its chaotic side. The city of disruption where identities become contentious, symbols contorted and meanings lost. All the upheaval being loosely held down by fragile supports, curiously stimulating its inhabitants while at the same time reminding them of their own barrenness, of the chaos within their souls.

One city hums to the sound of universe; a soothing melody while the other produces a noise, of all the chaos and disruption that has now become an unmissable feature of this city.

These two cities keep their distance from one another while rushing towards each other simultaneously.

**Figure 10**

*Harmony, Chaos*  
(2017). Pencil, pen  
and ink on paper,  
digitally rendered partially.  
Source: Author,  
2017

## FLOW OF TIME-SUSPENSION OF TIME

(What remains transitive/What remains still)



Constantly morphing itself with each passing moment?

In broad daylight, you enter the city that stands in an outpouring flow of time. This city communicates tangible, substantial, all that is probable, existing in a finite unit of time. The inhabitants, of this city of chance and possibility continuously move in an animated rush, heading to several destinations all at once but never arriving anywhere. They flock from one place to another, circuiting but never take a single moment to contemplate and unwind.



Or suspended in a singular endless moment?

The city of movement, however, not a moment later gets clocked by the city of stillness, which exists in a singular moment of rupture that lasts frozen for an eternity. As darkness prevails, the city of possibilities is taken over by semblances, illusions, all that is improbable and fleeting. It shifts its rhythm; the movement coming to a halt and the substantial now suspending over the void of obscurity. Its inhabitants stay locked in a moment while watching everything around them either fall to pieces or fall into place.

One city is an illusion of life while the other, a semblance of death. Both cities are connected to each other, becoming one another at different moments of time while still being only themselves.

Figure 11

*Flow of Time, Suspension of Time* (2017). Pencil, pen and ink on paper, digitally rendered partially. Source: Author, 2017

## Conclusion

The social and physical environment or *field*—borrowing from the Gestalt psychological framework—is dynamic and changes over time, across spaces and with experience; as such, people change over time as well. In effect, people and space are connected and co-produce one another rather than existing as distinct, autonomous entities (Lewin, 1943).<sup>5</sup> As spatial imagination plays a role in producing notions of social and spatial reality, it also becomes a tool to address the disconnections between the lived or actual and the imagined, which are often indicative of social or spatial injustices.<sup>6</sup> As the poet, William Butler Yeats wrote, “In dreams begin responsibilities.”<sup>7</sup> These illustrations by the author aiming to explore the similar theme of re-visiting the mental maps<sup>8</sup> of the Lahore Fort as spatial imaginations are more malleable and influential in producing material geographies as well as drawing on the narratives and experiences of the visitors. They aim to study and depict the current state of an obscure spatial identity and dual/opposing realities that follow the visitor of this space, to convey that complexity by exploring the hidden realities or ‘ghosts’ of the space that belong to its citizens, (visited only in mental scape now) as the space itself lies under a physical control of spatial experience. Art has, thus, been used to explore the idea of the autonomy of the space; a space which has always belonged to the people more so than the authority exercised by changing political regimes over it.

## Endnotes

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**Diamond Oberoi Vahali** is an Associate professor at Ambedkar University, Delhi in the School of Letters. She has co-edited and co-authored *Once Upon A Time: A Collection of Short Stories* and *Life and Times of Shanta Toofani: Story of a Survivor*. She has published articles pertaining to literature and cinema and is mainly interested in Indian Literature, Cinema Studies, Psychoanalysis, Life Writing and Memory Studies, Folklore, Indigenous Studies, Orature and in pursuing research in documenting films and narratives that have dealt with people's struggles.

**Dimple (Amreen) Oberoi Vahali** (who often writes under the pen name Amreen Murad) is a social activist with long-standing experience of working with human and animal rights, feminist and environmental issues. She is also a poet, an artist and has performed in a number of theatre productions and street plays. As a free-lance writer, her writings offer an impelling reflection on political and deeply philosophical concerns of value to the predicaments of our world today. Amongst others, her book, *The Life and Times of Shanta Toofani* (co-authored with Diamond Oberoi Vahali) is a psychobiography of the life of an Indian activist - Shanta - who remains an exemplar of devoted and committed social engagement. This work was published by Daanish Publishers (2009). Dimple (Amreen) Oberoi Vahali is passionate about Urdu and Hindustani and all mother-tongues being given their due status in India.

**Gudrun Wallenböck** holds Master's degrees in Architecture from the Technical University in Graz, Austria and in Cultural Management from SMBS, Austria. She is the founder and artistic director of Hinterland Galerie, Vienna, an independent art space and platform dedicated to the promotion of intercultural and interdisciplinary projects. Gudrun is also the founder of Hinterland Design and co-founded Sitios, a global network on urban solutions for public space. She is a core member of the programming team for two European Capitals (2003 Graz, 2009 Linz). Since 2009 Gudrun has been working as a curator and designer for international and intercultural projects and sits on the advisory board of the SIMORGH Foundation that promotes intercultural dialogue through its bases in Vienna and Tehran and of the Austrian Pakistan Society based in Vienna. Gudrun is currently conducting PhD research at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (MdW) in Vienna, Austria where her project is investigating functional possibilities with intercultural curation as a development of her singular activities at Hinterland with artists working to enhance and promote intercultural dialogue and understanding.

**Professor Jakelin Troy** is the Director of Indigenous Research, Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Research, The University of Sydney. She is also Editor in Chief, 'Ab-Original: Journal of Indigenous Studies and First Nations and First Peoples' Cultures' at Pennsylvania State Press. Her academic qualifications include PhD Australian National University, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Linguistics; BA Hons Anthropology (first class) University of Sydney; Graduate Diploma in Education, Secondary Teaching, University of Canberra. Her fields of interest include Australian Aboriginal languages; endangered languages and language revitalisation; endangered languages and education; language policy and planning; linguistic geography; sociolinguistics amongst countless other languages.

**Professor Linda Barwick** is a musicologist and Professor at The University of Sydney's Conservatorium of Music. Her passion is working with communities to document and sustain their local performance traditions. She leads several projects funded by the Australian Research Council. She is currently based at SOAS, the University of London, as Leverhulme Visiting Professor working with Prof Richard Widdess and others on a project entitled, "The future of endangered song: creativity and diversity in language and music".

**Matt Poll** is a Torres Strait and Australian South Sea Islander Island curator and author working with The University of Sydney Museums where he is also the University's repatriation project manager. Matt has previously worked as the Artistic Director of The Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative and with the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. Matt's research involves assisting contemporary Aboriginal communities and individuals reevaluate and reconfigure historic museum collections of indigenous artefacts and in assisting artists to explore collections and archives within ethically empowered frameworks.

**Naintara AbulFazal** is an aspiring artist and practices as an animator, illustrator and writer. She has worked as Teaching Assistant during her studies and as Visiting Faculty after completing her Master's degree in Multimedia Arts from the National College of Arts, Lahore. She obtained her Bachelors in Multimedia Design from the University of Gujrat, Pakistan. She is currently Lecturer at the School of Cinematic and Digital Arts, Institute for Art and Culture, Lahore.

**Ofita Purwani, PhD** is an architect and an educationist. She currently teaches at the Department of Architecture, Universitas Sebelas Maret. She completed her doctorate in Architecture from the University of Edinburgh. She obtained her Master's degree in Architecture from the Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology, Indonesia. Dr. Ofita's research interests include Architecture, Spatial Politics, Information Technology and Politics and Urban/Rural Sociology. She is a member of the organising committee for LNPSA 8, an annual workshop and symposium on the teaching of history of architecture, Sebelas Maret University. She is also editor-in-chief of an academic journal *International Journal of Architecture and Built Environment*, School of Architecture, Sebelas Maret University. She has been awarded with numerous research grants and has a number of publications to her credit.

**Samman Qayyum** is an architect and currently studying MA Urban Design at the University of Sheffield. She completed her Bachelors in Architecture from the National College of Arts, Rawalpindi.

**Siddharth Pandey** is currently a Research Fellow in Global History at the Munich Centre for Global History, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich (Germany), where he is researching the cross-cultural links between the highland cultures of Europe and South Asian hill stations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Later this year, he will take up a Visiting Fellowship at Yale University, USA. He holds a PhD in English Literature and Materiality Studies from the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge (UK), where he was based as a Cambridge International Scholar. He has a range of research interests, from colonial cultures and cinema studies to fantasy literature and heritage conservation, on all of which he has extensively presented and published at national and international platforms. As a landscape photographer, he has had seven displays as well as a commission from the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the world's leading institute in art and design. He hails from the Himalayas of Shimla, India.

**Varda Nisar** is an architect, researcher and a curator based in Karachi, Pakistan. She is an M. Phil Anthropology student at the Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad. She completed her MA (General History), BA (Economics, Education, International Relations), and Bachelors of Architecture from the University of Karachi. She is the founder of the Karachi Children's Art Fest and is currently engaged with the Karachi Biennale (KB17), as their Head of Educational Outreach Program, the largest contemporary art exhibition in Karachi. Varda is also Assistant Art Editor at The Missing Slate. She has trained with the Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC, Spark Arts Festival for Children, Leicester. Besides this, she has also been engaged in studying the cultural artifacts of the Silawat Community, who were the original stone masons of the city. She has several publications to her credit.

## Editorial Board

**Prof. Sajida Haider Vandal** is an architect, urbanist and educationist. She is currently Vice Chancellor of the Institute for Art and Culture, Director of Society for Cultural Education and CEO, THAAP, Pakistan.

**Prof. Dr. Gulzar Haider** is an architect and an educationist. He is currently Dean, Razia Hassan School of Architecture, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, Pakistan.

**Ms. Rati Framroz Cooper** (late) was Principal Emeritus of the Rajkumar College, Rajkot, Gujarat, India.

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**Prof. Dr. Priyaleen Singh** is an architect, urbanist and educationist. She is currently Professor and Head of Department of Architectural Conservation, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi, India.

**Prof. Dr. Harbans Mukhia** is a historian whose principal area of study is medieval India. He is Former Rector, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

**Prof. Dr. Balvinder Singh** is an architect, urbanist, conservationist and educationist. He is currently Professor of Architecture and Planning, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, India.

**Prof. Dr. Samra Mohsin Khan** is an architect and an educationist. She is currently Chairperson, Architecture Department, Comsats IIT, Islamabad, Pakistan.

**Dr. Sarmad Khawaja** is a writer, columnist and a journalist. He is presently working for the promotion of schools and colleges for underprivileged children in rural South Punjab, writing for the promotion of arts and sciences in schools, various children books and translations of world literature classics into Urdu language.



# THAAP

THAAP, established in 2006, is registered as a not-for-profit Section 42 Company with the Securities Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). It is a forum of academics and professionals dedicated to improving the state of education, particularly in the fields of Art and Culture, where multi-disciplinary discourses take place and diversity thrives; our particular focus is on teachers for they will, and can, lead the way and give us hope for a richer future - a future which is not stagnant with unitary thought but which carries the variety of a thousand flowers. To achieve this goal, International Conferences are held on an annual basis, while Seminars, Colloquiums, Consultative meetings are organized throughout the year. THAAP recognizes the intrinsic link between history, tradition and culture and acknowledges that our present day beliefs, value systems and world view, which constitute the culture of a society or community, are shaped by the historical past. The resultant entity, while composed of many parts, operates as an integral body. Knowledge has grown into many fields of specializations yet as it flows from the human mind, it is integrated towards the common goal of human welfare. THAAP promotes integration and inclusivism and not the opposite. It aims to reassess and revisit history and create scholarship and knowledge of the old and recent history from the people's perspective and disseminate it to a wide audience. There is no better way to learn than to learn from each other.

## THAAP Crafts

Recognizing the rich craft traditions of Pakistan, THAAP-CRAFT seeks to enable the provision of livelihood opportunities for the marginalized craft communities and engender pride in the cultural heritage and expressions of the people of this nation. It works closely with the THAAP Culture and Development Program for purposes of marketing the products and promoting crafts persons. It is currently working with the Women Collectives established as pilots in Bahawalpur District.

## THAAP Culture and Development Program

THAAP Culture and Development Program was set up for purposes of working within culture and heritage sectors, to strengthen the nexus between culture and sustainable development and safeguarding communities' inalienable rights to their culture particularly their Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).

The THAAP Culture and Development Program works towards social and economic empowerment of the underprivileged village communities, especially women, by promoting their participation in the economic growth of communities through entrepreneurship and capacity building initiatives, mainly by enhancing non-agricultural income generation opportunities. Its youth program aims to engage youth in safeguarding heritage and promotes intergenerational transfer of cultural knowledge in schools through collaboration with Intangible Culture tradition bearers. THAAP also maintains a pool of associates who participate in projects as and when needed. Experts and ustads are currently working in South Punjab, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, and Kalaash with an aim to empower local communities and train them in capacity building and the Convention 2003.

#### THAAP Publications

THAAP Publications have published “Cultural Expressions of South Punjab”, author Sajida Vandal with contributions by Dr. Nasarullah Nasir, Saba Samee and Ayesha Imdad; the “Historiography of Architecture of Pakistan and the Region”, based on the Papers of THAAP Conference - 2010; “Portrait of Lahore – Lahore Nu Salam” based on the Papers of THAAP Conference - 2011; “Life in Small Towns”, based on the Papers of the THAAP Conference – 2012; “Cultural Roots of Art and Architecture of the Punjab”, based on the Papers of the THAAP Conference – 2013; “Culture, Art and Architecture of the Marginalized and the Poor”, based on the Papers of the THAAP Conference – 2014; “People’s History of Pakistan”, based on the Papers of the THAAP Conference – 2015; “People and the City”, based on the Papers of the THAAP Conference – 2016; “City: An Evolving Organism”, based on the Papers of the THAAP Conference – 2017; edited by Prof. Pervaiz Vandal.

**Prof. Sajida Haider Vandal, CEO THAAP**

**Prof. Pervaiz Vandal, Director THAAP**







2019

# THAAP JOURNAL

## ART, TOLERANCE AND DEMOCRACY

Art in the full sweep of all aesthetic events, from painting, sculpture, music, architecture, theatre, poetry and literature, provides experiences that uplift ordinary existence to a feeling of fulfilment, peace and serenity, and with that, tolerance towards the 'other', the 'different' and the 'outsider' germinates and flourishes. The experience of creativity and art is essentially humbling.

Greater collaboration between the arts and education at all levels would emphasize imagination, critical thinking, social inclusion and tolerance of the different. Education and awareness, are critical for the long-term sustainability of democracy and the arts play a pivotal role in helping people to accept different perspectives in a holistic manner.

### CONTRIBUTORS

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7. Prof. Jakelin Troy
8. Prof. Linda Barwick
9. Matt Poll
10. Naintara AbulFazal
11. Ofita Purwani, PhD
12. Samman Qayyum
13. Siddharth Pandey
14. Varda Nisar

