

## Cultural Homogenisation, Places of Memory, and the Loss of Secular Urban Space

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ANIL BHATTI

*Postcolonial India's myth of secularism assumed that the planned evolution of the good society would be accompanied by the gradual marginalisation of contradictions between religions, languages, and cultural specificities. Bombay became symptomatic of this myth in film and folklore. Against this background, cultural homogenisation and identity-based politics occupy places of memory and heritage sites leading to the contestation of heterogeneous and homogeneous views of culture.*

I

Conflict and violence have become an integral part of the city in India. Instead of becoming an urban space of liberation, the postcolonial city is the locus of disaster. Whether it is the hopelessly inadequate infrastructure, the slums, or the social tensions and communal violence, the city has become a patched-over space of catastrophe. There is a historical background to this. Much of the social tension in Indian cities today derives from the contradiction between a secular inclusivist idea of India and an exclusivist version of the homogeneous social order. The Bombay film, ever sensitive to the social mood suitable for its success, was responsible for reflecting these themes in the troubled history of the sub-continent from Independence and Partition in 1947, through the dictatorial Emergency in 1975, the Bombay textile strike and the rise of a fundamentalist right wing after the 1980s, the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992, and the Bombay riots of 1992-93. It may therefore be helpful to begin by referring to *the* Indian City, namely Bombay, its favoured

artistic genre, the film, and its relationship to the project of constructing a secular postcolonial India against other restricted versions of the postcolonial order.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1950s the popular Hindi film from Bombay had started disseminating what might be called the secular, international, and yet quintessentially Indian, vision of post-independence India associated with India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru (cf. Nehru 1999; Khilnani 1997; Chatterjee 1998; Kapur/Rajadhyaksha 2001; Kaarsholm 2004; Patnaik 2003; Kaarsholm 2002). This helped to sublimate embarrassing questions of caste/class and make them bearable through the aesthetics of popular social drama and comedy.

Raj Kapoor's film *Shri 420* (*Mr. 420*, 1955) became paradigmatic for this view, and its famous, often quoted song, written by Shailendra and Hasrat Jaipuri, sums up this post-independence mood of Nehruvian secularism:

Mera juta hai japani/yeh patloon englistani  
 Sar peh laal topi roosi/phir bhi dil hai hindustani  
 (My shoe is Japane (Japanese)/these pants are Englistani (English)  
 The red cap on my head is Russi (Russian)/yet my heart is Hindustani (Indian))

These lines may well be read as an early example of complex cultural encoding and a comfortable affirmation of multiple identities in pluricultural societies before the postcolonial discussion popularised the term (cf. Csáky/Kury/Tragatschnig 2004). But the main theme of *Shri 420*, which was scripted by Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, is the loss of secular innocence through capitalist corruption. The number 420 in Raj Kapoor's film refers to the paragraph concerning cheating in the Indian penal code. The hero of the film, appropriately and allegorically named Raj,<sup>2</sup> succumbs to the lure of money and becomes a cheat, someone who can be booked under section 420 of the Indian Penal code, and this is significant for it consolidates Bombay's reputation as the richest and most corrupt of Indian cities, a perpetual threat to innocence and honesty. It is the perennial capitalist Other to the ideals of austerity, honesty, self-sacrifice, and service inherent in the freedom struggle. Raj, the hapless victim of avarice, appropriately pawns the honesty medal, which had been his only prize possession before he was appropriated by the world of money. He is, in a sense, a victim of money, modernity, and the metropolis, which classic writings on the city have emphasized (cf. Simmel 1958; Müller 1988: 18). But it is important to emphasize that the opposition to the Bad City is not some village idyll. The symbolic overdetermination in the film makes this clear. Raj himself is an educated migrant with a B.A. degree. His journey to Bombay in

1 Cf. the contributions in Patel, Sujata/Thorner, Alice (1996), and Kaarsholm (2002) for further literature on the theme of Bombay/Mumbai.

2 Raj Kapoor's first name "Raj" also means "rule." It also is synonymous with the British Raj or "rule."

search for work starts from the north Indian city of Allahabad, which was Nehru's birthplace. We see that, among other things, this film is also about the struggle between rapacious finance and secular idealism for the soul of independent India.

All this was, however, in the realm of popular social drama and comedy, which also made it bearable for large audiences. The Bombay film (irreverently called Bollywood today) had in its repertoire a sufficiently entertaining view of colonial/postcolonial/modern/postmodern Bombay. *Bombay meri jaan*, Majrooh Sultanpuri's song from the film *C.I.D.* (1954), sung against a background of Bombay's Victorian architecture echoed the ludic irreverence of the age of entertainment.

Aay dil hai mushkil jeena yahan,  
Zara hattke, zara bachke,  
Yeh hai Bombay meri jaan...  
(O heart, its tough living here  
Watch out, move aside, this is Bombay my dear...)

"Jaan" literally means life and "meri jaan," which for the sake of an elusive rhyme I have rendered as "my dear," is a term of endearment common in northern India, which puns on Life and Love. Meri jaan is my life/love (cf. Pinto/Fernandes 2003; Kaviraj 2004). Bombay as a lifeline is also the love in which the vagabond is irrevocably implicated.

The combination of innocence abroad and streetwise behaviour became part of the filmic formula in the Bombay idiom. In a complex urban world the good ultimately did triumph so that a nascent nation had sufficient ground to believe in a tolerable and tolerant road towards non-aligned, third-world self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and industrial modernity with retention of flexible cultural moorings. In those days, one could indeed be pan-Indian and international.

This mood will be replaced by the emergence of a confident globalised Indian diaspora after the 1990s, which then need not enact internationalism on Indian soil but can look upon the world as its stage, which seems only to exist together with its icons Michael Jackson and Elvis Presley in order to bring out India and its film stars' celluloid uniqueness more effectively:

London dekha, Paris dekha, aur dekha Japan  
Michael dekha, Elvis dekha, doosara nahin Hindustan  
Eh duniya hai dulhan, dulhan ke maathey ki bindia  
I love my India  
(London seen, Paris seen, and also Japan  
Michael seen, Elvis seen, nothing like Hindustan  
The world is a bride, the bride has a bindia 9 [dot] on the forehead  
I love my India) (Ray 2004: 173).

This is from a 1998 film, *Pardes (Abroad)*. The itinerary of tourism is ticked off, as it were to reaffirm the smug self of a comfortably globalised indigenous urban bourgeoisie using English naturally to convey patriotic sentiments to the world without seeming odd now, because urban India uses such markers as signs of its urban multilingual semiotics. This is already a far cry from the romantic Raj who is recognisably part of a politically defined postcolonial world order in which India is placed as a perhaps poor but honourable participant. Ultimately this phase did not last for long, and appropriately the collapse of the Nehruvian Age of Innocence and the transition to the globalised age of dependency is summed up with the seismic sensitivity of the Bombay film by another film lyric which clearly alludes, in a parodistic manner, to the song from Raj Kapoor's *Shri 420*:

Aslam Bhai ...  
Dubai ka Chashma, Cheen ki Chaddi, aur Irani Chai...  
(Brother Aslam...  
Spectacles from Dubai, Underwear from China, Irani tea....)

The movement from Raj's song to Aslam Bhai's song<sup>3</sup> is the movement from secular internationalism to rapacious globalisation. Spectacles from Dubai, underwear from China replace the Chaplinesque garb worn by Raj. The tea will be Indian, but served to Brother Aslam, a self-confident, streetwise Muslim denizen of globalised urban Bombay where drinking tea (chai) in one of Bombay's cafes run by members of the Irani community signals urban living. The Muslim innuendo is of course intended to refer to fundamentalism, the involvement of the Bombay film world with a mafia underworld controlled from the Gulf, and so on ("Never get involved with the mafia" is a line in the song). But more significantly, the demarcation of religious communities and marking them out of a secular totality becomes apparent through this song. Retrospectively, the Muslim tag reminds us that Raj is a Hindu name and Raj's song from *Shri 420*, which was supposedly pan-Indian now suddenly seems revealed as the fragile secular construct that it clearly was.

What concerns us here is the locale of the city as the place (*Ort, lieu*) of the secular dream and its loss and destruction (Prakash 2002: 2). For one thing, the foil to Bombay is not necessarily the idyllic village. The inability of the innocent migrant worker to live up to ideals is not necessarily linked with some myth of a village arcadia versus a brutal and anonymous city. The first encounter scene between the migrant and the city does of course lead to bewilderment and disorientation, but the genre sees to it that the hero gets to know the code very soon. In any case, the vision of India did not necessarily

3 From the film *Love ke liye kuch bhi karega* (2001). The website [www.raaga.com](http://www.raaga.com) is a useful source for information on Bombay film.

oppose the village to the city as substantive categories or life worlds, as there was usually enough feudal oppression in the village community to escape from. The myth of Bombay as the city of migrants and as “a heterogeneous mix of races, religions, and linguistic groups” (Singh 2003: 24), was always also coupled with problems of survival within the context of the uneven development in Indian industrial development and economy (cf. Acharya 2002).

But perhaps Bombay’s main fascination lay in the fact that it was different. It did not carry the weight of cultural tradition like Calcutta; nor did it labour to live up to myths of Imperial grandeur like India’s perennial political capital Delhi. Bombay was unabashedly the commercial capital of India, and by accepting the anonymous quality of money as the universal general equivalent of all values, Bombay too became the place where the tensions in the two competing visions of India could be played out: the secular and the fundamentalist.<sup>4</sup>

## II

Some of the above remarks may become clearer if we look at the international level, where we are witnessing social transformations that are characterised by two moments. Relatively homogeneous societies are developing into more complex social formations. On the other hand, existing complex societies are being subjected to tensions that seem to announce their break up (cf. Bhatti 2005).

The process of European integration may be looked upon as an example of the first type of transformation process. Large-scale migrations and globalising processes are leading to long-term societal transformations and relatively monolingual and homogeneous societies are opening up to the possibilities (both good and bad) of greater pluralism. On the other hand, in a counter process, traditionally pluricultural<sup>5</sup> countries like India, which seemed to have muddled through to an uneasy systemic balance exemplified by the slogan of “unity in diversity” characteristic of Nehruvian secularism and pluriculturalism, are now increasingly being subjected to fundamentalist pres-

4 The writer Sa’adat Hasan Manto, who lived and worked in the Bombay film world for twelve years and migrated to Pakistan after the Partition of India in 1947, was perhaps expressing this when he wrote: “That strip of land which is Bombay had taken me, a footloose young man rejected by his family, into its vast lap and said to me, ‘You can be happy here on two pennies a day or on hundreds of thousands of rupees... Here you can do what you like; no one will speak ill of you. And no one will tell you what to do or moralize to you’” (Manto 2001: 17).

5 I use the term “pluriculturalism” rather than “multiculturalism,” which can encourage rigid demarcations.

tures, which would logically lead to more rigid forms of homogeneous organization of socio-cultural and political units. In this context, we could remember the historical paradigm of the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. The end of Yugoslavia would be a more drastic contemporary reminder of this second type of process.

As a result of a questionable extrapolation of the European process of nation formation in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, fundamentalist thought today favours organisations that are as homogeneous as possible with regard to language, ethnicity, and religion. This in itself is not the explosive point. What is important is the assumption that this is the “natural” form of organisation of nation states. The concept of minorities results from this. And thereafter the negotiation of minority rights (civil rights, religious rights) is established.

It is worth remembering that Johann Gottfried Herder, in his seminal *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Humanity* (1784), assumed that drastic migrations and intermingling of peoples had characterised the pre-history of Europe, and without this process of amalgamation the “General Spirit of Europe” (*Allgemeingeist Europa’s*) could hardly have been awakened (Herder 1989: 705). But the whole point of Herder’s thought was then to go on to affirm that the historical retention of this diversity would be unnatural, and therefore wrong. Diversity for him becomes the pre-condition for homogenisation in both temporal as well as categorical terms. Assimilation and amalgamation are therefore the necessary and natural part of the pre-history of a historical process leading to increasing orders of complexity. But this is precisely why organisational solutions have to be found to deal with this process as one enters the modern age. In Herder’s thought the most natural social order would be one that corresponds to a divine plan of nature. Since nature produces families in order to ensure the survival of the species, the most natural order was that of an organic family. Since the modern nation was to mirror this order, the most natural state would be an organic state in which one Volk with one national character would exist. It is this perspective that also leads to Herder’s anti colonialism and his espousal of cultural mixing. Because colonialism led to an un-natural expansion of states and an unnatural and “wild” intermingling of the human species and nations under one sceptre, colonialism in Herder’s eyes was, in the modern era, against the plan of nature. If there is such a thing as an enlightened and liberal philosophy of segregation, Herder’s thought would lead to it. Multiculturalism as distinct from pluriculturalism (cf. Bhargava 1998; Chatterjee 1998; Thapar 2000) seems to me essentially to go back to this principle of liberal and distancing segregation. I need not point out here how fraught with problems multiculturalist perspectives are and how vulnerable they are to a distortion through notions of racial hegemony and ghettoisation, especially against the background of our contemporary experience.

It is against the background of the ideology of natural order that we can understand the nineteenth-century colonial drive towards classification and schematization in order to achieve something like a “colonial competence” (similar to a linguistic competence) in order to be able to control the material world now so suddenly at the disposal of the colonial powers.

The model that dominates seeks to proceed from chaos to order. Complexity is viewed as chaos that does not admit of administrative regulation. India’s complexity for instance was viewed by colonialism as a chaos that required domestication. It was domesticated under colonialism by an extraordinary development of classificatory and taxonomic energy (cf. Cohn 1985). In learning to speak as a colonial power and developing a colonial competence, the systematic codification of modern Indian language practices was necessary. Since language and translation are important instruments of power, a certain type of language ideology developed that ignored overlapping and real forms of communication in favour of abstract linguistic classification mixed up with religion. A colonial bureaucratic order destroyed pluralities of social communication and replaced it with lexicographic classification. Languages as classified systems became autonomous and therefore negotiable among classes and communities of people who claimed to represent them. It then became part of the self-interest of the representatives of the new classified order and its beneficiaries to sustain the autocratically imposed system of classification and impart to it the status of being real and natural. In principle this holds good for the classification of the caste systems and the generation of subsystems of caste too.

### III

Sa’adat Hasan Manto’s short story *Toba Tek Singh* (1955), which, like the film *Shri 420*, has become a foundational text for the contemporary discourse on the beleaguered state of Indian secularism, would be pertinent here (Manto 1993; Ravikant/Saint 2001). The story has the bleak simplicity and logic of a Kafkaesque parable. Manto takes the problem to where it belongs, namely to the realm of madness: A few years after the Partition of the Indian subcontinent (1947) it occurs to the governments of India and Pakistan to complete the exchange of populations based on religious criteria by also exchanging the inmates of lunatic asylums. Insane Muslims remain in Pakistan and insane Hindu and Sikh inmates go to India. The logic of Partition dictated this (Hasan 2000). Accordingly, the inmates of the asylum in Lahore (Pakistan) are slated for exchange. One of the inmates, the Sikh Bishan Singh from the Punjabi town Toba Tek Singh, has been standing on his feet for fifteen years in the Asylum, speaking only in a gibberish constructed out of the three languages

of Punjab's continuum of linguistic communication: Hindustani (Hindi-Urdu), Punjabi, and English. He refuses to be deported, and, after standing on his feet for fifteen years, collapses in the no-man's-land between the barbed wires of India and Pakistan, the creation of which he has cursed in his own private language, his own gibberish. The piece of land he collapses on becomes, in Manto's story, the surrealist fusion of the man Bishan Singh and his home Toba Tek Singh. The piece of land between two barbed wires becomes the geographical placement of this town and the ultimate home of the man, thus negating the logic of Partition and the creation of hard arbitrary boundaries cutting across systems of cultural praxis.

Bhishan Singh's act of resistance can be seen as an act of resistance against Partition, seen as the final outcome of a complex colonial process, which, among other things, led to the destruction and reconfiguration of a pluricultural sphere of communication in North India (cf. Bayly 1996; Rai 2001). This public sphere was by no means a utopian, pacified area. It had its own system of power, repression, and domination. But, as result of a non-hermeneutic emphasis on praxis rather than on the hermeneutic strategy of creating difference in order to understand it, this public sphere functioned in many ways as an "ecumene" cutting across hard boundaries. Colonialism changed the configuration of the system of power and domination, of course, and privileged identities that could form coalitions of power through negotiation; or they could exterminate each other.

## IV

Fundamentalism in India has inherited this drive from colonialism. Today, India's complexity is threatened by the fundamentalist ideological drive towards religious homogeneity. Fundamentalisms seeks to replace the pluralistic praxis of Hinduism, which has many diverse forms, by creating a monolithic block, which then marginalises or patronises other religions in India like Islam or Christianity by stamping them as foreign and therefore implying that they are unauthentic. In the invidious logic of this "therefore" lies the threat to a secular India, which means a threat to its pluralistic form of loose diversity. In a sense, what we are witnessing is the replacement of historically evolved diversity by the ideologically posited naturalness (*Naturwüchsigkeit*) of monochromatic forms. The logic of homogenisation was perhaps propounded most succinctly by Carl Schmitt, whose influential study of constitutional law—*Verfassungslehre* (1928)—treats homogeneity of the *Volk* (not of humanity) as the basis for the relationship between ruler and ruled (Schmitt 1965: 229f.). The ground for homogenisation may vary, and race, colour, and religion are the usual candidates, but homogenisation establishes substantial

equality as the basic precondition of Schmitt's conception of democracy, which was influential in formulating the ideology of the fascist German state. It also forms the basis for the distinction between clearly marked and defined systems of "friend" and "enemy" in Schmitt's political philosophy. Fundamentalisms today have inherited this dubious legacy of inclusion and exclusion.

As against the ideology of the "natural," homogenised order, the consciously secular postcolonial state dispenses with its legitimization through the appeal to any transcendental "natural" order. Secularism is a conscious utopian construct. It is a fuzzy, diffuse notion, an ideal projected towards the future as against the hard contours of right-wing ideology based on resentments derived from interpretations of the past. Secularism dispenses with the tribal principle that bonds through race, religion, and language, which explains its "vulnerability" and its fragility. It is highly dependent on the success of modern democratic institutions functioning in an intact manner. It is the political way of dealing with and sustaining pluriculturalism. This also marks the attempt to construct a pluriculturalist society of choice (*Gesellschaft*) as against a community (*Gemeinschaft*) defined by religious bonding, to use a distinction made in 1887 by the sociologist Tönnies (Tönnies 1991). Secularism is a project of the postcolonial Indian state, which is directed against linear processes of religious homogenisation.

Jawaharlal Nehru tried to capture the linguistic and cultural complexity of India, its diversity, and unity by using the image of a palimpsest that negates the essentialisation imposed by authenticity and origins. As he wrote, while in jail from 1942-45 during the Freedom Struggle, India seemed to him to be an

ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously. All of these exist together in our conscious or subconscious selves, though we may not be aware of them, and they had gone to build up the complex and mysterious personality of India (Nehru 1999: 59).

This image of the palimpsest, which Victor Hugo also used for Europe (Lützel 1982: 442), is admittedly idealistic, but it corresponds in many ways with the notion of the simultaneity of non-synchronous worlds in any historical formation (*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*) that Ernst Bloch formulated in the context of his study of fascism (Bloch 1979). The validity of a palimpsest lies in its totality and not in any particular layer, for the layering can be seen as a form of enrichment that leads to the dominance of the multiple. Any attempt to ascribe authenticity to any particular layer or to some mythical *Urtext* of culture or history leads to an impoverishment because it destroys the totality of the process of inscription and the simultaneity of the latent presence of its multiple layers. Homogenisation is a form of cultural

appropriation that seeks to give exclusive authenticity to a particular layer or section of a cultural palimpsest. Strictly speaking, however, the *Urtext* of a palimpsest would be a blank surface. The drive towards authenticity in a pluralistic society is a drive towards a *tabula rasa*, an obliteration of complexity. The destruction inherent in our contemporary wars is this obsession with the power of erasure.

But if we continue to use Nehru's idealistic perspective in an affirmative manner today without looking at the erosion of Indian pluralism through the rise of fundamentalisms, we lose sight of the utopian content of the ideal of the palimpsest. Salman Rushdie's novel *The Moor's last Sigh*, which is also an allegory of India and its iconic city Bombay, therefore withdraws Nehru's liberal vision and varies the aporetic possibilities of the figure of the palimpsest by resituating it negatively. Contemporary Bombay's contradictions lie now in the contradictions between a fictive appearance and a phantom-like reality, and this is perhaps true of the whole of India. In the novel, the protagonist, Moor, can comprehend the corrupt soul of his father, Abraham Zogoiby, only through a negative interpretation of the palimpsest of the city, now corrupted by the interwoven worlds of politics, crime and money, and communal violence. India and the city have become a grotesque palimpsest and a parody of cultural complexity:

The City itself, perhaps the whole country, was a palimpsest, Under World beneath Over World, black market beneath white; when the whole of life was like this, when an invisible reality moved phantomwise beneath a visible fiction, subverting all its meanings, how then could Abraham's career have been any different? How could any of us have escaped that deadly layering? How, trapped as we were in the hundred per cent fakery of the real, in the fancy-dress, weeping-Arab kitsch of the superficial, could we have penetrated to the full, sensual truth of the lost mother below? How could we have lived authentic lives? How could we have failed to be grotesque? (Rushdie 1996: 184f.).

In the novel, the recovery of the utopian dimensions of a palimpsestic India is no longer possible through the politics of the present, and thus is located in artistic praxis. Moor's mother, Aurora Zogoiby's ironic project of painting pictures fuses the memory of the destruction of Europe's pluriculturalist potentials in the Spain of 1492 with independent India's potentials in 1947. The fusion of these two potentials seeks to *reconstruct* a heterogeneous, pluralistic India threatened by the forces of homogenisation. And this Utopia of reconstructed heterogeneity could then be called "Mooristan" or "Palimpstine" (Rushdie 1996: 226).

In Rushdie's novel, Palimpstine can be realised only as a dying vision. This is a realistic perspective because the destruction of palimpsestic perspective is the bleak reality of India's recent history. I conclude by referring to the monopolisation of tradition through fundamentalism. In the North Indian city of Ayodhya, birth place of Lord Ram, there is a mosque ascribed to the Mogul emperor Babur (15th century). The Babri Masjid, as it is called, has suppos-

edly been erected on Hindu temple foundations devoted to Lord Ram. Hindu fundamentalist destroyed the mosque in 1992. If we adhere to the idea of a palimpsest, then it is in no way surprising that one religious monument should stand on the foundations of an older and different religious monument. This is part of the bloody history of the sub continent that we have inherited as a shared, historical, pluricultural result (Noorani 2003).

## V

If we say that the goal of the secular project was the establishment of a complex modern society as against the counter project of a single religious community, we reiterate the difference between heterogeneity and homogeneity. The identification and occupation of places of memory and its monopolisation destroys the complexity of the palimpsest. The destruction of the mosque was in fact the drive to create a blank *Urtext* as *tabula rasa*. Places of memory become contested sites for violent appropriations of the past. The destruction of the mosque by Hindu fundamentalists in December 1992 led to widespread communal violence between Hindus and Muslims in India. Inventing the myth of origins seeks to destroy the palimpsest of culture and to replace the multi-layered nature of monuments and sites of memory in a city with uni-dimensional points of reference to a *single* past, to a single fundamentalist urban space.

The following illustrations remind us in their stark unambiguity of this turning point in India's contemporary history:

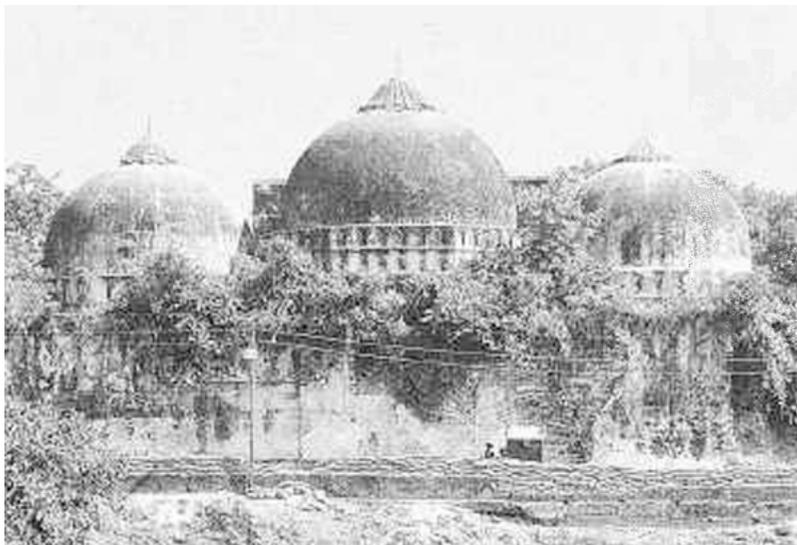


Figure 1: The Babri Masjid as it was before December 1992  
(Photo: © Shaid Khan, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babri\\_Mosque](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babri_Mosque))



Figure 2: Storming the mosque  
(Photo: © <http://www.islam-online.net>, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babri\\_Mosque](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babri_Mosque))



Figure 3: The result of destruction  
(Photo: © <http://www.islam-online.net>, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babri\\_Mosque](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babri_Mosque))

What remains after stone and rubble? A reference to another work of art may serve as a tentative conclusion. In *Speaking Stones*, an installation by the artist N. M. Rimzon,



Figure 4: *Speaking Stones*; N. M. Rimzon (Photo: © N.M. Rimzon)

we see the figure of a mourner crouching within a circle of stone fragments that hold down photographs of India's history of communal violence, which, invoked in this manner, become testimony to the history of violence and our "responsibility to grieve" (Kapur 2003: 59).

We have here an instance of how the labour and work of mourning and grieving (*Trauerarbeit*) lead to what one may, following Peter Weiss, call the *Aesthetics of Resistance* (Weiss 1975-81), which has emerged out of India's troubled trajectory from secular visions to violent struggles over the control of the memory of the past. Combined with mass movements for the renewal of secular politics, this has the potential to restate the projects in favour of cultural complexity in contemporary India and its beleaguered cities.

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