A Nation of Imaginaries

Negotiating India's Collective Identity through Mughal Miniatures

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

India is a nation of imaginaries. Through time, the subcontinent has been captivated by mystical and profane conceptions of collective identity which have inspired hope, fear, and belonging. Since 2014, the nation has been swept up by the imaginary of Hindutva, a cultural nationalist movement that proposes a primordial cultural and ethnic identity within the territorial region of the Indian subcontinent. The Hindutva movement has been championed by the governing political right which have deployed it to sow communal divide and establish a homogenous society. The Indian-Muslim is particularly antagonized within this socio-political context and has been pushed to the margins of society. Rupal Oza, a scholar on nationalism, suggests that the Hindutva project is a "narrative of spatial belonging and segregation" which is complicated by the entangled histories of the Hindu and the Indian-Muslim. As such, the machinations of the Hindutva imaginary see it inscribing itself within the spatial geography of the subcontinent while simultaneously Othering the Indian-Muslim.

My research is situated within this contentious milieu where I investigate the transformation of space by an emboldened nationalist movement. Against the backdrop of an uncertain future for the Indian-Muslim, my research traces the past to uncover the shared history of myths and memories of the Hindu and Muslim communities. My study lands on the late 16th century when the Mughal Empire sprawled across the majority of the Indian subcontinent, unifying an incredibly diverse group of subjects with vast cultural and religious differences. A product of this unprecedented tolerance and social cohesion is the Mughal miniature painting tradition which I foreground as an important visual archive of politics, power, and the ideals of a society. More importantly, I posit the miniature's characteristic spatial and temporal distortion as a unique capacity to visualize several continuous and discontinuous narratives in the space of a single image.

In this research, I propose that the distinct qualities of the Mughal painting tradition can be re-mobilized in contemporary discourse to critically engage with the Hindutva imaginary and expand the limits imposed on the marginal Other. I lean on the work of Henri Lefevbre and Jane Rendell to argue that the production of miniature images is a radical spatial practice to negotiate the Othering of the Indian-Muslim; where spatial representation is a form of spatial production. My research culminates in a number of disparate reconfigured miniatures that not only interrogate the Hindutva imaginary, but also re-inscribe the Indian-Muslim back into the socio-political fabric of India.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to begin by acknowledging that the School of Architecture, where this thesis was developed, sits on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. Our main campus is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River since time and immemorial. I want to personally acknowledge the communities that have historically lived on and cared for this land that I live and work on today.

In speaking of community, this work would not have been possible without the immense support I received from a large number of people near and far.

I am deeply grateful to my thesis supervisor, Prof. Tracey Eve Winton for her endless support through this long and arduous journey; your guidance and wisdom was instrumental in shaping this work. I am thankful for Prof. Robert Jan Van Pelt who took genuine interest in my work and pushed me to critically engage with my ideas. My thanks also goes to Prof. Anwar Jaber who graciously read my work and offered insightful comments that would eventually alter the trajectory of my research. I wish to also thank Prof. Vincent Hui and Court Sin who championed my desire to pursue graduate studies. I am also very appreciative of Prof. Jane Hutton for giving me an opportunity to prove myself and fulfill this desire.

To my editors Elias and Joseph, I am indebted to you both, for all the time you gave to refining my work from the initial draft to the final presentation. The success of this work owes so much to both of your efforts.

Outside of my research work, I cannot thank enough the people of Rm. 3002. To Nilo, for always finding the divine in the mundane. To Safaa, for the many long conversations that became shared therapy. To Hania, for her unusual wisdom such as, “he bit me such a bite”. To Shannon, for the coffee-breaks that turned into mutual hysteria. To Alison, Matt and many others who I shared meaningful conversations with and countless laughs.

Lastly, I cannot imagine completing this work without the patience, love and care I received from Dhisana and Beau. I thank you both for making me a better man than I was before I started this journey.

DEDICATION

To my sister, Anam.

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Author's Statement

As I write this introduction, I realize I am nearing two decades since I have emigrated from India. While there have been countless opportunities over that period to visit my country of birth, life had other plans for me. My immediate circumstances meant that there were always other pressing concerns, whether it was a new job or a demanding course load, visiting India became a secondary priority in my grand narrative. It wouldn't be until much later in life that I recognized the impact of this deficiency on my growth as an individual. From feelings of immense distance and disconnect with my family in India to posturing a Canadian identity and culture to better assimilate with my new community. Throughout my twenties I reconciled a hybrid-self that operated fine in neutral environments such as the corporate office or university classroom. However, beyond these spaces, where either cultural identity dominated the social backdrop, my constructed self-fractured and splintered. It was apparent I had lost touch with my roots and was completely unfamiliar with a place that I had been associating with.

In hopes of bridging this gap, I found myself in my graduate studies exploring a part of my identity that I had neglected. I took to researching the early history of the Indian subcontinent, the people, their art and culture to better understand and engage with my past. I quickly grasped how culturally syncretic the nation was in part due to the comings and goings of various historical empires and people. I also noted that there were moments of significant conflict and tragedy, however each period was followed by stretches of great cooperation and tolerance. This is in stark contrast to India's current developing situation.

In looking to the past, I was made aware of history's uncomfortable place within contemporary discourse. The rising Hindutva movement in India is pushing a narrative which labels the minority Indian-Muslim as foreign, and worse, an invasive force. Through a blatant rewriting of history, cultural contributions have been reassigned, and new unconfirmed historiography introduced. In front of our eyes, we see the Indian-Muslim slowly erased from the pages of time.

As the communal tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities head towards a boiling point, I am unquestionably searching to negotiate the divide. Moreover, I am coming to terms with my idyllic vision of a distant home that is now methodically erasing my existence and our entangled history. After much reflection, I see the following research as not just a document of my once home, but a method to bridge an eventual way back for myself, and for the community I am a part of.

Fig. 0.1 A reconfigured miniature illustrating the politics of fear against the Indian-Muslim; as an invasive colonial entity and of having pan-Islamic inclinations, image by author, 2023

Introduction

Shah Jahan

You knew, Emperor of India, Shah Jahan,
That life, youth, wealth, renown
All float away down the stream of time.
Your only dream
Was to preserve forever your heart's pain.
The harsh thunder of imperial power
Would fade into sleep
Like a sunset's crimson splendour,
But it was your hope
That at least a single, eternally-heaved sigh would stay
To grieve the sky.

-Rabindranath Tagore
One Hundred and One Poems - Translated by Kshitish Roy

The late 19th century poet, Rabindranath Tagore wrote a poem addressing the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. In it, he spoke to the transience of existence and described Shah Jahan's commission of the Taj Mahal as an eternal monument to love and the intense tragedy of loss. Tagore would notably liken the Taj Mahal to a "teardrop on the cheek of time", forever reminding us of the Emperor's sorrow.

Cladded in white marble with delicate inlay work of precious and semi precious stones, the mausoleum stands as one of the most important displays of Indo-Islamic architecture styles in the world. The Taj Mahal would take close to 22 years to construct and very nearly bankrupt Shah Jahan's kingdom. However large and exhaustive the undertaking, Shah Jahan much like the Mughal emperors before him, saw the construction of such monuments as an important exercise in imperial authority and a display of the empire's cultural splendor. The location of such monuments was also critical in situating power; the Taj Mahal would be constructed in Agra, the first capital of the Mughal Empire established by Shah Jahan's grandfather. When Shah Jahan decided to relocate the capital in 1648, he would build an entirely new walled city, located in what is now known as modern day Delhi. Shah Jahan commissioned a record number of monuments in the walled city to signify its importance in the empire including the Red Fort, a red sandstone clad royal palace, and the Jama Masjid, one of the largest mosques in India.

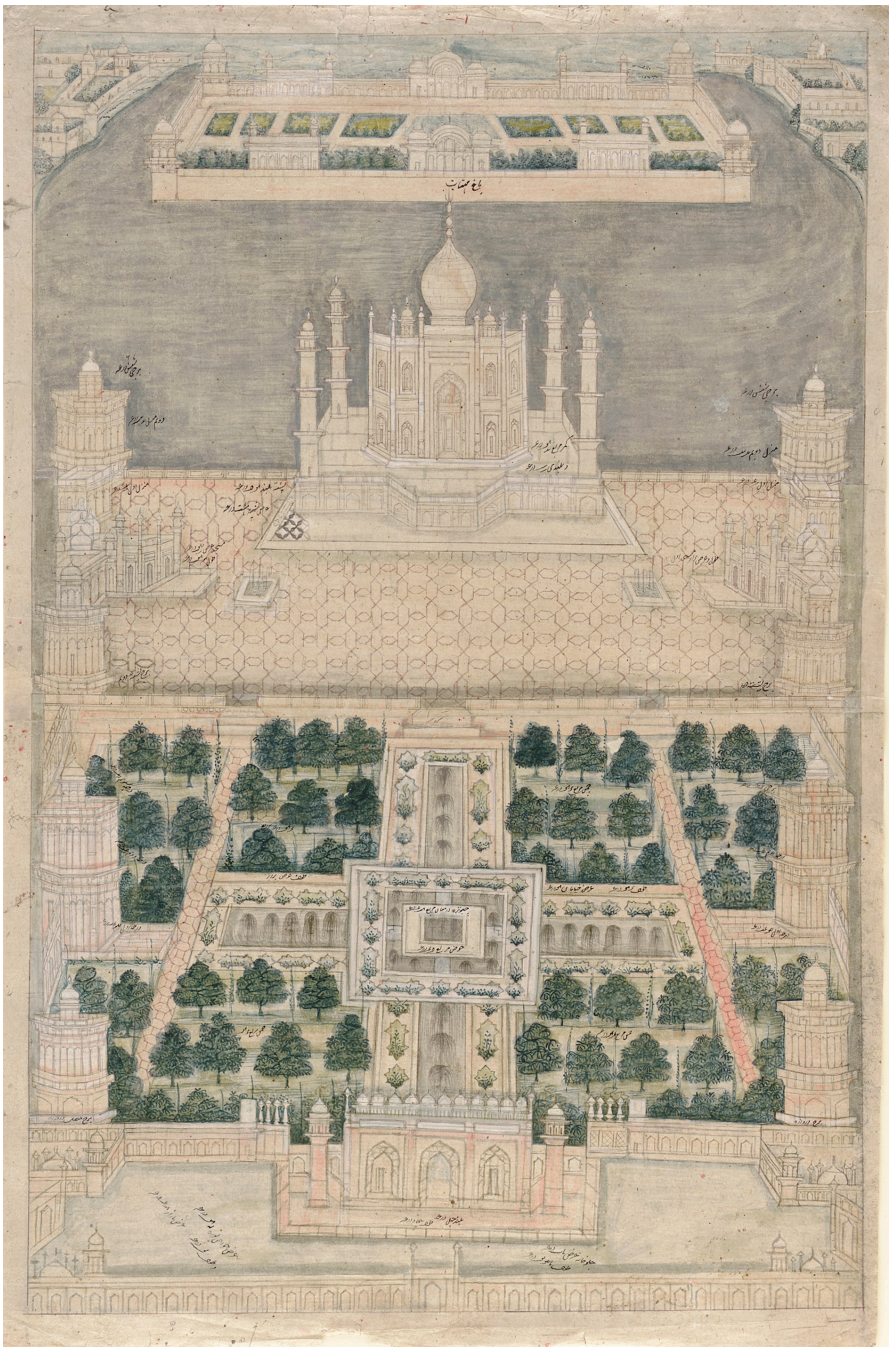

Fig. 0.2 A bird's eye view of the Taj Mahal at Agra, completed in the Company School Tradition, Artist unknown. 1790-1810

The Mughals were not oblivious to the relationship between the production of space and power. There is extensive scholarly work suggesting the Mughal Empire's use of architecture as a vehicle to impose imperial subjectivity and authority.[1,2,3] Ebba Koch, the foremost expert on the study of Mughal arts, suggests that architecture was considered "imperial representational art par excellence" and notes that Shah Jahan was a "master aesthetician" who systematically used the potential of art to bolster his kingship. Koch also argues that the projection of power was not limited to built space but explored through alternative apertures like Art. Among them, one particular visual tradition known as the Mughal miniature stands apart as an intriguing study of art history and the politics of representation. While the visual culture of miniature painting originated from adjacent lands, the painting style was quickly integrated into the Mughal Empire's arsenal. It is here, where Koch states that miniature art was systematized and deployed to lend "force to the Emperor's authority" where the pursuit of beauty through art was a mastery of the Emperor over his realm.[4]

[1] Ebba Koch, *Mughal Architecture: An Outline of Its History and Development (1526-1858)* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2014).

[2] Abhishek Kaicker, *The King and the People: Sovereignty and Popular Politics in Mughal Delhi* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[3] Santhi Kavuri-Bauer, *Monumental Matters the Power, Subjectivity, and Space of India's Mughal Architecture* (Duke University Press, n.d.).

[4] Ebba Koch, "Visual Strategies of Imperial Self-Representation: The Windsor Pādshāhnāma Revisited," The Art Bulletin 99, no. 3 (2017): 93–124, https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2017.1292871.

Fig. 0.3 An imperial procession in front of the Jama Masjid, Artist unknown. 1719

Fig. 0.4 Shah Jahan on a globe with his four sons, Artist Balchand, 1628-1640

Miniatures such as *Shah Jahan on a globe with his four sons*, reflect the overt projection of power in some commissioned images; an allegorical portrait which visualizes the Emperor standing above a globe as cherubs - likely inspired from European art, and the tremendous cultural exchange occurring between India and Rome - lower a golden crown upon his head. Mika Natif, an art historian argues images such as this illustrate "the dynasty's broad intellectual identities, cultural pluralism, state policies, and openness to other artistic traditions all facets of their own [Mughal] cultural superiority."[5]

[5] Mika Natif, "Introduction," chapter, in *Mughal Occidentalism: Artistic Encounters between Europe and Asia at the Courts of India, 1580-1630* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 6.

Fig. 0.5 Louvre Museum, Department of Islamic Arts, 2013

While miniature paintings from the Mughal era have been divided and scattered across foreign cultural institutions, the built architecture of a profound cultural past still exists 300 years later in modern day Delhi. However, in 2023, these monuments sit on shifting ground at the epicenter of a new conception of nation and identity.

In the 2014 parliamentary elections the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), a nationalist political party led by Narendra Modi, won majority parliamentary seats by fanning the flames of communalism and cultural nationalism.[6] The BJP stands as a champion of the *Hindutva* movement, an ideology that proposes a primordialist Hindu ethnic and cultural identity originating in the territorial region of the Indian subcontinent.[7] The Hindutva ideology originated in the late 19th century for several reasons, but primarily as a response to the perceived threat of a politically organized Muslim minority and its pan-Islamic inclinations.[8,9] However, the nationalist movement quickly transformed to address a number of perceived issues facing the Hindu populace. In its many formulations, the Hindutva campaign is particularly antagonistic in its perception of the Muslim minority in India. In the Hindutva view, the Indian-Muslim is framed as a historical invader to the region and as having extraterritorial religious and cultural loyalties.[10]

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[6] Christophe Jaffrelot, "Hindutva: What It Means to Be a Hindu," chapter, in *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023).

[7] Christophe Jaffrelot, chapter, in *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), 25.

[8] Prabhu Bapu, "Muslims - the 'Historical Enemy,'" chapter, in *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North India, 1915-1930: Constructing Nation and History* (Routledge, n.d.), 84.

[9] Jaffrelot, Modi's India, 12

[10] Jaffrelot, The Hindu Nationalist, 25

Fig. 0.6 Muslim refugees attempting to flee India sit on the roof of an overcrowded train near Delhi, Associated Press, 1947

Fig. 0.7 Prevailing Religions of the British Indian Empire, John George Bartholomew, 1909

The notions of the Muslim Other culminated in 1947 after the colonial exit of the British East India Company. A pivotal moment in India's history, the event known as the Partition, saw the nation divided along religious lines with mass exodus and deaths of millions of Muslims and Hindus. The brutalities of the Partition still linger in the conscience of both groups. Post-Partition India has seen the general sentiment lean towards secular nationalism, a product of the atrocities and violence that both communities experienced during the Partition. However, the last three decades have seen heightened communalist tensions that sparked moments of intense violence between groups; the critical events in this relationship are the 1992 Babri Mosque demolition, and the 2002 Gujarat riots.[11]

In the present day, the BJP and the Hindutva campaign have had astounding support across the nation but a tenacious opposition of progressive, secular nationalists threatens Hindutva from cementing itself in India's future. For the BJP and the larger Hindutva campaign, these political successes are fleeting and the nation requires a deeper reimagination. As such, the Hindutva campaign has adopted a multi-modal approach to mobilizing its ideology. Scholars note the structured deployment of Hindutva historiography in academic literature such as the National Council of Education, Research and Training (NCERT) removing key chapters on the Mughal Empire from highschool textbooks.[12] In the entertainment industry, Bollywood films villainize the Indian-Muslim through tropes of a terrorist, gangster, foreign-spy against a dominant Hindu force for good.[13]

The BJP campaign has also shifted its energies to the built form of its cities. In the context of Delhi, the political center of India, the remnants of the Mughal walled city still dominate the contemporary urban fabric. This poses a notable obstacle for the BJP as these monuments of the past occupy important physical and ideological sites that diminish the Hindutva imaginary of India. The very public presence and international notoriety of these Mughal monuments threaten the primordialist and homogeneous 'Hindu India', furthermore, they signify an enlightened Indian-Muslim period of India outside of supposed 'Hindu contributions'

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[11] Gregory Derek Pred Allan and Rupal Oza, "The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India," chapter, in *Violent Geographies: Fear, Terror, and Political Violence* (New York, USA: Routledge, 2006), 164.

[12] Amlan Sarkar, "Why Hindu Nationalists Want to Erase Mughal History," The Swaddle, accessed November 2, 2023, https://theswaddle.com/why-hindu-nationalism-wants-to-erase-mughal-history.

[13] Samanth Subramanian, "When the Hindu Right Came for Bollywood," The New Yorker, October 10, 2022, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/10/17/when-the-hindu-right-came-for-bollywood.

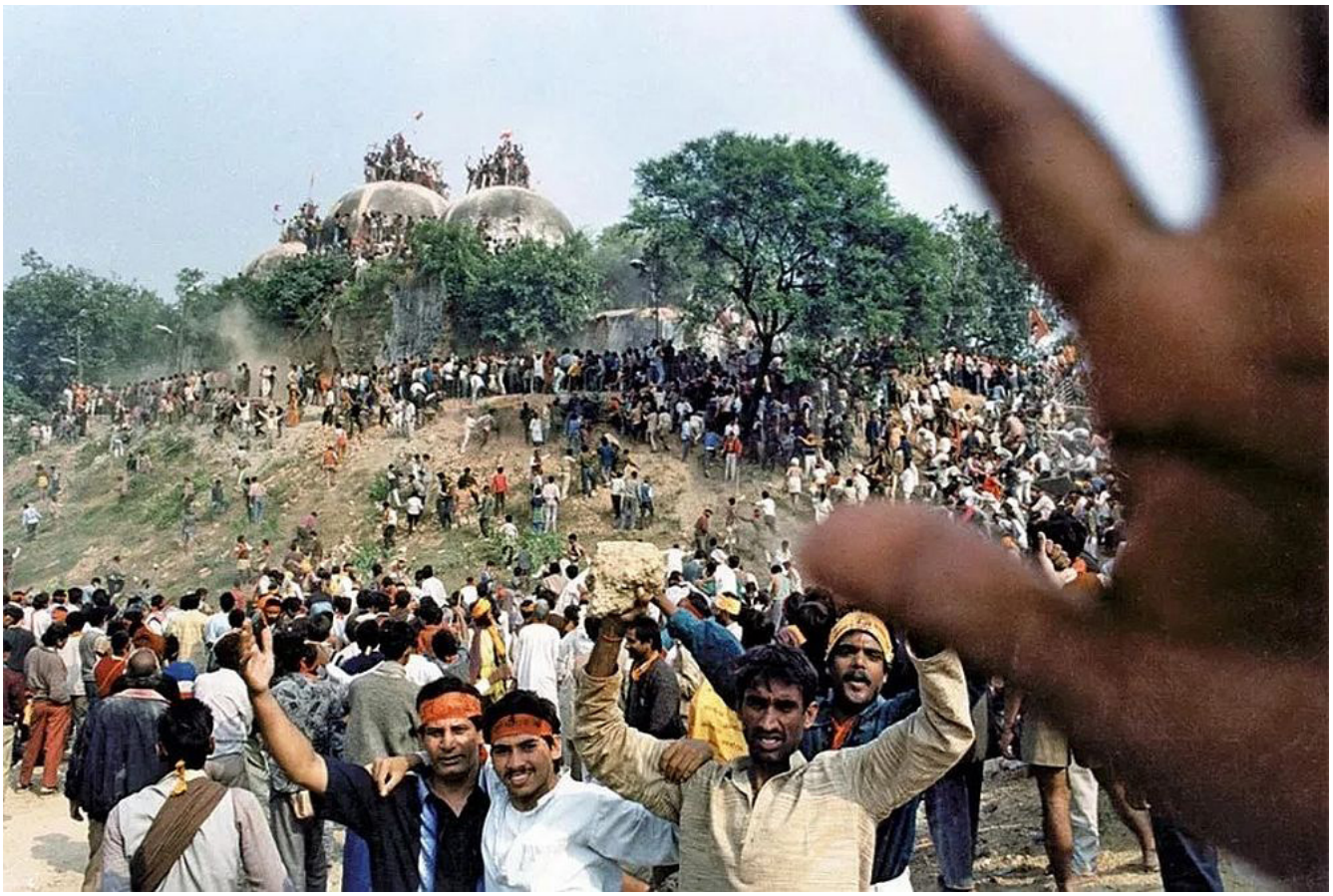

Fig. 0.8 Kar sevaks demolishing the Babri masjid, Agence France-Presse, 1992

The BJP has responded to this challenge with two approaches in subverting these monuments and further remaking the Indian-Muslim in the Hindutva vision. The first approach is a form of spatial contestation, whereby the Hindutva and its armatures question the origin of the Mughal constructions. Often the Hindutva campaign uncovers new archaeologies within the architecture that challenges the Mughal character and is then used to conclude a new Hindu origin and programme. In 2022, a member of the BJP's political party filed a petition to the Indian High Court to investigate 22 locked rooms under the Taj Mahal. The petition claimed that the rooms below the monument held confirmation that the Taj Mahal was built on the ruins of an ancient *Shiva* temple named *Tejo Mahalaya*. The petition's supporters further argued that the mausoleum was in fact created 400 years prior by a Hindu king and passed down to other Hindu rulers, until 1632, when the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan destroyed and annexed the temple. While the high court would dismiss the formal plea due to a lack of evidence and the attempt thwarted, the approach has proven successfully executed by the BJP and the Hindutva campaign in the past.

In 1992, in the state of Ayodhya, Hindutva supporters were successful in contesting the site of the Babri Mosque. They claimed that the Mosque was built on a historic temple and was the ancient birthplace of the Hindu god *Rama*. The Babri Mosque, constructed in 1528 and named after the first Mughal Emperor Babur, would become a contentious site with numerous legal disputes. These debates would eventually culminate with a violent takeover of the mosque by Hindutva supporters who would demolish the structure. The spatial contest triggered international headlines and nationwide riots that resulted in the death of hundreds of Hindus and Muslims in India.

The second approach the BJP employs is the production of overt Hindutva space intended to raise the Hindutva profile and simultaneously alienate the Indian-Muslim from the urban fabric. In the text *The Fundamentalist City: Religiosity and the remaking of urban space*, the historian Mrinalini Rajagopalan situated the capital city of Delhi within the 'rhetorical' landscape of the Hindutva. In it, she identified the furtive practices by the Hindutva campaign to appropriate 'urban space and urban history' in the capital city of Delhi to serve the Hindutva imaginary. Rajagopalan specifically examines the subversion of Delhi's dominant Mughal cultural landscape by reclaiming Delhi's Hindu past.

Fig. 0.9 A statue of warrior King Shivaji Bhonsle. In recent history, Shivaji has been elevated as a proto-nationalist and hero of the Hindus. Kees van Tilburg, 2001

Among the techniques employed by the Hindutva; BJP's commissioning of statues along key circulation routes to the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort in Delhi. The statues are of minor historical figures that have seen new light as they symbolize a relevant Hindu 'militant masculinities'. Rajagopalan suggests that often the memorialized figures are individuals who have in history stood against an invasive Other, typically an Indian-Muslim. These spatial practices are carefully curated and produce an urban space where Hindutva ideals take shape aggressively against a Muslim Other, inscribing the Hindutva imaginary deep into the built form of the city itself.

The spatial strategies are not limited to Delhi and span beyond into other major socio-political centers where the Hindutva has decided to amplify its presence. The methodical deconstruction of Mughal signifiers in the urban fabric is reflective of a larger Hindutva agenda of cultural erasure for the Muslim minority group. Referencing the work of Renu Desai and the 'communalized city' as well as Rupal Oza's on 'violent geographies' these spatial practices are predatory and seek to further Other the Indian-Muslim minority from the socio-political fabric.[14;15]

Against the backdrop of an uncertain future for the Indian-Muslim, my research traces the past to investigate the entangled history of the Hindu and Muslim community. The study lands on the late 16th century when the Mughal Empire sprawled across the majority of the Indian subcontinent unifying an incredibly diverse group of subjects with vast cultural and religious differences. From Kabul in the west to Bengal in the east, the empire promoted religious tolerance and societal harmony that ignited a period of dramatic social reform and cultural enlightenment.[16]

Within this milieu of a cultural renaissance and social cohesion, the Mughal miniature artifact acts as a unique product and record of the Empire's ambitious vision of harmony. The miniature tradition transforms in fascinating ways to respond to the various cross-cultural exchanges experienced from within and outside of the Empire. As such, my research foregrounds the Mughal miniature painting tradition as an important artifact for critical discourse on politics, culture, and religion. Relying on existing scholarly work surrounding the miniature tradition, I posit the artifact as a rich archive of societal ideals, politics, and power. More importantly, I highlight the miniature's characteristic spatial and temporal distortion as a unique capacity to visualize several continuous and discontinuous narratives in the space of a single image.

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[14] Nezar AlSayyad, Mejgan Massoumi, and Renu Desai, "Producing and Contesting the 'Communalized City,'" chapter, in *The Fundamentalist City?: Religiosity and the Remaking of Urban Space* (London: Routledge, 2011), 100.

[15] Oza, Violent Geographies, 156

[16] Natif, Mughal Occidentalism, 4

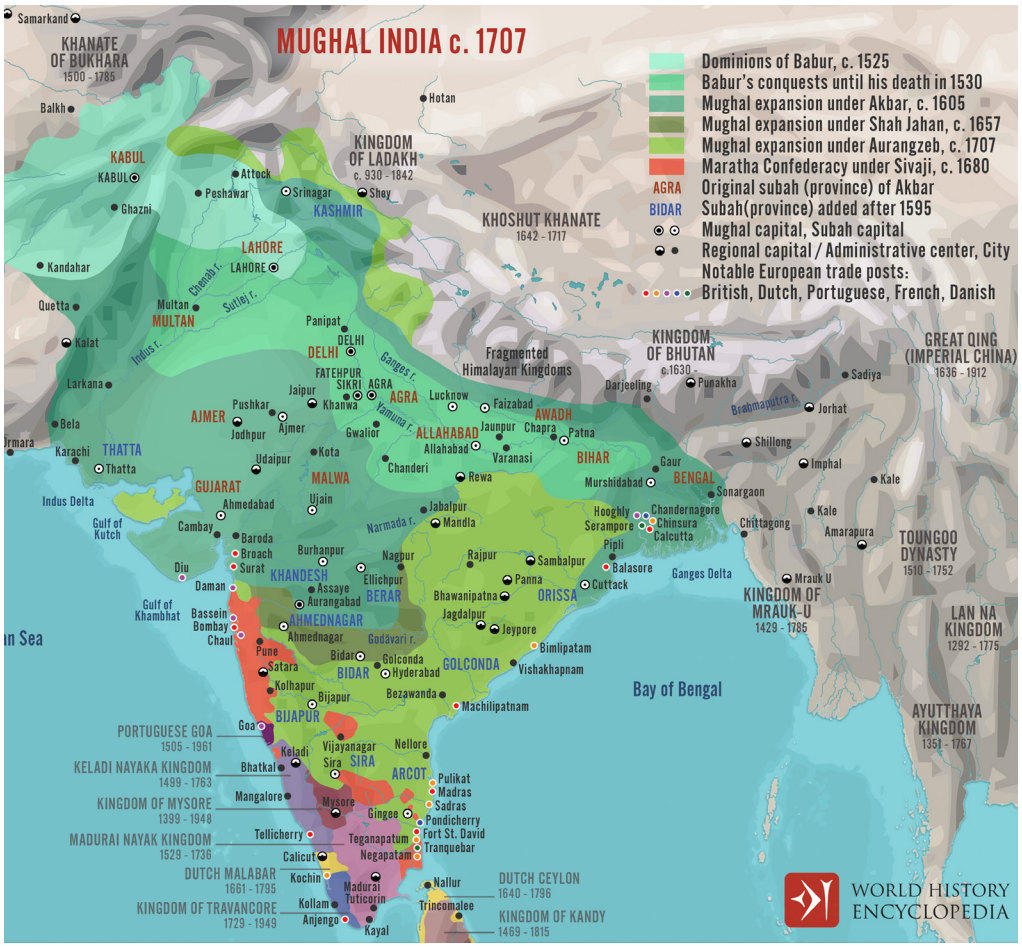

Fig. 0.10 The extent of the Mughal empire from 1525 - 1707, Simeon Netchev, 2022.

In this research, I propose that the distinct qualities of the Mughal painting tradition can be re-mobilized in contemporary discourse to critically engage with the Hindutva imaginary and expand the limits imposed on the marginal Other. I lean on the work of scholars such as Henri Lefevbre and Jane Rendell to argue that the production of miniature images is a radical spatial practice to negotiate the Othering of the Indian-Muslim; where spatial representation is a form of spatial production. My research culminates in a number of disparate reconfigured miniatures examining the Hindutva imaginary and re-inscribing the Indian-Muslim in the socio-political fabric of India.

1. An Entangled History

1.1 Introduction

India has long been a deeply syncretic society with a rich history of cultural intermixing and pluralistic communities. In the 17th century, Mughal crown prince Dara Shikoh would author, *The Mingling of the Two Oceans*, a treatise devoted to the mystical and pluralistic commonalities between Hinduism and Islam. While in the mid-19th century, the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar promulgated that Hinduism and Islam both shared the same essence and operated an empire steeped in Hindu-Islamic culture. However, within decades at the turn of the twentieth century, the subcontinent has rapidly devolved into a highly polarized society where communities, particularly the Hindu and the Indian-Muslim, cannot imagine a peaceful existence together.

In the writing that follows, I examine the deterioration of the Hindu and Muslim relations by outlining the socio-political context that sets the stage for a hyper nationalist movement to take shape. I define the Hindutva ideology, its figureheads, the political apparatus and machinations of the movement, the British Raj's involvement in the Partition, and finally key moments in post-Colonial India that awakened the Hindutva spirit. I continue this writing by defining the Indian-Muslim through the Hindutva project's perceived threat of the Muslim Other. This includes the Indian-Muslim's as a 'colonizer', its pan-Islamic inclinations, and finally its association with militant Islamic extremism.

1.2 Hindutva and the politics of fear

Under the leadership of Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Hindu nationalism has seen a renewed fervor in the social and political fabric of India. Since 2014, the BJP has strategically endorsed a nebulous Hindu-right narrative that has sowed communal divide between minority groups.[1] Hindutva, a term which translates to Hindu-ness, is at the core of the BJP's platform; it associates a primordial Hindu cultural and ethnic identity with the territorial region of the Indian subcontinent.[2]

The term Hindutva is first traced back to the 1923 seminal text, *Essentials of Hindutva*, authored by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.[3] The intellectual father of Hindu Nationalism, Savarkar introduces Hindutva as a way of life and notes three essentials for Hindutva: a common *rashtra* (nation), a common *jati* (race), and a common *sanskriti* (culture).[4] Savarkar is careful to note that Hindutva is not a singular religious identification but rather a cultural and territorial identification. To that end, Savarkar introduces India as *pitrubhoomi* (Holy land) where, "Hindu denoted all those whose religion has grown "out of the soil of India"— Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and the multiple Hindu sects, the Hindu *Dharma*."[5] In this ideological framework Hindutva incorporates all the religious communities with a common Indic origin while simultaneously excluding Christians and Muslims.

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[1] Giorgio Shani, "Towards a 'Hindu Rashtra: Hindutva', Religion, and Nationalism in India," Religion, State and Society 49, no. 3 (2021): 264–80, https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2021.1947731.

[2] Chetan Bhatt, "The Primordial Nation of the Hindus," chapter, in *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (S.l.: Bloomsbury India, 2020), 12.

[3] Jaffrelot, The Hindu Nationalist, 11

[4] Jaffrelot, The Hindu Nationalist, 19

[5] Thomas Blom Hansen, "Imagining the Hindu Nation," chapter, in *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Roskilde, Denmark: International Development Studies, Roskilde University, 1997), 79.

The Othering of the Muslim minority within Hindutva ideology is of particular note, as it corresponds to a perceived social and political threat of the Indian-Muslim within the subcontinent.[6] Savarkar notes, "Muslims had potentially "extraterritorial loyalties," as their "holy lands" were outside the territory of India."[7] The fear of the Indian-Muslim introduced in Savarkar's Hindutva remains consistent through the decades that follow, however the modalities of fear evolve. Scholars widely organize the Hindutva's perceived Muslim threat into two distinct periods of Muslim identity, the pre-colonial and the post-colonial Muslim.[8] The pre-colonial Muslim fear is associated with the invasion and rule by Muslim Empires such as the Mughal dynasty, while the post-colonial Muslim fear is shaped by notions of pan-Islamism, a weak pseudo-secular governance in independent India, and finally a contemporaneous mode of violent Islamic extremism.

According to contemporary scholars, the communalist tensions between Hindus and Muslims occurred under the colonial administration of India from 1858 to 1947, known as the *British Raj*. Specifically, the Crown rule's imperial statecraft created political and religious boundaries between the Hindus and the Muslims[9] The British Raj's use of 'indirect rule' required defining communities along religious lines and forming political representation. As British historian Alex von Tunzelmann notes, "many Indians stopped accepting the diversity of their own thoughts and began to ask themselves in which of the boxes they belonged."[10] Peter van der Veer, an academic on religion and nationalism in India, suggests that this 'colonial novelty' was fundamental to the emergence of religious nationalism.[11]

In British India, the fear and threats of the minority Other drove Hindu Nationalists to mobilize their majority constituency towards political action.

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[6] Dibyesh Anand, "Hindu Nation under Siege," chapter, in *Hindu Nationalism in India and the Politics of Fear* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 20.

[7] Blom Hansen, Saffron Wave, 79

[8] Desai, Communalized City, 100

[9] Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

[10] William Dalrymple, "The Mutual Genocide of Indian Partition," The New Yorker, June 22, 2015, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/29/the-great-divide-books-dalrymple.

[11] Peter van d Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India.* (Oxford University Press, 1998), Quoted in Oza, Violent Geographies, 155

The first half of the twentieth century saw the political machinations of the Hindutva spirit gain momentum through the Hindu *Mahasabha*, a communalist political organization determined to protect the Hindu community's interest.[12] The timing of the Hindu Mahsabha corresponds with the creation of the Muslim Other's own political establishment, the *All India Muslim League*, an entity committed to securing representation and interest for Muslims in British India.

In addition to the Hindu Mahsabha, a new Hindu nationalist volunteer organization named *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), gained remarkable traction within the Hindu youth.[13] The group founded by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar was inspired by Italian Fascist groups and teachings of Savarkar's Hindutva.[14] The RSS was not a political organization but a collective in service of the Hindu community to counter the "organized and strong" Muslim Other. Hedgewar saw the Hindus as "disaggregated and weak" and sought to reform the Hindu into an aggressive, masculine force through a 'character building' regiment.[15]

The mid-twentieth century marks the climax of the Indian independence movement led by the secular *Indian National Congress* (INC) and its figure-head, Mahatma Gandhi. Through the ideology of *Satyagraha*, a form of civil disobedience, Mahatma Gandhi and the INC's ultimate goal was to end the British colonial rule and establish an independent India with a secular and democratic political structure. Critically, the RSS, and Hindu Mahsabha would openly oppose Gandhi's "Quit India" campaign as both parties saw benefit in either cooperating, or skirting the British. The RSS saw the anti-colonial struggle as a diversion of resources and a distraction from their primary objective of reforming Hindu character. Whilst the Hindu Mahsabha's ideological focus was concerned with an anti-Muslim rhetoric as opposed to an anti-colonial struggle. More importantly, the Hindu Mahasabha saw INC's call for a secular India inclusive of all religions as eroding the Hindu spirit. Furthermore, the Mahasabha deemed Gandhi's non-violent civil resistance as emasculating the Hindu youth and feeding into the 'weak' Hindu physique.[16]

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[12] Bhatt, Hindu Nationalism, N.p.

[13] Bhatt, Hindu Nationalism, 113

[14] Bhatt, Hindu Nationalism, 123

[15] Bhatt, Hindu Nationalism, 117

[16] Bhuwan Kumar Jha, "Militarizing the Community: Hindu Mahasabha's Initiative (1915–1940)," Studies in History 29, no. 1 (2013): 119–46, https://doi.org/10.1177/0257643013496691.

Help the Refugees
Chandni Chowk, Delhi.

The Hindustan Times

LARGEST CIRCULATION IN NORTHERN, NORTH-WESTERN AND CENTRAL INDIA

NEW DELHI FRIDAY, AUGUST 15, 1947.

INDIA INDEPENDENT : BRITISH RULE ENDS

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TAKES OVER

MOUNTBATTEN'S APPOINTMENT AS GOVERNOR-GENERAL ENDORSED

COLOURFUL CEREMONY MARKS BIRTH OF NATION

(By Our Special Representative)

NEW DELHI, Thursday.—At midnight tonight the Constituent Assembly, consisting of the chosen representatives of the Indian people, assumed sovereign power and the members solemnly took the pledge to serve India and her people. "We end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again," said Pandit Nehru in calling upon the members to take the new pledge.

HOMAGE TO THE FATHER OF THE NATION

Governors Sworn In As Free India Is Born

THE PLEDGE

THE NEW CABINET

Mountbatten Praises Helpful Attitude Of Indian Press

NEW STAR RISES IN THE EAST

LEADERS TELL NATION OF TASKS AHEAD

Attlee's Greetings To Nehru

Blessed Dawn of Independence!

Fig. 1.1 At the stroke of the midnight hour on August 15, 1947, India awoke to life and freedom. Hindustan Times, 1947

1940s onward the political situation between the INC and the British would continue to sour as a result of the civil disobedience movement, whilst the Muslim League led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, accumulated a sizable following in Muslim constituencies through a communalist narrative. This subsequently brought the two-nation theory to the political fore, in opposition to the INC and British's vision of a united India.[17] In the period that follows, tensions were heightened by local and regional political rhetoric and growing communal violence between Hindu and Muslim groups. The British, eager to exit the subcontinent and avoid mediating a civil conflict, would rush to find a resolution between the political forces of the INC and the Muslim League. In a rapid parry of decisions the British would announce a date to transfer power and move forward with the Partition as the sole option for the two parties.[18]

[17] Bapu, Hindu Mahasabha, 42

[18] Dalrymple, The Bloody Legacy of Indian Partition

In the aftermath of the Partition, Hindu nationalists blamed the INC, Nehru and Gandhi for pandering to the Muslims and reinforcing Hindu weakness. Hindu nationalists identified this as pseudo-secularism involving minority appeasement, ultimately leading to the displacement and death of millions of Hindus.[19] Post Partition, Gandhi would become a symbol of an Independent India as a secular state existing on the basis of "equal citizenship rights" for Hindus and Muslim. This vision of India proved irreconcilable for the Hindu nationalist movement who could not "maneuver in politics," leading to Gandhi's eventual assassination by a militant Hindu nationalist.[20]

The fallout of Gandhi's assassination in 1948 saw an immediate and violent response from a seemingly united India; members of Hindu nationalist groups such as the RSS were attacked and their offices damaged. The INC would respond by banning and imprisoning over 20,000 RSS members, including M.S. Golwalkar, the leader of the RSS for promoting "violence and subversion" in Independent India.[21] After a year of detainment, Golwalkar would eventually be released on the precondition of RSS accepting the constitution of India as a secular state among other stipulations. The RSS and Golwalkar would accept these terms partially, and with great ambiguity, particularly towards the call for secularism. Golwalkar propounded that "To a Hindu, the state is and has always been secular", and instead that the historical empires of the Mughal kingdom were a departure from Hindu secularism and an example of theocracy.[22]

The national condemnation of the RSS and INC's suppression of RSS leadership would significantly dampen RSS's momentum in the decades to follow. Golkwalkar would confront the INC's rhetoric by pushing the RSS as a non-political organization concerned with character building.[23] This would cause internal fissures between leadership and regional *pracharaks, RSS missionaries,* who wished to explore political armatures for the organization. These ideological rifts are attributed to the spawn of offshoot organizations in the years following such as the *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (BJS) in the 1950s, a precursor to the coalition of smaller political parties that would form the *Janata Party* and end 30 years of secular populist rule of the INC in 1977.

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[19] Blom Hansen, Saffron Wave, 95

[20] Bapu, Hindu Mahasabha, 120

[21] Bhatt, Hindu Nationalism, 145

[22] Bhatt, Hindu Nationalism, 146

[23] Bhatt, Hindu Nationalism, 148

Fig. 1.2 A temporary refugee camp for Muslims waiting on a convoy to Pakistan, Margaret Bourke-White, 1947

The BJS and the Janata Party are critical political organizations in Indian democracy as their political experience and membership paved the way for the formation of the BJP in 1980. Led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, BJP's success on the national stage was minimal and sporadic until the Babri Mosque demolition in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.

Over the course of a decade, the BJP politicized the Ayodhya dispute, a historical and socio-religious debate over the control of land on which the Babri Mosque sat. The land was historically claimed by Hindus as the birthplace of the Hindu deity Rama, and they claimed that the mosque on the site was constructed by the Mughals after the demolition or modification of a previously existing Hindu temple.[24] The BJP saw this debate as an opportunity to shift the focus away from contemporaneous issues of caste division in Hindutva politics and instead unite a large Hindu voterbank towards a Muslim Other issue. As such, In September 1990, the BJP organized and led the *Ram Rath Yatra*, or 'chariot journey', a political and religious rally that snaked through the country with the intent of seeking support from a diverse Hindu mass on the Ayodhya debate. The BJP's leader at the time, L.K. Advani, would state, "If Muslims are entitled to an Islamic atmosphere in Mecca, and if Christians are entitled to a Christian atmosphere in the Vatican, why is it wrong for the Hindus to expect a Hindu atmosphere in Ayodhya?".[25] Traveling over 300 kms a day, the procession passed through hundreds of rural villages and urban cities garnering a mass of supporters. More importantly, the *Yatra* triggered riots along its path with Muslim minority communities resulting in violent clashes across the nation. While the BJP's leader would be arrested before the final destination, thousands of supporters still reached the end of the rally at the Mosque. A violent confrontation with security forces would finally stop the supporters from storming the grounds but the events would create nation-wide reverberations causing further Hindu-Muslim riots.

[24] Jaffrelot, The Hindu Nationalist, 91

[25] L. K. Advani, "The Ayodhya Movement," chapter, in *My Country My Life* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2008), 366.

The culmination of the Ayodhya issue takes place in 1992 when the Hindutva elements once again organized a rally with 200,000 *kar sevaks* at the site of the Babri Mosque.[26] A day filled with political and religious rhetoric by Hindutva leaders animated a militant mob that would subsequently storm the mosque and overwhelm the security measures in place. Within hours the crowd of Hindu nationalists set the mosque ablaze and demolished it. This would become a pivotal moment in the Hindutva narrative as it signified an awakening of the Hindu spirit. Academics widely note this event as a turning point in the ambition of the Hindu nationalist project.

The success of the Babri Mosque demolition and a platform of communalist politics would place the BJP and the Hindutva movement as a strong political contender in the 1990s and the early 2000s. In 2002, a train in Gujarat that had returned from the contested site of Ayodhya caught fire, and killed 58 people, several of whom were Hindu pilgrims and *kar sevaks*. The immediate aftermath would place the blame of the tragedy on the Muslim Other as the state devolved into chaos. The BJP and Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister at the time, were faced with massive communalist violence and anti-Muslim sentiment with several scholars noting the complicity of the authorities and state leadership in enabling and condoning the targeting of Muslims.[27;28] The city of Godhra, where the train was stopped and the larger state of Gujarat experienced a savage pogrom lasting for over two months with 2000 Muslims dead and 150,000 displaced. Scholars cite the Gujarat pogrom as a significant departure from the historical patterns of communal violence as it demonstrated a high-level of pre-planning and execution. Extensive evidence suggests that Muslim dwellings and commercial spaces were surveyed and identified by Hindu Right elements ahead of the train accident and pogrom. After eventual order was regained in the city, the urban fabric of the city was completely transformed with spaces designated Muslim-owned destroyed, and other adjacent Hindu-owned spaces left standing. After the Gujarat riots and pogrom the spatial divide between communities dramatically increased with many Muslim residents seeking safety in remaining ethnic enclaves. In Oza's *Violent Geographies*, she notes that violence remapped the state of Gujarat, removing the Indian-Muslim from not only "the architecture of state but the very body politic".[29]

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[26] Blom Hansen, Saffron Wave, 183

[27] Martha C. Nussbaum, The Clash within: Democracy, Religious Violence, and India's Future (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

[28] Dipankar Gupta, *Justice before Reconciliation: Negotiating a "new Normal" in Post-Riot Mumbai and Ahmedabad* (New Delhi: Routledge India, 2016).

[29] Oza, Violent Geographies, 164

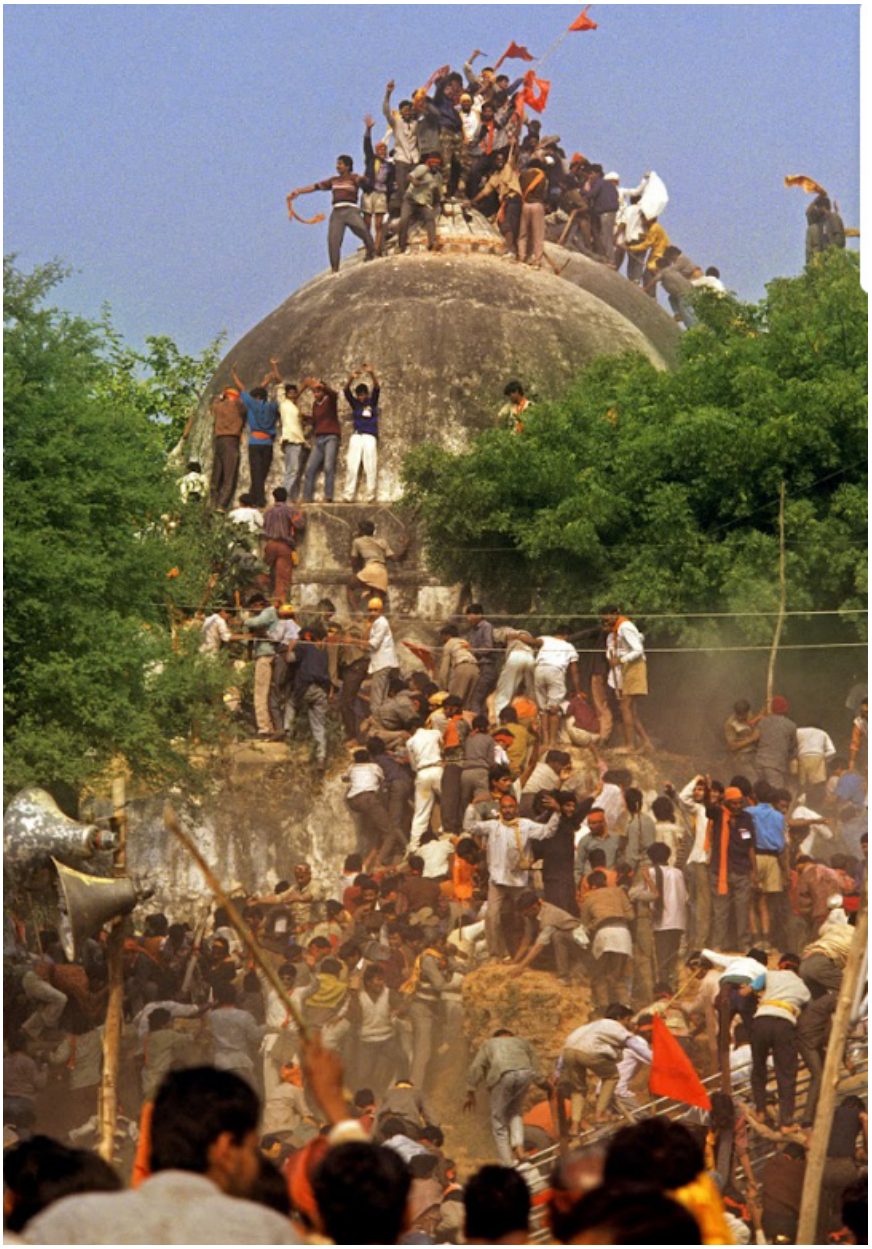

Fig. 1.3 Using grappling hooks hundreds of kar sevaks scaled the three domes and began to demolish the structure with axes and hammers, Nitin Rai, 1992

Fig. 1.4 The Gujarat riots demonstrated a particularly systematic and pre-planned violence on Indian-Muslim owned spaces, Agence France-Presse, 2002

The specific socio-political context that gave way to the pogroms in Gujarat would come to identify the state as the 'laboratory of Hindutva'. Many commentators suggest the mobilization of Hindu Right and the 'justified revenge' against Muslims would eventually be replicated in other states across India. In 2014, the BJP would win the general elections in an outright majority with Narendra Modi sworn in as the 14th Prime Minister of India with an unprecedented mobilization of upper, middle, and Dalit caste voters. With only 8% of the Muslim voters supporting the BJP, a new era of Hindu Right democracy would sweep the nation.

1.3 The Indian-Muslim

In the Hindutva's construction of the Indian-Muslim as the Other, three attributes are consequential among many perceived fears: the Indian-Muslim as a colonizer, the Indian-Muslim's pan-Islamic conceptions, and the Indian-Muslim as an Islamic extremist.[30;31]

On the 77th anniversary of India's Independence from Britain, Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a stirring address to the nation, where he spoke to the future and the past. He would go on to suggest that the nation has reached a critical milestone as "Mother India stood up to break chains" of one-thousand years of slavery.[32] According to this view, the colonization of India precedes the British empire, and begins in the 8th century with the dynastic rule of several disparate Muslim Empires, from the Mughals to the Lodis.[33] The association of these historical Islamic empires as colonial entities serves to produce a Hindutva historiography divided into three distinct periods, an ancient Hindu period, a medieval Muslim period, and a modern British period,[34] where the ancient Hindu period is a glorious period of enlightenment when indigenous science and culture flourished, while the medieval Islamic period is characteristic of civilization decay and despotic rule.[35] Within this, the Hindutva project is able to further anti-Muslim sentiment and situate the Mughal Empire within a discourse of 'decolonization' where India's bright future lies in shedding its 'slave mentality.'[36]

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[30] Sarkar, Why Hindu Nationalists Want to Erase Mughal History.

[31] Romila Thapar, "What History Really Tells Us about Hindu-Muslim Relations," The Wire, accessed November 2, 2023, https://thewire.in/history/what-history-really-tells-us-about-hindu-muslim-relations.

[32] PM's address from the ramparts of Red Fort on the occasion of 77th ..., accessed November 2, 2023, https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-address-from-the-ramparts-of-red-fort-on-the-occasion-of-77th-independence-day/.

[33] Sanya Dhingra, "How Hindu Nationalists Redefined Decolonization in India," New Lines Magazine, August 14, 2023, https://newlinesmag.com/argument/how-hindu-nationalists-redefined-decolonization-in-india/.

[34] Dhingra, Decolonization

[35] Dhingra, Decolonization

[36] Sarkar, Why Hindu Nationalists Want to Erase Mughal History.

Fig. 1.5 Standing atop the Red Fort, the Mughal monument commissioned by Shah Jahan, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks on Independence Day, Manish Swarup/Associated Press, 2023

It is well documented that Babur, the first Mughal emperor, arrived onto the Indian subcontinent from Central Asia as an invasive force; however, Hindutva does little to note that Babur's first violent conquest and battle was against another Muslim Empire, the Delhi Sultanate. Furthermore, Hindutva's construction of Islamic colonizers from Central Asia fails to acknowledge that the Indian subcontinent was frequently targeted by tribes from Central Asia, predating Muslim intrusions and invasions.

While it is true that Babur brought with him a foreign culture that did not exist on the subcontinent, vast scholarly work clearly indicates that the empire that succeeded Babur quickly assimilated their culture and identity to that of their new surroundings. Scholars often highlight that Babur's lineage was mixed with intermarriages with local Hindu *Rajput* aristocracies.

After Akbar - Babur's grandson - all Mughal emperors were born in India and many had *Rajput* mothers.[37] The social and cultural exchange between the Mughal and their contemporaries was highly mutual and synergetic. The exposure to *Rajput* culture saw Mughal emperors participating in Hindu festivals and rituals,[38] while the Mughal's artistic productions such as the miniatures would inspire the *Rajputs* to develop their own miniature tradition.[39]

The Hindutva often cites the destruction of Hindu temples and shrines as an example of the Mughal Empire's violent colonial invasion. Andre Wink, author of *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, asserts that the Muslim destruction of Hindu signifiers was an attack on Hindu religious practice and was directly informed by Islamic thought and its iconoclasm.[40] In addition, Peter Jackson, a scholar on Medieval Muslim India, notes that historians in the medieval era saw the expansion of Islamic empires onto the subcontinent as constituting 'holy war,' where the 'army of Islam' fought against the Hindu 'infidels.' However, extensive scholarly work by historians, Romila Thapar, Richard H. Davis, and Peter Jackson note that "the need to exaggerate the persecution at the hands of the Muslim is required to justify the inculcation of anti-Muslim sentiments among the Hindus of today."[41] The historians do acknowledge that while Muslim iconoclasts destroyed Hindu temples and Hindu symbols, there are also many instances of Muslim rulers contributing back to the Hindu population. Finally, that severe persecution existed well before the arrival of the Muslims to the subcontinent, notably between Buddhist and Jain sects.[42]

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[37] Waldemar Hansen, *The Peacock Throne: The Drama of Mogul India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996).

[38] Sarkar, Why Hindu Nationalists Want to Erase Mughal History.

[39] Parvati Sharma, "The Mughals Were an Integral Part of India – so Why Are They Being Labelled Foreigners?," Scroll.in, November 25, 2018, https://scroll.in/article/903166/the-mughals-were-an-integral-part-of-india-so-why-are-they-being-labelled-foreigners.

[40] André Wink, The Making of the Indo-Islamic World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[41] Romila Thapar, "Syndicated Hinduism," Indian Cultural Forum, December 18, 2020, https://indianculturalforum.in/2018/02/21/syndicated-hinduism-romila-thapar/.

[42] Thapar, Syndicated Hinduism

Fig. 1.6 The Battle of Panipat marks the beginning of the Mughal empire with Babur's invasion into North India, artist unknown, c.1589-90

The second perceived threat of the Muslim Other lies in what the Hindutva suggests are pan-Islamic inclinations of the Indian-Muslim. This conception dates back to the *Khilafat movement* of the 1920s when Indian-Muslims in British India organized political protests against Britain's planned dissolution of the Ottoman empire after World War I.[43] The Ottoman empire represented the Caliphate, the supreme religious and political leader of Sunni Muslims. As such, the issue became deeply religious and emotional, triggering widespread condemnation from the Indian-Muslims. Mahatma Gandhi and the INC saw this as an opportune moment to form a united Hindu-Muslim front against the British colonial project.[44] Through Gandhi, the movement saw unprecedented Hindu-Muslim solidarity, dramatically changing the political landscape within India and cementing Gandhi's non violent civil disobedience. While the movement would not succeed in its stated goals, it awoke a strong Indian-Muslim consciousness that found itself part of a larger pan-Islamic community, and more importantly, separate from the other communities in India. Political scientist and author Benedict Anderson defines this as an "imagined community," a socially constructed community imagined by individuals who perceive themselves as part of a broader collective.

[43] Christophe Jaffrelot, "Stigmatising and Emulating 'Threatening Others,'" chapter, in The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), 19.

[44] Jaffrelot, The Hindu Nationalist, 19

For the Hindu Right, the Khilafat movement illustrated a strong, politically capable and organized Indian-Muslim provoking deep anxieties. Primarily, the Hindu Right saw their own lack of cohesion and political capacity as their own weakness.[45] Scholars suggest that the Khilafat movement's 'political agitation' provided a guidebook for future Hindutva mobilization. A second and more important Hindu anxiety was related to the pan-Islamic nature of the movement; the Indian-Muslim's concern for maintaining a religious Caliphate in the Ottoman empire confirmed the core Hindutva ideology that the Muslim does not see India as a 'holyland.'[46]

[45] Jaffrelot, The Hindu Nationalist, 20

[46] Jaffrelot, The Hindu Nationalist

The final threat constructed by the Hindutva project is the association of the Indian-Muslim with Islamic extremism and militant Islam. The Hindutva has leveraged global events to fuel anti-Muslim sentiment and Islamaphobic discourse to paint the Indian-Muslim with suspicion and sedition. Following the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States, the Hindu nationalists took the 'Muslim terrorist' signifier and asserted that they too were victims of their terror. Oza cites one particular Hindutva association and its leadership making the claim that the mosque constructed by Babur at Ayodhya 450 years ago by destroying the Ram temple and the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center are symbols of Islamic *jihad*. It is necessary for India, Jews and the Western world to come together and fight Islamic militants."[47] In this, the Mughal Emperor Babur, and more importantly the Indian-Muslim are tied together as the "unchanging figure of the Muslim perpetrator."[48]

[47] Oza, Violent Geographies, 154

[48] Oza, Violent Geographies, 154

2. Writing the Past

2.1 Introduction

A primordialist origin is a core requisite for nationalist movements, and the Hindutva project promotes one of its own. The past is an important element as it is used to mobilize a return to an idealistic cultural period in the subcontinent's history, unsullied by the Muslim Other. The Hindutva primordialist narrative centers around Vedic Aryanism and the Indigenous Aryan mythology, which suggests an ancient Aryan race existed on the Indian subcontinent, of which Hindus are descendants.[1] While mainstream scholarship widely rejects this theory as erroneous and a religio-nationalistic view on history, it maintains enormous support within Hindutva circles.[2] The association of the Hindus with this ancient indigenous race allows the Hindutva imaginary to make claim to the land as its original inhabitants. Through this argument the Hindutva campaign seeks to label all others, particularly the Indian-Muslim, as an invasive group. In addition, the Hindutva ideology conflates British rule of India with historical Muslim presence in India as both have successfully colonized 'the Hindu'.[3,4] Rupal Oza, in her writings on the geography of the Hindu Right, suggests that the Hindutva project is a "narrative of spatial belonging and segregation" which is complicated by the entangled histories of the Hindu and the Indian-Muslim.[5] Oza continues that the Hindutva project seeks to develop a "Hindu *rashtra,* a pure Hindu national space, one not contaminated by signs of the Muslim Other."[6]

[1] Bhatt, Hindu Nationalism, 14

[2] Oza, Violent Geographies, 156

[3] Sarkar, Why Hindu Nationalists Want to Erase Mughal History.

[4] Dhingra, Decolonization

[5] Oza, Violent Geographies, 157

[6] Oza, Violent Geographies, 157

In this writing, I examine the Hindutva project's approach to the 'problematized' signifiers of the Muslim Other, among which, the Mughal monuments occupy important ideological sites along the cultural and spatial landscape of India. Within the Hindutva framework, the Muslim does not share the same religious, and/or cultural loyalties to the land as the Hindu. To that extent, the Islamic Mughal Empire and its monuments stand as key historical and cultural institutions of a dark colonial past. Furthermore, they counter the unbroken Hindu past narrative by highlighting their role in shaping the nation.[7]

Over the last two decades, the Hindutva project has employed a variety of tactics to subvert the spatial and urban referrents of Mughal and Islamic culture, and introduce new Hindu-centric historiography. In this research, I identify commonly used tactics by the Hindutva for spatial construction and contestation; inscribing space, a socio-politically charged construction of space that amplify Hindutva ideology, and spatial contestation, a strategy deployed to interrogate and resist spaces that aim to threaten the Hindutva campaign. In addition, I also examine the Hindutva project's gradual displacement of the Muslim Other on the margins of society by embracing communalist urban planning and discriminatory legislature. I assert that the subversion of Islamic spatial referents and concurrent aggrandization of "Hindu" space is a methodical erasure of the Indian-Muslim from the broader socio-cultural discourse in India.[8,9,10]

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[7] Sarkar, "Why Hindu Nationalists Want to Erase Mughal History."

[8] Nadia Nooreyezdan and Mohammad Ali Nadia Nooreyezdan, "The Rampant Erasure of Muslim Heritage in India," Hyperallergic, July 31, 2023, https://hyperallergic.com/835308/the-rampant-erasure-of-muslim-heritage-in-india/.

[9] Sarkar, Why Hindu Nationalists Want to Erase Mughal History.

[10] Obaid Mir, "To Edit Muslims out of India's History Is to Deny Them a Future," Al Jazeera, May 5, 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/5/4/to-edit-muslims-out-of-indias-history-is-to-deny-them-a-future.

2.2 Inscribing Self

One of the first organized approaches to mapping the Hindutva imaginary onto the urban environment was documented in the 1980s and 1990s, when the Hindutva project mass-produced stickers, calendars, and icons with Hindu iconography to be deployed into the public sphere.[11] These would then be placed onto cars, scooters, public walls, and books, effectively raising the visibility of the Hindutva vision and linking Hindu iconography with the nationalist imaginary. The visuals featured were quite simple and included symbols of the saffron flag, the Hindu god Rama, and an unbuilt temple on the contested site of the Babri Mosque.[12] It is here where Rama and the Babri Mosque were co-opted by the Hindutva movement and became a battleground for the Hindu project to realize itself on a national space.

The Hindutva campaign would also employ more overt practices to inscribe itself, such as the mobilization of nationwide rallies. Framed as spiritual pilgrimages, the rallies took on a powerful meaning which Van der Veer suggests, "involves a journey from one's village or town to a sacred center and back, its performance appears to reinforce the notion of a wider community of believers".[13] In 1983, the *Ekamata Yatra* was one of the first major Hindutva-led rallies to take shape. Translating to 'pilgrimage of unity' or 'one-ness' the rally was a pan-Hindu exercise, allowing Hindus of all castes to participate and formed as a response to a number of growing anxieties the Hindutva had of the Muslim Other, including pan-Islamic movements, religious conversions in low-caste Hindus, and the perceived threat that the Hindu could become a minority in the face of rising Muslim numbers. The rally consisted of three planned routes, one from Kathmandu (North) to Tamil Nadu (South), the second from Bengal (East) to Gujarat (West), and finally from Uttar Pradesh, the Northern state housing the city of Ayodhya, to Tamil Nadu. The three primary rallies saw as many as 47 smaller processions join on, and as Oza states, they constructed, "a web of processions that literally mapped Indian territory as all-encompassingly Hindu." There are further reports noting that the pilgrimage route deliberately carved through Muslim neighborhoods with provocative chants such as, "*Musalmano Ka ek hee sthan, Pakistan ya Kabristan*," which translates to "Muslims have only two places, either Pakistan or the graveyard."[14]

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[11] Oza, Violent Geographies, 161

[12] Oza, Violent Geographies, 161

[13] Oza, Violent Geographies, 160

[14] Oza, Violent Geographies, 161

Following the success of the *Ekamata Yatra,* the Hindutva project focused their energies on the issue of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. As noted before, the Hindutva would claim that the Babri Mosque was constructed upon *Ram Janmabhoomi*, or the birthplace of Rama. The Hindu Right's claim is that in 1528 the Mughal Emperor Babur destroyed an ancient temple where the Hindu god Rama was born and subsequently built the Babri Mosque. While historians dispute the veracity of these claims, the narrative delivered by the Hindu Right was successful in uniting a divided Hindu populace against a singular Other. Van der Veer and Oza both suggest that the Hindu Right successfully transformed the Babri Mosque to become a "material embodiment of Muslim violence against Hindus", and that it was "instrumental in the homogenization of a 'national' Hinduism.[15]

To tackle the issue of the Babri Mosque, the Hindutva project organized the *Ram Rath Yatra* rally in 1990. The rally snaked across North India with the support of thousands of dedicated RSS members, or *kar sevaks* along the way. A procession of vehicles including a *Rath,* or chariot described as "religious, allusive, militant, masculine, and anti-Muslim" carved the urban environment while Hindutva slogans blared through speakers.[16] Christophe Jaffrelot suggests that the procession was curated around religious themes, with the chariot flanked by activists dressed as mythological deities. *Kar sevaks* would reportedly hand out politically charged paraphernalia with images and posters of a proposed temple on the Babri Mosque site.[17] The rally was led by L.K. Advani, then-president of the BJP, who addressed the Yatra in several provocative speeches with "frenzied religious sentiments and militant national fervor".[18] The charged atmosphere of the rally brought out militant sentiments within the participants leading to several clashes with the Muslim Other with subsequent riots across major cities in Jaipur, Ahmedabad, and Hyderabad.

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[15] Oza, Violent Geographies, 160

[16] Ramachandra Guha, "Life Without the Congress," chapter, in *India after Gandhi the History of the World's Largest Democracy* (London: Picador India, 2008), 583.

[17] Christophe Jaffrelot, "The Hindu Nationalist Reinterpretation of Pilgrimage in India: The Limits of Yatra Politics," Nations and Nationalism 15, no. 1 (2009): 1–19, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2009.00364.x.

[18] K. N. Panikkar, "Religious Symbols and Political Mobilization: The Agitation for a Mandir at Ayodhya," Social Scientist 21, no. 7/8 (1993): 63–78, https://doi.org/10.2307/3520346.

Fig. 2.1 BJP leader LK Advani on a Toyota truck converted into a chariot.
Express Archive, 1990

The rally would eventually terminate at the site of the Babri Mosque where reportedly 40,000 *Kar sevaks* reached the mosque, with one Hindutva supporter placing a saffron flag on top of the mosque. Satish Deshpande suggests that this approach is a successful Hindutva spatial strategy, which links "in a durable and ideologically credible way, abstract (imagined) spaces to concrete (physical) places.[19] Thus, the mobilization of the *Ram Rath Yatra* rally and others like it, operate to map the Hindutva imaginary onto the physical environment.

While the use of national processions and pilgrimages is still prevalent, the last decade has seen Hindutva employ alternative approaches to permanently embed its ideology into space. Under the guise of 'decolonization' Modi's BJP has selectively shed its colonized past to replace and remove British and Mughal referrents in the urban environment. The BJP suggests that decolonization is "a powerful symbol of our nation's progress and a reflection of a brighter future for New India."[20,21]

In 2015, the Aurangzeb roadway in New Delhi was renamed because its name was in reference to the sixth Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. In 2018, Allahabad, a metropolis in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh was renamed to Prayagraj after a holy city in Hindu scripture. The name Allahabad is attributed to the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, who saw the site's strategic potential and built a fort.

In addition to the renaming programme, architectural historian Rajagopalan cites the erection of ancient Hindu warriors memorials in Delhi as an embodiment of Hindu strength and masculinity, and that have most importantly had a historic confrontation with a Muslim Other. In the curation of memory, the Hindutva advances a selective history of Hindu strength and martyrdom at the hands of the Muslim Other. This is doubly wielded to counter the Islamic empire's rich presence in Delhi and villainizing the Muslim Other further.

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[19] Oza, Violent Geographies, 161

[20] Dhingra, Decolonization

[21] Sarkar, Why Hindu Nationalists Want to Erase Mughal History.

2.3 Shaping the Other

The contestation of Muslim space is an active project of the Hindutva campaign and is observed as a reclamation of Muslim space as Hindu space, as well as the silent and gradual displacement of Muslim presence from the public sphere.

Hindutva has found its most provocative and effective method for spatial contestation in the appropriation of Muslim sacred spaces as Hindu spaces. This is primarily initiated by uncovering a Hindu historicity or archaeology under an existing Muslim construction of space. The Hindutva spatial contestation employs this neo-archaeology to interrogate the legitimacy of the existing Muslim sacred space and push for a reclamation of the space for Hindu religious practice. The nature of this archaeology typically highlights the otherness of the Muslim by narrating a violent construction of Muslim space on top of a primordialist sacred Hindu space. In addition, Rajagopalan argues that the archaeology is motivated by the expectation of excavating "an imperial city to match (and possibly surpass) the grandeur of all the Islamic cities built,"[22] such that a Hindu city becomes a "progenitor for all the imperial capitals that followed."[23]

A prominent example of Hindutva's spatial contestation and a defining moment in Hindu-Muslim relations is the Babri Mosque demolition. The 16th century mosque has been spatially contested by Hindutva groups since 1949. However, disputes regarding origin and ownership for the site date back to 1855. In 1949, Hindu nationalist activists found an opportunity to place several Hindu artifacts within the site of the operational mosque. A subsequent narrative was published, suggesting the artifacts appeared miraculously inside the mosque which fuelled widespread communal unrest. To the delight of the Hindutva project, this led to the authorities halting all religious practice on the site as mediation. Authorities would eventually remove the artifacts at the insistence of the then Prime Minister Nehru.

[22] Desai, Communalized City, 283

[23] Desai, Communalized City, 283

In the 1980s, the Hindu Right and the BJP reignited the movement to reclaim the Babri Mosque. Through the organization of *Yatras* and other demonstrations, the BJP transformed a contest for a local shrine into a dispute over national space. In 1992, two years after the successes of the Ram Yatra Rally, the BJP would hold a demonstration on the site of the Babri Mosque where 200,000 kar sevaks were in attendance. The ceremonies involved multiple charged speeches by BJP leaders which eventually led to a large mob storming the mosque. Within hours the mosque would be brought to the ground by improvised tools. The event would send reverberations across the nation and stands as one of the defining moments in the Hindu-Muslim relationship. As Oza notes, "the image of the Hindutva activists atop the crumbled structure of the Masjid remains a haunting symbol of Hindutva victory and the public denunciation of secularism".[24]

Over three decades later, the lessons learned from the Babri Mosque case are re-deployed by the Hindutva project to contest a variety of religious and cultural symbols of the Muslim Other in India, including the Gyanvapi Mosque and the Taj Mahal. The *Gyanvapi Row* is a recent provocation by the Hindu Right to contest the Gyanvapi Mosque in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. Upon a recent discovery of a *shivling,* an abstract representation of the Hindu god Shiva, within the *wudu-khana*, the ritual ablution space of the mosque.[25] Through this discovery the Hindutva project has petitioned civil courts to allow access and praying rights to the mosque. In support of the Hindutva claim, historians do state that a temple existed on the site prior, but also highlight that the site has seen several spatial contests that have led to demolitions and re-constructions between mosques and temples. Particularly noting that during Akbar's reign a temple was constructed but it was subsequently demolished under Aurangzeb's rule to make way for a Mosque. Of note is the Mosque's rear wall which maintains a semi-demolished plinth distinctly from a previous structure which has been a site for Hindu prayer for decades.

[24] Oza, Violent Geographies, 161

[25] "Citing SC Protection, Varanasi Court Dismisses Plea for Survey in Gyanvapi Mosque's Wazukhana," Hindustan Times, October 21, 2023, https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/others/citing-sc-protection-varanasi-court-dismisses-plea-for-survey-in-gyanvapi-mosque-s-wazukhana-101697909955541.html.

The case in the legal courts is complicated by the Places of Worship (POW) Act created by the INC in 1991, as a response to the rising communal tensions generated by L.K Advani's Ram Rath Yatra the year prior. The act prescribes that the religious character of any place of worship must be maintained as it existed on August 15th, 1947.[26] As such, the Muslim groups representing the Gyanvapi Mosque argue that the structure has been standing and in use for over 600 years falling well within the POW Act. Hindutva supporters suggest that the Hindu community has also actively used the rear walls of the mosque for prayer since 1993 and that the *shivling existed* long before 1947.[27] As the issue is taken on by the civil courts, all religious practice is halted at the mosque and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) have been mobilized to investigate the religious character of the space. The *Gyanvapi Row* proves a successful spatial contestation for the Hindu Right as Muslim sacred space is slowly reclaimed for the Hindutva project. This particular contestation also highlights the selective narrative produced by the Hindu Right where Aurangzeb's destruction is elevated while the earlier patronage is discarded.

The Taj Mahal stands as one of the world's most recognizable symbols of Indo-Islamic architecture and it too is vulnerable to spatial contestation. The Hindutva have introduced an alternate historiography that claims a series of locked rooms are hidden underneath the Taj Mahal. The rooms enclose Hindu artifacts and symbols of an ancient Hindu Temple named the Tejo Mahalaya, existing well before the Taj Mahal. The Hindu Right has disseminated politically charged messaging to encourage the masses to demand legal investigations and reclaim the site for Hindu sacred practice. The Hindutva's call for investigation of these concealed spaces mobilizes the ASI, and once again threatens to subvert Muslim contribution and signifiers in the urban fabric.

[26] Nandini Sundar, "Why the Places of Worship Act Must Be Preserved," The Wire, accessed November 2, 2023, https://thewire.in/rights/why-the-places-of-worship-act-must-be-preserved.

[27] Raja Todar, "Don't Use 'Shivling' to Further Your Politics: Former Mahant of Kashi Vishwanath Temple," The Wire, accessed November 2, 2023, https://thewire.in/politics/shivling-kashi-vishwanath-temple-gyanvapi.

Fig. 2.2 A view of the Gyanvapi Mosque's rear wall, where remnants of an older demolished structure still remain.

The Muslim occupation of space in the public sphere is also threatened under the Hindu nationalist campaign which seeks to exclude and force the everyday practices of Muslim communal identity into the private sphere. Towards a cultural and religious hegemony, Hindutva activists have pressured local governments in states like Haryana to end the practice of outdoor prayers for Friday *namaz*. Activists have resorted to disrupting prayer congregations by occupying the land prior to prayer and conducting Hindu rituals, and *havana,* worship centered on fire. Local administration in Haryana have issued statements noting, "The practice of offering *namaz* in open spaces will not be tolerated … If somebody offers *namaz* or holds *paaths* - religious recitations - at one's place, we have no objection to that. Religious places are built for this very purpose that people go there and offer prayers. Such programmes should not be held in open spaces."[28]

In addition, the symbols of Muslim expressions are also compromised under the Hindutva campaign. In Karnataka, the state government has upheld a ruling that bans female students from wearing the *hijab* in educational institutions as it does not form part of the uniform. More importantly, members in state leadership have blatantly communicated that, "to follow our religions, we have our worshipping places and all this [wearing of *hijabs*] can be done there … Students should follow the rules set by the school."[29] While the controversy has sparked nationwide outrage from the Muslim community, it has done little to stop other states from entertaining similar policies and stances. Further, relegating Muslim religious practice and expression to designated spaces away from public space reinforces the Hindutva's aim of homogenizing the public realm and erases the markers of the Muslim identity from India.

[28] Anshu Saluja, "Hindutva and the Reimagining of Public Space in India," South Asian Voices, March 28, 2022, https://southasianvoices.org/hindutva-and-the-re-imagining-of-public-space-in-india/.

[29] Saluja, Reimagining of Public Space in India

As recently as 2022, the BJP has escalated beyond controlling Muslim presence in the public space to the private sphere. In several states from Madhya Pradesh to Uttar Pradesh authorities have responded to Muslim protests by employing targeted demolitions of activist homes. In one specific incident, the BJP led authorities publicized an image of a demolished home with a note saying "Unruly elements remember, every Friday is followed by a Saturday."[30] While the formal response by the Hindu Right authorities has indicated that these homes were illegal settlements, legal experts and civil society groups argue these are targeted demolition of Muslim individuals linked to protests and a state exercise in deterring religious activism.[31,32]

Lastly, a product of the spirited Hindutva movement is a deepening spatial segregation between Hindus and Muslims in urban centers, which architectural researcher Renu Desai terms, 'The communalist city'. Desai argues that this specific urban segregation is produced through, "'communal violence' in India - and other practices born out of fear and suspicion, and exclusion of the Muslim Other."[33] The city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat is an important space that has been entrenched spatially along religious lines due to a history of savage clashes between Hindu and Muslim groups. Since the 1980s several incidents of communal violence have transformed the urban fabric of Ahmedabad with Hindu and Muslim neighborhoods constructing large walls as a form of 'border' control. Desai notes that mixing within neighborhoods is difficult where neither religious group prefers to sell or rent to a religious Other. Beyond ownership, travel between enclaves is difficult as well where "Rickshaw drivers of different religious backgrounds often take different routes through the city, avoiding localities and neighborhoods dominated by the religious Other."[34]

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[30] "Nupur Sharma: Uttar Pradesh Destroys Houses of Muslims after Protests," BBC News, June 13, 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-61782033.

[31] Zoya Mateen in Delhi and Dilnawaz Pasha in Haryana, "Nuh Violence: Is Bulldozer Punishment Trampling Justice in India?," BBC News, August 8, 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-66391485.

[32] Indian American Muslim Council, "Demolition of Indian Muslim Homes Is Collective Persecution," Genocidewatch, June 22, 2022, https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/demolition-of-muslim-homes-in-india-termed-as-collective-punishment.

[33] Desai, Communalized City, 100

[34] Desai, Communalized City, 114

3. The Miniature

3.1 Introduction

In a miniature dating to 1635, the Mughal Emperor Jahangir is illustrated partaking in the Hindu festival of *Holi*, a festival celebrating the eternal love of the Hindu deities Radha and Krishna.[1] The miniature depicts a lively scene in the *zenana* where several ladies of the Mughal court engage in dance while others use vessels of color to splash each other with paint. This image bears significance within the contemporaneous socio-political climate as it reframes the Hindutva's antagonistic view of the Mughal Empire and, more broadly, the Indian-Muslim.[2] It illustrates a deep cultural amalgamation that penetrated deep into the Mughal Empire where a Muslim emperor is actively engaged in Hindu activities that have been intentionally recorded for the royal archive. This miniature is one of many that interrogate the historic religious and cultural solidarity of the Hindu and the Indian-Muslim that is actively subverted by the contemporary Hindutva campaign.

As the BJP continues to fortify its vision of a fragmented India where the Hindu and the Indian-Muslim are socially and politically divided, my research uncovers neglected historical narratives that run counter to the Hindutva imaginary. I focus my research on the historical empire of the Mughal dynasty, which the Hindutva has particularly singled out in recent symbolic contests.[3] In addition to traditional methods of historical and cultural review, this work looks to the Mughal miniatures as a comprehensive record of the Mughal Empire's values and further seeks to build a nuanced characterization of the Hindu and the Indian-Muslim's entangled past.

In the following section, under the heading 'The miniature as archive', I document the miniature's arrival to the subcontinent, its role in projecting the ideals of its patron, and the subsequent evolution under the patronage of the Empire. This section also speaks to the cross-cultural transformation of the miniature tradition as it engages with the world around it. Along with this writing I showcase a selection of miniatures that illustrate the visual culture's development. The miniatures are compiled from a range of patrons, some bound in illuminated manuscripts and others loose leaf. Unless noted the miniatures are showcased in full without modification, as documented by contemporary stewards - ie. cultural institutions.

In the section under the 'Excavating artifact' heading I provide an analysis and a narrative reading of a selection of miniatures to introduce their conventions and visual culture. Finally, this chapter concludes with the section 'Confronting Image' where I introduce art theory on the Mughal miniature and establish the relationship between image and the production of space.

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[1] Object detail | inspiring Ireland, accessed November 2, 2023, https://www.inspiring-ireland.ie/object-detail/r494vm07g.

[2] Sheikh Saaliq, "How India's Hindu Nationalists Are Using a Long-Dead Emperor for Anti-Muslim Politics," PBS, June 3, 2022, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/how-indias-hindu-nationalists-are-using-a-long-dead-emperor-for-anti-muslim-politics.

[3] Sarkar, Why Hindu Nationalists Want to Erase Mughal History.

Fig. 3.1 Jahangir celebrates the Hindu festival of Holi, Govardhan, c.1635

3.2 The Miniature as Archive

In the mid 16th century the Mughal Emperor Humayun would return to India after an exile of 15 years. He would bring with him an army of 12,000 men generously offered by Shah Tahmasp I of the Safavid Empire.[4] Humayun's objective was to defeat the Sur Empire who had forced his retreat and recapture lost territory in Northern India. In the midst of a civil war within the Sur Empire, Humayun would claim victory and retake Delhi, marking his return to India and the rise of the Mughal Empire in 1555 once again.[5]

Along with military support, Humayun's return also brought with it a new Persian sensibility in high culture and aesthetics. In the sanctuary of the Safavid Empire, Humayun was exposed to the imperial splendor and power of Shah Tahmasp I through his empire's mature architecture and culturally heterogeneous art.[6] He was particularly taken by the work of the Safavid royal atelier, which employed some of the finest miniature artists in the Persian tradition. Under the Shah, the ateliers produced comprehensive handbound books with rich illustrations finished in gold and silver. These books known as 'Illuminated Manuscripts' engaged with topics of religion, myth, lore, and often the majesty of the patron. At the behest of Humayun, the Shah handed over two promising miniature artists from his atelier, Abd Al Samad and Mir Sayyid Ali, to travel back to India with the Mughal emperor.[7]

This transfer of knowledge would mark the beginning of a long history in the miniature visual tradition that forms uniquely at the center of Mughal culture, politics, and identity. While in its infancy the painting tradition was a confluence of symbols and styles from the imported Persian aesthetic – which in itself is inspired by Chinese scroll painting - to the native Hindu and Jain painting traditions, the Mughal miniature would very quickly settle into its own conventions and vocabulary.[8]

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[4] Dirk Collier, "Humayun: The Savant Dilettante," chapter, in *The Great Mughals and Their India* (New Delhi, India: Hay House India, 2016), 115.

[5] Collier, Humayun, 141

[6] Valerie Gonzalez, "Genesis of Aesthetic Hybridity in Mughal Painting," chapter, in *Aesthetic Hybridity in Mughal Painting, 1526-1658* (Routledge, 2020), 184.

[7] Gregory Minissale, "Introduction," chapter, in *Images of Thought: Visuality in Islamic India, 1550-1750* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 21.

[8] Mika Natif, "Introduction," chapter, in *Mughal Occidentalism: Artistic Encounters between Europe and Asia at the Courts of India, 1580-1630* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 3.

However, the study of the Mughal miniature tradition as we know it begins with Akbar, the third Mughal Emperor and son of Humayun. Under Akbar's patronage, miniature painting reached its zenith in commissioned works and employed artisans. Akbar himself was personally trained in the arts by Abd Al Samad. Akbar's commitment to continuing his father's legacy of the arts and culture saw the Mughal Empire transform into a cultural hub with grand architectural commissions such as the walled city of Fatehpur Sikri in 1571, and the Red Fort completed in 1573; both in Agra, near Delhi. Akbar would patronize the arts by forming an atelier in Agra and another in Lahore. The ateliers flourished with a production of a variety of original and translated works. Among these were the *Akbarnama*, an official biographical account of Akbar which took seven years to complete, and the *Hamzanama*, a fanciful and semi-biographical illustrated manuscript of Hamza, an uncle of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad. The *Hamzanama* was an unprecedented undertaking that took fifteen years to complete, with over 100 painters, gilders, illuminators, and binders dedicated to completing 1400 painted folios.[9]

In the late 16th century, Akbar's ateliers were well equipped to take on some of the most complex subjects and as such planned to translate a number of Persian and Sanskrit works.[10] Akbar saw these translations as significant endeavors, his personal biographer notes, "He (Akbar) thought why should I not have the Sanskrit works translated in my name; for they are written by the ascetics and sages of the past and all of them embody correct and convincing proofs (about Hinduism) and are the very pivot on which their religion, beliefs and forms of worship turns; and they will produce all kinds of fruits of felicity both temporal and spiritual, and will be the cause of affluence and power, and will ensure an abundance of children and wealth as is written in the prefaces of these books."[11]

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[9] Asok Kumar Das and Stuart Cary Welch, "Making of Razmnama," chapter, in *Paintings of the Razmnama: The Book of War* (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 2005), 8.

[10] Kumar Das, Razmnama, 8

[11] Al Bada'uni, A History Of India Muntakhab-Ut-Tawarikh, Translated by George Speirs Alexander Ranking. (Karachi, Pakistan: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1990), Quoted in Kumar Das, Razmnama 9

Around this time, Akbar would significantly expand his spiritual and intellectual engagements with the diverse cultural and religious practices in his kingdom. The *Akbarnama* notes that the emperor visited various shrines and tombs of Sufi saints and sought out the teachings of Hindu yogi's and ascetics.[12] The *Ulama* - Orthodox Islamic leadership - within Akbar's governance would express deep dissatisfaction with Akbar's activities which would eventually cause Akbar to distance himself from them. In 1575, Akbar would construct the *Ibadat Khana* within the court of Fatehpur Sikri. The *Ibadat Khana*, roughly translating to the *house of worship*, was a formal space to bring together pious men and religious scholars of different faiths to engage in discussions and debates. Akbar would hold weekly meetings and bring together Sunni and Shia *mullahs*, Sufi mystics, Hindu *pandits,* Jain *munis*, Zoroastian clerics, and Jewish scholars who would all discuss relevant spiritual topics.

At the end of the 16th century, the first Jesuit mission arrived in India consisting of Portuguese missionaries and an artist. To the surprise of the Jesuits, they found an empire that was in equal intellectual bloom. Upon arrival, the party was separated with the artist collaborating with the miniaturists of the royal atelier, while the missionaries were invited to the *Ibadat Khana*. The Jesuits saw the emperor's enthusiasm in their beliefs as a massive success and felt they were nearing his conversion to Christianity. However, Akbar's interest was "self-serving and mixed with notions of intellectual curiosity and cultural superiority."[13]The collaboration between the atelier and the Jesuit mission would yield incredible images of Christian iconography completed in the Mughal tradition. An example of which is the miniature *The Martyrdom of Saint Cecilia*, where the royal atelier has made a close copy of an engraving by Jerome [Hieronymus] Wierix, and placed it within a gilded frame and bound it inside an illuminated manuscript for Akbar.[14]

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[12] Abū al-Faẓl ibn Mubārak, *The History of Akbar*, Translated by Wheeler M. Thackston. (Harvard University Press, 2018), Quoted in Natif, Mika. Mughal Tolerance, 3

[13] Natif, ,Mughal Tolerance, 37

[14] Victoria and Albert Museum, "Saint Cecilia: Nini: V&A Explore the Collections," Victoria and Albert Museum: Explore the Collections, accessed November 2, 2023, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1263551/saint-cecilia-painting-nini/.

Fig. 3.2 The Martyrdom of Saint Cecilia, Nini, c.1630

The weekly debates were often acrimonious and further fueled Akbar's search for truth within the tenets of each faith. During this period of intense discourse, Akbar became acutely aware of the power religious leaders held in creating divisions. As such, Akbar tasked his atelier with translating various religious texts, particularly Hindu mythologies such as the *Mahabharata* into illuminated manuscripts. Akbar's hope was that these translations could span the divide between the Hindu and Muslim communities if the "religious works were propagated accurately, cleansed of the interpretations of *mullas* and priests whose preaching often ran counter to the texts … an end to the monopoly of those who did not state correctly the real spirit of their respective religions and deemed themselves as custodians of their faith."[15] Akbar would choose the saga of the *Mahabharata* for numerous reasons; Akbar's biographer records Akbar saying "[the *Mahabharata*] contains all sorts of stories and moral reflection, and advice, and matters relating to conduct and manners and religion and science." Akbar further comments that "the study of history enables the people to take lessons from the past." Ultimately, Akbar's goal was to "dispel the ignorance and bigotry of his kinsmen, nobles and lawgivers by exposing them to the essence of religious thought and philosophy that had marked this vast country over the centuries."[16] The translation of the *Mahabharata* would take over 6 years to complete and would be known as the *Razmnama*, The Book of War. Akbar's biographer notes that after the manuscript's completion, it became available for nobles, such that copies could be produced for dissemination outside of the Royal court.[17]

[15] Kumar Das, Razmnama, 9

[16] Kumar Das, Razmnama, 9

[17] Kumar Das, Razmnama, 10

Fig. 3.3 Rama Receives Sugriva and Jambavat, the Monkey and Bear Kings, artist unknown, c.1605

Consequently, the discussions at the *Ibadat Khana* and Akbar's personal spiritual journey would lead him to a profound moment of clarity where he would publicize a new syncretic religion at the center of the Mughal Empire. The religion called *Din-i-Ilahi* merged all the rational contents and "the rose gardens" of each religion within his empire. Akbar's aim was to unite and reconcile the differences that divided his empire. The adoption of this new syncretic religion paired with the expansive engagement with other cultural and religious practices dramatically expanded the visual culture of the Mughal miniatures. The painting tradition and the royal ateliers quickly incorporated a multiplicity of narratives with a novel aesthetic hybridity.

The miniature *Krishna in Combat with Indra*, is an excellent reflection of this transformation taking place in Akbar's empire where Hindu holy scripture is perceived through the Mughal miniature medium with European conventions of linear perspective and sfumato. The miniature forms a single image from the *Harivamsa*, an illuminated manuscript that documents the life of the Hindu deity Krishna and considered an appendix of the *Mahabharata*. The miniature depicts Krishna riding atop the mythical Garuda as it sweeps down to battle with Indra, the lord of the gods, riding a white elephant. All the while, celestial beings and gods watch in the distance amongst the sky's swirling clouds above and people watch from boats docked on a lush landscape below. The backdrop encompassing the sky and the landscape are rendered with a rudimentary sfumato and linear perspective.

Fig. 3.4 Krishna in combat with Indra, artist unknown, c.1590

Akbar's reign would come to a sudden end in 1605 when an unexpected illness eventually led to his demise. He would be succeeded by his son, Jahangir, the fourth emperor of the Mughal dynasty. Jahangir's governance saw a continued pursuit of cultural hegemony and conquest over the Indian subcontinent with small scale victories that would eventually see the empire sprawl from Afghanistan to Bengal. However, unlike his father, Jahangir was considered a weak leader, an atheist, and an addict to pleasures of wine and opium. While Jahangir's reign saw internal power struggles and turmoil, the arts thrived. Soon after his ascension, Jahangir would move to preserve his father's art and, by way, his legacy.

Jahangir would also establish a new royal atelier for miniature painting. In contrast to the historical and political subjects of Akbar's manuscripts and commissions, Jahangir was enamored by the natural world around him and, as such, the miniatures produced under him were focused on highly refined depictions of flora and fauna, as well as accurate renderings of figures and portraiture. The Mughal painting tradition would reach its highest degree of naturalism and scientific accuracy under Jahangir. In the miniature, *Study of a Loriquet, Horned Pheasant, Dodo, Ducks, and Partridges*, Jahangir's court artist, Ustad Mansur, would document a set of birds brought to the Emperor by the Portuguese, among them is the now extinct Dodo bird. The image is considered one of the few and extremely rare examples of the Dodo bird rendered in color.

Fig. 3.5 Study of a Loriquet, Horned Pheasant, Dodo, Ducks, and Partridges, Ustad Mansur, c.1615

Additionally, Jahangir built on the European relations established by his father and became fascinated by the high arts of Europe. His exposure to the cultural and artistic sensibilities of European art assured they quickly found their way into the Mughal tradition. Miniatures such as *Jahangir and Shah Abbas (Jahangir's Dream)*, demonstrate the European influence on the Mughal tradition, where Jahangir is depicted standing on a globe with accurately mapped land masses for India and the Middle East; maps which would have come into Jahangir's court through the European missions. In addition, behind the Emperor is a sublime Sun and Moon halo held up by winged angels; this is another indicator of European motifs permeating through Jahanghir's court.

Fig. 3.6 Jahangir and Shah Abbas (Jahangir's Dream), Abu'l Hasan, c.1618

Fig. 3.7 Shah-Jahan honoring Prince Dara-Shikoh at his wedding, Bulaqi, c.1635 - 1650

Jahangir's eventual death in 1627 would pave the way for his son, Shah Jahan to take leadership of the empire. Shah Jahan would not only inherit a politically stable empire but also the finest miniaturists and royal ateliers in the subcontinent. Under Shah Jahan, the Mughal miniature tradition would find a balance between historical record and idealization. Koch comments that miniatures under Shah Jahan were highly complex artistic creations that went beyond their apparent function as historical narratives. She suggests that "no other instance in the history of art comes readily to mind in which artistic form was so methodically manipulated for non artistics aims, namely imperial ideology."[18] The *Padshahnama* stands as an extraordinary manuscript that comes out of Shah Jahan's empire, and it focuses on activities of the royal court, particularly the assemblies within the *darbar*. The miniatures within the *Padshahnama* were not only renderings of historical events but more importantly had subliminal qualities speaking to the abstract power structure of Shah Jahan's empire. Shah Jahan is widely considered to have ushered in a golden era for Mughal cultural dominance, with his rule seeing the construction of countless grand architectural monuments such as the Lal Qila in 1648, the Taj Mahal in 1653, and the Shah Jahan Mosque in 1659.

[18] Ebba Koch, "Visual Strategies of Imperial Self-Representation: The Windsor Pādshāhnāma Revisited," The Art Bulletin 99, no. 3 (2017): 93–124, https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2017.1292871.

In 1657 Shah Jahan would fall seriously ill, subsequently resulting in a power vacuum that sparked a battle for supremacy amongst his oldest son Dara Shikoh, and his youngest Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb would emerge victorious and usurp Shah Jahan's throne in 1658. Shah Jahan would eventually recover from his illness, however, Aurangzeb would quickly place him under house arrest and continue his role as emperor.

Aurangzeb's rule would lead to a dramatic shift in the ideology of the empire from a moderate Islamic state to a fundamentalist Islamic state. The emperor would ratchet down on the pluralism that thrived under his predecessors and implement taxation on the non-Muslim populace. He also established policies based on Islamic ethics such as the prohibition of gambling, fornication, and consumption of alcohol. An embodiment of this paradigm shift saw the art of the miniature painting step away from opulent figural and portraiture of the past, to a rise in austere depictions with understated settings. The few royal portraits commissioned depicted Aurangzeb as a fearsome warrior, oftentimes engaged in prayer or contemplation.

Aurangzeb's leadership is considered the last effective assembly of the Mughal Empire before its rapid decline; much of it as a direct result of Aurangzeb's unbridled expansion on the Indian subcontinent. Aurangzeb's military exploits caused irreparable financial ruin for the kingdom which would be exploited by his rivals upon his death in 1707.

At the turn of the 18th century the British East India Company had significantly expanded into India with several employees migrating into major urban centers as stewards. A function of this new governance saw a new genre of miniature painting taking form in British East India Company rule, aptly labeled Company School painting. This painting style saw the new European rulers recruit Indian miniature artists to paint in European technique and appearance. The Company School paintings are distinct from their Mughal counterparts as they pursue illusionism through linear perspective, and most prominently act alone as individual images in contrast to the illuminated manuscripts of the Mughal work.

Fig. 3.8 Emperor Aurangzeb in Old Age, artist unknown, c.1725

Fig. 3.9 A Syce (Groom) Holding Two Carriage Horses, Shaikh Muhammad Amir of Karraya, c.1845

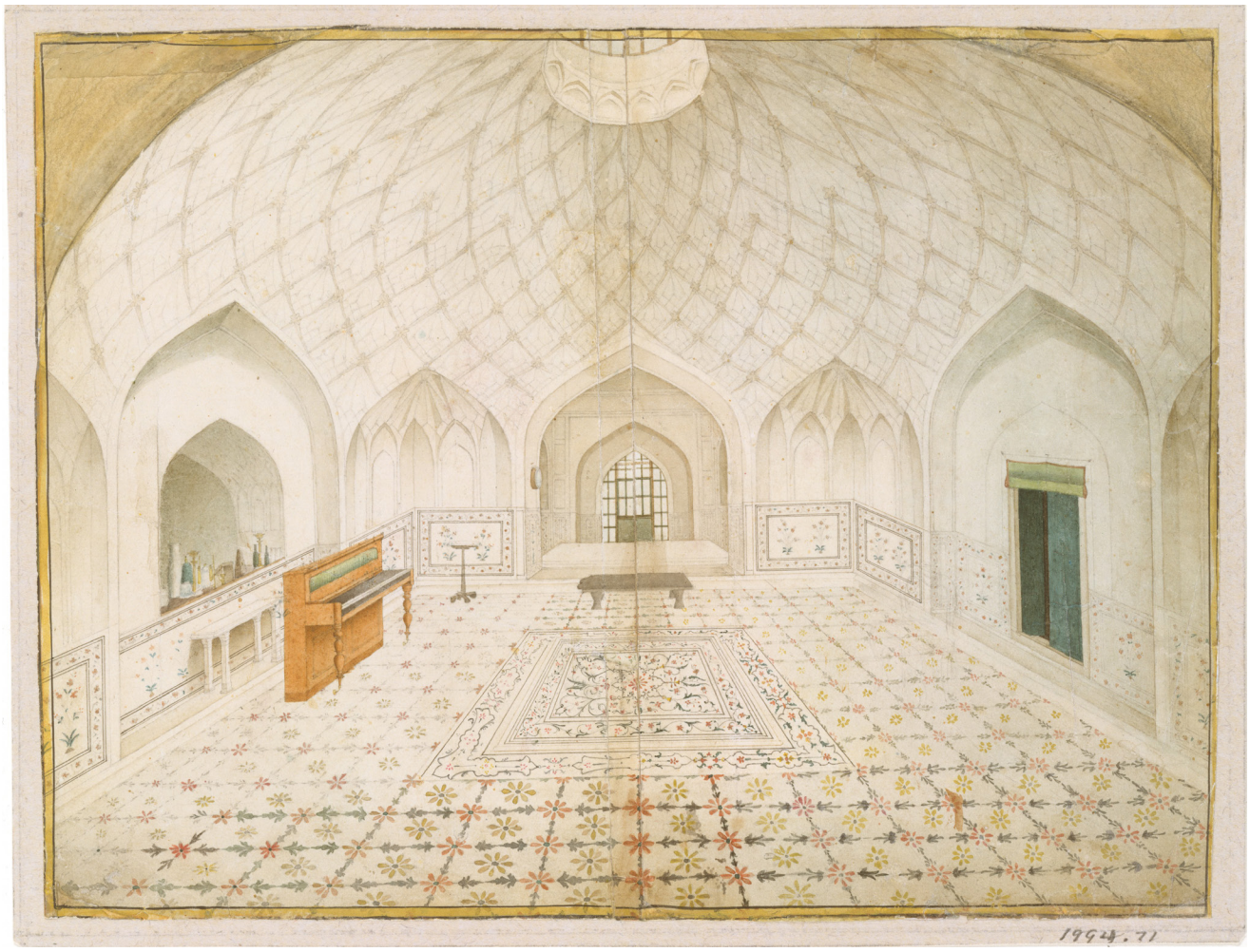

Fig. 3.10 Interior of the Hammam at the Red Fort, Delhi, Furnished According to English Taste, artist unknown, c.1830–40

Thematically the Company School paintings further differed from the Mughal miniature in their lack of reflexivity. While the Mughal miniatures recorded historical narratives and contained some programmatic statements, the Company School paintings were concerned with aesthetics and visual documentation of foreign lands and people. As such, Company School paintings were devoid of narrative and mobilized the medium in an anthropological and scientific manner. The miniature *Interior of the Hammam at the Red Fort, Delhi, Furnished According to English Taste* and *A Syce (Groom) Holding Two Carriage Horses* are both great examples of how the miniature tradition transformed through the patronage of the British. These images are both likely commissioned by British East India company officers who wanted a visual record of their servants, animals, and possessions.[19] The interior of the Red Fort illustrates the conversion of a bath house by a British resident; a common practice among British nationals who would convert ruined or abandoned Mughal buildings into habitable spaces.[20]

Post-colonial academics such as Divya Saraf have identified the vast catalog of Company School painting as the aesthetic fetishization of the people and practices of the subcontinent.[21]

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[19] "A Groom Holding Two Carriage Horses," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed November 2, 2023, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/453354.

[20] "Interior of the Hammam at the Red Fort, Delhi, Furnished According to English Taste," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed November 2, 2023, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/453350.

[21] Divya Saraf, "Aesthetics of Extraction: Reconfiguring Images of Empire," Harvard Graduate School of Design, May 1, 2021, https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/37367886.

3.3 Excavating Artifact

Mughal miniatures are allegorically dense illustrations that often feature several narratives and references embedded within the space of a single image. In the following section, five Mughal-era miniatures are closely examined to 'excavate' the layers of narrative constructed within as well as provide broader socio-political context to these narratives and production of the image. Lastly, this study highlights the miniature's role as a comprehensive archive of the ideological and intellectual values of its patrons as well as bring forth the unique metaphysical capacity of the illustration to distort time and space.

A wealth of existing art history and theory on miniature painting – primarily Persian miniature painting and medieval manuscripts - is referenced to equip the reader with the miniature's conventions and vocabulary. This study also proposes the relevancy of scholarly research on Persian miniature concepts to the Mughal tradition, as the latter openly acknowledges its origins and is in many ways a stylistic offshoot of the former.

A. Akbar presents a painting to his father Humayun

Description

In the space of an image that measures less than nine by five inches, the artist has constructed a dense scene teeming with life and happenings. Composed in a manner that instinctively guides the eye to read from the bottom up, the miniature depicts a gathering of sorts, where guests enter from the street into a gated courtyard. A large *divan* of ambiguous spatial depth opens onto the courtyard with a number of distinguished guests spilling out. Beyond the courtyard, an ornate threshold divides the public front of house from a back of house staircase, where several attendants gracefully bring food to an undefined opening within the treehouse structure. Within the upper third of the painting, an even busier scene is illustrated with a canopied upper terrace housing musicians engrossed in song. A narrow path guides the eye to a private setting, where a small open terrace seats the Emperor Humayun and his successor, prince Akbar. In a narrative climax, Akbar is shown handing an illustration to his father, which upon closer inspection, reveals a mise-en-abyme, a copy of an image within itself.

Context

The first miniature selected for a deep allegorical reading is titled *Akbar presents a painting to his father Humayun*, completed in 1550-1556 by Abd Al Samad. For this study, I am showcasing the full miniature scanned along with its decorative margins along with several detail images of the original for clarity in communicating the narrative reading. Scholarly work suggests that the miniature was part of many standalone images produced as diplomatic gifts by either Humayun and/or Akbar.

As you may recall, the artist is one of two Persian Safavid artists that were drafted by Emperor Humayun to found the Mughal miniature tradition in India. This image is an early example of the Mughal miniature style before it reached full maturity in the late 16th century. As such, the illustration aligns closely with the Persian miniature tradition from the Safavid era.

The artist Al Samad was not only responsible for founding and leading Humayun's royal atelier, but was also tasked with personally tutoring Prince Akbar in the education of miniature painting.

Fig. 3.11 Akbar presents a painting to his father Humayun, Abd Al Samad, c.1550–1556

Narrative Reading

The narrative reading of this miniature seeks to highlight two significant ideas within the Mughal miniature tradition. The first is the metaphysical quality of the image where it engages with a spatial and temporal distortion. The second relates to the ontological quality of the miniature, specifically its ability to interrogate and negotiate the viewer's understanding of the image.

On the metaphysical quality of the miniature, architectural historian Shima Mohajeri's text *Architectures of Transversality* identifies Persian miniature art as the site of becoming, defined loosely as "the becoming of images of words, the becoming-creator of the created, and the becoming-time of space," where the "immanent impulse of creation inseparable from and simultaneous with the miniature space." As this particular miniature is closely aligned with the Persian miniature tradition we are able to rely on Persian scholarship to investigate the conceptual elements of the image. Mohajeri further goes on to identify two conventions of the miniature that allow it to achieve this transcendent quality of becoming, which she calls "spatial simultaneity" and "spatial multiplicity."

Spatial simultaneity speaks to the simultaneous dimensions and perspectives illustrated in the space of the miniature. Where spatial ambiguity, and shifting materiality and depth intensify and "underscore the state of suspension essential for capturing the dynamic process of becoming." While spatial multiplicity is understood as an architectural arrangement of spaces in various perspectives, roof views and sections of upper and lower levels. Mohajeri describes the experience as "the image of an assemblage composed of a multiplicity of instants, continually regenerated at every moment… it represents a cinematic image of time that goes back and forth, in between instants to produce a semblance of continuity."

In the miniature *Akbar presents a painting to his father Humayun*, the concept of becoming is prominently illustrated through the spatial simultaneity mechanism. Spatial simultaneity is most prominent at the openings within the large tree-house architecture, particularly at the *divan* where the distinction between the *divan's* exterior and interior faces is distorted using ornamental patterning. The artist's decision to cover the surfaces of the interior and exterior of the *divan* with dense patterning lend to a reading where the volume, depth, and general physics of the *divan* become indecipherable.

Fig. 3.12 Detail image of Fig. 3.11, the artist Abd Al Samad seated at the threshold of the diwan which is at once inside and outside

The artist uses simultaneity again at the opening for the back-of-house staircase, where the size, location, and color of the opening distort our perception through an inconsistent architecture. The size in relation to scale of the attendant sparks a curious understanding of the opening. This is followed by the location which functions to circulate attendants to the upper canopied terrace but seemingly lands in an interstitial space between the *divan* ceiling, and below the canopied level. The use of a solid color fill within the opening further suggests an infinite spatiality that reinforces the simultaneity present in the painting. The combination of the *divan* and the back-of-house opening provoke the viewer to rationalize the architecture of the tree-house.

Mohajeri describes simultaneity in miniatures as spaces of "the now," where past and future events converge to the present. This concept is overt in this miniature where we're at once with Humayun and Akbar, as well as the guests entering the courtyard below. These temporal discrepancies are heightened through the introduction of distinct thresholds between the spaces of the image. The painting further acts in opposition to the assumed linear model of time which proceeds from past – present – future, instead opting to visualize an image that is in a constant state of coming into being. This is blatant in the finale – if such an end can exist – where Akbar is sharing an image of the image, distorting the viewer's concept of temporality, subsequently questioning the painting's temporal state.

The ontological quality of the Mughal miniature tradition is best explained through questioning the authorship of the *Akbar presents a painting to his father Humayun* miniature. Reading from the bottom up; Al Samad has drawn himself in the miniature, as is common for courtly artists. In customary humility, he appears below all the distinguished guests of the gathering and even outside of the protective shelter of the *divan*. A small book with Al Samad's name appears beside him. The appearance of Al Samad in the image suggests that he is the author of this book. However, when one reaches the obvious climax of the image, we note the final provocation of the image with Akbar sharing a duplicate of the larger miniature with his father. In this, the image interrogates the viewer on their understanding of the image. As in, who authored the miniature? Was this a production of the revered Safavid painter Abd Al Samad, or his pupil Prince Akbar?

Kavitha Singh, an expert on Mughal painting traditions, suggests the miniature "crumples time" where the event of Akbar handing the image to Humayun could have only been illustrated after that very event has occurred, "but the painting-within-the-painting already forecasts the event-to-come in every detail. Both retrospective and prospective, the painting is a loop in time."[22] This interrogation by the image is typical of the Mughal tradition where one or many narratives converge towards a point but room is left for the viewer to interpret and negotiate the narrative(s) presented. Thus the miniatures of the Mughal tradition are pregnant with messaging that shift upon readings, by whom they are read, and the background and insight they may bring into the reading.

[22] Kavita Singh, "In a Miniature of Humayun and Akbar, Time Crumples to Depict an Entire World of Learning," Scroll.in, June 27, 2021, https://scroll.in/article/998543/in-a-miniature-of-humayun-and-akbar-time-crumples-to-depict-an-entire-world-of-learning.

Fig. 3.13 Detail image of Fig. 3.11, the emperor's attendant at the top of the stairs stands at the threshold of an opening with infinite depth

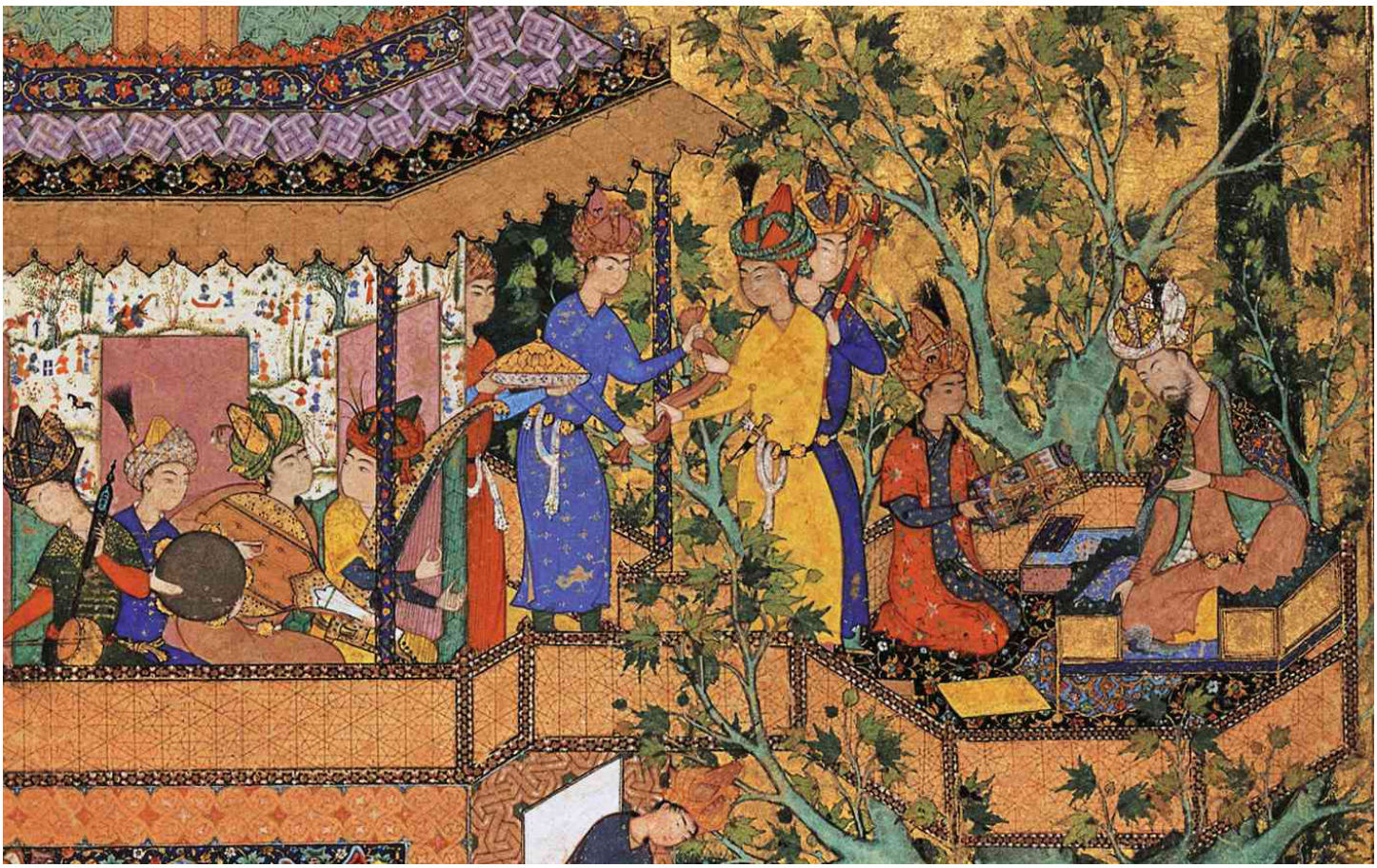

Fig. 3.14 Detail image of Fig. 3.11, the image culminates in a mise-en-abyme, suggesting an infinitely recurring sequence

B. The King Carried Away by a Giant Bird

Description

The following miniature visualizes a scene from the 6th century Persian epic *Haft Peykar* where Sasanian King Bahram Gur is hanging from the claws of a giant Simurgh bird. A vast landscape is seen below with rolling hills and large agricultural plots dividing the land. The artist takes care to illustrate several laborers tending to fields, workers using oxen, and farmers shepherding goats. To the left a dense walled city rises against the natural landscape with several onlookers waiting in awe as the mystical Simurgh and Bahram Gur approach.

Context

The miniature is one sheet of a folio extracted from a much larger - 325 page - illuminated manuscript named the *Khamsa of Nizami*. For this study, I am using two images, one that shows the full folio scanned along with its decorated margins, and the second is a detail of the original miniature included for clarity.

The Khamsa of Nizami manuscript produced for Emperor Akbar is a translation of the 'five poems' or the *Khamsa* originally written by Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi in 1191. The story would be translated for Akbar's pleasure and re-imagined to be set within his empire. The specific illustration under study is a scene from the *Haft Peykar* or the 'The Seven Beauties,' the fifth poem in Nizami's *Khamsa*. The poem follows the adventures of Bahram Gur and his romantic pursuit of seven princesses. While the larger manuscript is the work of several artists under the Mughal royal atelier led by Abd Al Samad, the miniature being studied was completed by Dharmadasa, a master Hindu miniaturist employed by Akbar. It is important to note here that Akbar ensured that his empire employed an array of individuals irrespective of faith, from the artists in the royal atelier up to the highest ranks of Mughal leadership. This inclusive policy is further explained in the writing and miniatures that follow.

Although widely known to be illiterate, the Mughal Emperor Akbar had an expansive personal library numbering in the tens of thousands. Akbar's biography notes how every night the emperor would have his attendants read to him.[23] The emperor's pursuit of knowledge and profound appreciation for arts and culture would be reflected in the royal atelier's commissions. Akbar would request the translation of several classical texts into illuminated manuscripts from diverse traditions including Indic, Islamicate, Persianate, Central Asian, and Greco-Roman; among these translated works was the Khamsa of Nizami.[24]

Lastly, there are two other versions of the Khamsa of Nizami to come out of the Mughal Empire which will become important in understanding the narrative reading for this image. The first of the two was made for Emperor Aurangzeb, Akbar's great grandson and the sixth Emperor of the Mughal Empire. Aurangzeb would patronize his own copy of the Khamsa of Nizami, however in it, his artists would replace the Sasanian Emperor Bahram Gur with Aurangzeb's likeness.

The second version of the Khamsa is not a translation, but a heavily inspired re-writing of Nizami's poetry by Indo-Persian poet Amir Khusrau. Khusrau would produce the *Khamsa of Khusrau* with a similar quintet of poems with *Hasht-Bihisht* being the equivalent of the *Haft Peykar*.

[23] Anu Kumar, "How Akbar Came to Love Books Though He Never Learnt to Read," Scroll.in, November 7, 2015, https://scroll.in/article/767632/how-akbar-came-to-love-books-though-he-never-learnt-to-read.

[24] Natif, Mughal Tolerance, 34

Fig. 3.15 The King Carried Away by a Giant Bird, Dharmdas, c.1595-1610

Fig. 3.16 Detail of the King Carried Away by a Giant Bird, Dharmdas, c.1595-1610

Narrative Reading

The following miniature is an important artifact for study as it demonstrates the role of the Mughal miniature as a production of ideological values and not simply an object of pleasure. As noted in the context above, the miniature depicts a mythical Simurgh bird soaring through the sky with the protagonist hanging below. While this is clearly a fantastical and allegorical recounting of Bahram Gur's exploits, the artist, and by extension the patron Akbar have chosen to ground the landscape scene in reality. The walled city, the agricultural fields and mountainous range beyond bear close resemblance to Fatehpur Sikri and Agra, the Mughal capital under Akbar's reign.

In comparing this specific miniature with another produced from Amir Khusrau's *Hasht-Bihisht*, the same moment is illustrated very differently. The artists' here have decided to visualize the landscape with a raging waterbody and fantastical sea-creatures. This discrepancy alludes to how Mughal miniatures often included immaterial representations of space, and that these were a product of the artist's creative liberties and not reflective of material reality.[25] Additionally, the differences between the two images highlights a statement made by Stephen Nichols, a historian focused on illuminated medieval manuscripts, arguing that miniature images often contain continuous and discontinuous narratives from its accompanying textual subject matter, and the image itself does not illustrate meaning but rather interrogates it. As such, while the Haft Peykar and Hasht-Bihisht may share the same textual narrative of Bahram Gur's adventure, the images accompanying them will differ.[26]

For further reading into this image, the work of Mika Natif is relevant; Natif is an art historian who has done extensive work in examining Mughal miniatures. In her text *Mughal Occidentalism*, Natif argues that the landscapes in Mughal miniatures are completed with intentionality and play an integral role in communicating the socio-political milieu of the Empire. Natif theorizes that the landscapes in *The King Carried Away by a Giant Bird miniature* are meant to reinforce Akbar's imaginary and produce "an image of Mughal India that was peaceful, economically prosperous, and cosmopolitan."[27]

Within this context, she suggests that the illustration of agricultural plots, farmers tending the land with tools and animals, as well as shepherds herding goats across lush grasslands speak to Akbar signaling his prosperous and productive kingdom where even the lowly peasant is acknowledged within the hierarchy of his kingdom.[28]

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[25] Natif, Mughal Tolerance, 152

[26] Stephen G. Nichols, "The Image as Textual Unconscious: Medieval Manuscripts," L'Esprit Créateur 29, no. 1 (1989): 7–23, https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.1989.0008.

[27] Natif, Mughal Tolerance, 152

[28] Natif, Mughal Tolerance, 188

Fig. 3.17 Young men carried off by a Simurgh - Amir Khusrau's Hasht-Bihisht, Basawan, c.1590

Simultaneously, the urban environment in the image depicts a secure walled city with a densely populated cityscape. The cityscape is dotted with a variety of building types and architectural vernaculars from flat roofed structures to domes and minarets. In Natif's analysis, this microarchitecture parallels Akbar's pursuit of a pluralist empire where mosques and temples can reside in close proximity to each other. The aspirations of Akbar and his society are reflected within the built form itself, where domes and minarets are reflective of Islamic architecture while the angular roof lines may indicate other religious denominations.

Another element of note within this miniature is the nascent perspective used to visualize the receding landscape. This is a novel technique that was not evident in prior imagery of the Mughal court, however it speaks once again to the nature of Akbar's court; open and tolerant towards cultural exchange. There is significant scholarship and evidence in Mughal arts that point to Abkar's deliberate engagement and adoption of European techniques such as the use of rudimentary perspective, European artifacts, and Christian subjects and conventions.

C. Akbar and the Jesuits

In the miniature titled *Akbar and the Jesuits*, the Emperor, Akbar, is depicted seated amongst Muslim scholars, Hindu and Jain priests, as well as Jesuits missionaries. In a courtyard under a clear night sky and a full moon, the group is engaged in an intense theological debate, while outside of the courtyard civilians of the empire proceed with their daily life.

Context

While narratively and conceptually minimal, this miniature is included in this study for its role in projecting the Emperor Akbar's authority and subjectivity. More importantly, this miniature speaks to the Mughal traditions' ability to document with nuance the intricate political and social climate of the time.

The miniature is one sheet of a folio and has been cropped to the space of the image. It does not include the un-decorated margins of the manuscript as I have determined it to be inconsequential to the narrative reading and the focus of this particular study. The miniature appears in the *Akbarnama*, or the Book of Akbar. The illuminated manuscript was commissioned by Akbar and it includes accompanying text by Abu'l-Fazl ibn Mubarak, Akbar's personal biographer and the Grand Vizier of the Empire. It consists of three volumes chronicling Akbar's reign as the third Mughal emperor. Volume I begins at Akbar's ancestry, birth, and upbringing. Volume II follows Akbar's reign and the critical battles that define his legacy. Volume III stands as the most compelling of the three as its subject matter delves into the intricacies of the empire from crop yields to commercial revenues as well as the cultural makeup of the empire's subjects. A large subsection within Volume III is dedicated to discussing the different religious beliefs of the empire's citizens. This particular miniature is thought to be a part of Volume III.

After the unexpected death of his father, Humayun, Akbar ascended to the Mughal throne at the age of fourteen. Under the guidance of regent Bairam Khan, Akbar would significantly expand the Mughal Empire across the Indian subcontinent from Gujarat in the west to Bengal in the east. Akbar's reign is notable for his governance, which significantly reformed Mughal administrative policies and led to an economically prosperous empire with progressive views on culture and religion.

Fig. 3.18 Akbar holds a religious assembly in the Ibadat Khana in Fatehpur Sikri, Nar Singh, c.1605

Among Akbar's noteworthy reforms include a new administrative policy known as the *Mansabdari system*. This was a grading system which determined the status and rank of government officials within the empire. Each rank would correspond to civic and military responsibilities of the *manasabadar* - individual with *mansab*, or a position of responsibility - within the empire as well as their compensation. Akbar would use this system to assign nobles various governance roles for the administration of the empire.

Akbar's empire quickly sprawled and subsequently became increasingly diverse, culturally and religiously. As a response, Akbar would embrace several progressive ideals to promote cultural and religious unity. The most critical among these was the notion of *Sulh-I-Kulh*, translating to 'peace with all'; its basic tenets were that of social balance and tolerance. Akbar would mobilize this policy internally within his empire to create a "balance of power among the different religious, social and ethnic groups."[29]

Akbar's appeal for tolerance would see Muslims and non-Muslims alike appointed to the highest ranks of his government. Furthermore, Akbar repealed his father's taxation legislation and eliminated the *Jizya* tax; a tax levied against non-Muslim subjects within the Mughal Empire. Akbar would also commission the *Ibadat Khana,* a meeting space in Fatehpur Sikri. It would be within this space and after numerous nights of open and civil debate that Akbar would conclude that all religions were the same. He would eventually follow this with the introduction of *Din-i-Ilahi.* Centered on pluralism and tolerance, the religion would reconcile elements from several religions including Islam, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism.

Akbar's *Sulh-I-Kulh* would also translate externally as foreign policy to engage with the growing European presence on the subcontinent. Scholars note *Sulh-I-Kulh* as consequential to the rich cultural exchange and commercial trade between the Mughal Empire and the European world, particularly the Portuguese in the late 16th century.[30]

[29] Natif, Mughal Tolerance, 27

[30] Natif, Mughal Tolerance, 27

Narrative Reading

The miniature *Akbar and Jesuits*, illustrates a vibrant scene within the courtyard of the *Ibadat Khana* at Fatehpur Sikri. The image is rich with patterning and color but it's abundantly clear it centers around the Emperor Akbar. Akbar is set apart as he sits on a minor throne with a canopy and several attendants standing behind him. A group of scholars sit facing Abkar as he directs his attention towards four individuals in his immediacy. The four look to be Hindu priests and Jesuit missionaries by way of their attire and depictions of their faces. Below them sit an additional six individuals which, again, by their attire and bearded faces look to be Muslim scholars of the Orthodox tradition and others of the Mystical Sufi teachings.

Within this visual organization, the miniature establishes a hierarchy amongst the subjects of the image. Akbar as the central figure, the Hindus and Jesuits next, and the Muslim scholars last. This hierarchy aligns with the political and religious tensions within Akbar's empire at the time. As noted before, Akbar's *Sulh-I-Kulh* dramatically opened the Mughal Empire to formally engage with the outside world in numerous ways, particularly resulting in its exposure to different religious beliefs. Abu Faz'l notes in Akbar's personal biography that the *Ulama*, or Islamic leaders of the Mughal Empire, expressed great displeasure with Akbar's activities in the *Ibadat Khana*. They saw Akbar's tolerance and active engagement as blasphemous and unnecessary. This would create significant friction, ultimately leading Akbar to stop his weekly gatherings at the *Ibadat Khana* as the invited Islamic scholars would raise their voices and behave uncivilly. The miniature does well to capture this dynamic through the figures' gestures, posture, and expression.

A final component to this image occurs in the bottom third of the image. The artist used a solid red sandstone wall, much like the actual Fatehpur Sikri, to spatially divide the *Ibadat Khana* from several individuals and horses passing by. The individuals are dressed in attire reflective of different socio-economic classes in the empire; the man in a simple loincloth representing the most vulnerable of society, the man in the middle possibly of the working class, and the man with horses a low level noble.

Reviewing the context provided earlier, the Mansabdari system implemented by Akbar would use the number of horses owned by an individual to determine an associated rank. The ownership of horses reflected an economic standing but also a military capacity as they could be used for calvary. There are many narrative conclusions that can be made as to the inclusion of these individuals at the bottom of the miniature; one possible narrative thread speaks to Akbar's eventual proposal of *Din-i-Ilahi*, a universal faith that is for all members of his society. Another speaks to the breadth of Akbar's rule; he is not just an emperor focused on spiritual matters, but one that manages the administration of the kingdom, its people as well as some of the most important questions of humanity.

In short, this narratively concise image contains a rich allegory of the political and social climate of Akbar's empire. It acts as an archive documenting a moment in time of Akbar's reign where an imperial policy manifests within space and trickles into the socio-political fabric for the individual within the empire to experience.

D. Shah-Jahan receives his three eldest sons and Asaf Khan during his accession ceremonies

This noteworthy miniature illustrates a vibrant scene set in the *darbar* of the Mughal court as the fifth Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan celebrates his ascension to the throne. The Emperor is seated within an ornate *jharokha*, as he presides over the imperial gathering. Below him are dozens of royal subjects representing the leadership across the Mughal Empire in the early 17th century. In addition, this gathering also signifies the reunion of the emperor with his three young sons and father-in-law; represented by the four individuals to the left.

Context

The following miniature is one sheet of a folio and has been cropped for clarity. It does not include the decorative gold margins of the manuscript as I have determined it to be inconsequential to the narrative reading and the focus of this particular study. The miniature is bound in the *Padshahnama*, a royal manuscript commissioned by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan to document his two decades of reign. The *Padshahnama* follows the tradition of imperial manuscripts produced for each Mughal emperor prior; *Baburnama*, *Akbarnama*, and *Tuzk-e-Jahangiri*, representing the reigns of Emperor Babur, Akbar, and Jahangir respectively.

The *Padshahnama* manuscript was completed by Shah Jahan's imperial historian Abdul Hamid Lahori in 1648 and contains 44 miniatures documenting battle scenes, major events in Shah Jahan's rule, and various court ceremonies.[31] Manuscripts like these would either stay within the empire's collection or gifted to those perceived as deserving. This particular manuscript would end up in the possession of a regional lord in Northern India after the collapse of the Mughal Empire in 1707. In 1799, it would be gifted to King George III. Today, the illuminated manuscript is part of the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle and is known as the *Windsor Padshahnama*.[32]

After six years in exile, Shah Jahan finally returns to Agra to ascend the throne after his father's death in 1627.[33]

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[31] "Padshahnamah (The Book of Emperors) ," Royal Collection Trust, accessed November 2, 2023, https://www.rct.uk/collection/1005025/padshahnamah-pd-shhnmh-the-book-of-emperors-lrmlrm.

[32] Padshahnamah, Royal Collection Trust.

[33] "Bichitr - Shah-Jahan Receives His Three Eldest Sons and Asaf Khan during His Accession Ceremonies (8 March 1628)," Royal Collection Trust, accessed November 2, 2023, https://www.rct.uk/collection/1005025-k/shah-jahan-receives-his-three-eldest-sons-and-asaf-khan-during-his-accession.

Fig. 3.19 Shah-Jahan receives his three eldest sons and Asaf Khan during his accession ceremonies, Bichitr and Ramdas, c.1630–40.

This miniature not only documents the formal celebration that honored this momentous occasion but also records the reunion of Shah Jahan and his three sons who were separated and left behind under the care of Asaf Khan, who's pictured to the far left. In this illuminated manuscript, the accompanying text adds further context to the image, "the parent's joy after such a long time was indescribable inasmuch as in the workshop of rhetoric there is no expression that can convey such joy."[34] The three sons illustrated in the miniature are Dara-Shikoh, Shah-Shuja, and Aurangzeb. As noted previously, Dara-Shikoh, the eldest of the three and heir-apparent, would be defeated and executed by the youngest brother, Aurangzeb in a war of succession.

Narrative Reading

I selected this miniature for reading as it represents a fully mature Mughal-era miniature that has come into its own structuralist visual culture. Moreover, it stands as an exceptional example of a miniature that acts as both historical recounting, and as an ideological production of the empire. The image is laden with symbols and pictorial conventions that represent the new leadership of Shah Jahan and how that might differ from his father before.

The image is set in the Agra Fort within the royal *darbar*. It is here in this space where royal decrees and formal discussions regarding the state were held. The miniature relies on the *darbar's* architecture to create a sense of order to the painting. Koch suggests that the rigid symmetry and order of the painting goes beyond visual order, but rather "in terms of composition and figure arrangement, as well as antithetical stylistic modes, were systematically explored to political ends, to create programmatic statements of order and hierarchy, the basic tenets of Shah Jahan's ideology."[35] While Gregory Minissale, an expert on art psychology and author of the *Images of Thought,* suggests that Koch's view is simplistic and "privileges a viewing choice over others … which are based on European perspectival elements rather than traditional Islamic planar geometries."[36] Minissale argues that the pictorial order of this miniature and of the Mughal miniature tradition are far more complex and employ hexagons and triangular subdivisions. This compositional complexity creates multivalent visual choices that transform the miniature from static to visual and ideologically dynamic.

[34] Shah-Jahan, Royal Collection Trust.

[35] Minissale, Images of Thought, 111

[36] Minissale, Images of Thought, 113

In this particular reading, I analyze the miniature from the top to the bottom, dividing the image into thirds. This approach falls in line with Minissale's suggestion that "None of these choices represent a closure as each possible way of reading the composition is in continual tension or counter-balance with others, creating shifting patterns that form and re-form."[37]

The top third of the painting includes the emperor, his sons, and his father-in-law. A canopied balcony known in vernacular Indo-Islamic architecture as a *Jharokha* frames Shah Jahan with symmetrical supports. Shah Jahan sits beneath an ornate *Shamsa*, or canopy, inside the *Jharokha*, which features an illustration of the *Huma*, a mythical Persian bird which prophesied the becoming of a great king.[38]

The middle third of the painting depicts high ranking subjects of the empire such as regional kings and allied nobles. The Royal Collection Trust (RCT) which owns the *Windsor Padshahnama* notes "tiny inscriptions" adjacent to figures in the miniature which identify an array of individuals from various regions with diverse religious and cultural backgrounds such as Iranian nobles and Rajput kings. Their inclusion in this miniature means to communicate the diversity of the empire and the heterogeneity of culture and power at its highest levels. A golden pedestal remains empty at the center of this miniature. Due to its color and gilding it becomes a striking focal point to the overall miniature. The RCT's analysis suggests that this is a space for an Islamic leader to give a sermon in the name of the emperor. To the viewer of this miniature this communicates the importance of religion in Shah Jahan's empire. This narrative continues as the miniature uses a primitive perspective to illustrate a small room behind the pedestal and below the emperor's *Jharokha*. The room depicts two priests, two lions, and a lamb. The room is also adorned with a golden clothesline outfitted with bells. These symbols become allegories and are not a historical recounting of lions and lambs within the imperial court but a metaphor for the empire's governance. The sermon given from the golden pedestal is intended to travel through the golden clothesline. It reflects a connection of the Imperial court to the far-reaching ends of the empire. The image further reassures the non-Muslim population that while this will be a religious monarchy, justice will still be upheld for the non-believer. This is signaled by the two prone lions around a vulnerable white lamb, where a naturally tense confrontation is dealt with peace and tolerance.

The final third of the image is where low ranked nobles and military commanders stand further reinforcing the notion of Shah Jahan's hierarchy focused on diplomacy, tolerance, and religion above military might.

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[37] Minissale, Images of Thought, 113

[38] Shah-Jahan, Royal Collection Trust.

3.4 Confronting Image

Building on the chapters prior, the miniature tradition serves as a fertile record of power, belief, and ideology within the subcontinent, tracing evolving power structures from early Islamic empires to the colonial rule under the British East India Company. In Minissale's text, *Images of Thought*, illusionist art of the miniature "is not a neutral field of artistic technical performance but a cultural space where ideological negotiations take place under the remote control of power relations."[39]

As the BJP enters its ninth year as the majority ruling party, the Hindu nationalist project continues to enjoy unrestrained freedom to undertake increasingly brazen attempts of re-writing the past and effacing the Muslim minority from India's collective history. Moreover, the Hindutva campaign has underwritten predatory practices that remove the Indian-Muslim from the socio-political fabric of contemporary India while simultaneously framing them as sinister. These strategies have compounded to alienate and 'other' the Indian-Muslim from the majority.

On a popular social media website, a community group named TrueIndology posted an image, claiming it to be a miniature from the *Akbarnama*. The post cites the miniature's title as, 'Akbar makes a tower of slain Hindu heads,' and it depicts several laborers constructing a tower made of bricks and decapitated heads. In the description the user suggests that this is the aftermath of a battle where Emperor Akbar had bested a Hindu king and that this post was intended to highlight the very violent and macabre side to the 'tolerant' and 'darling' king of the secularists. A cursory glance at the image quickly reveals that this is not at all a Mughal miniature but a badly illustrated imitation. It lacks the refinement in figural and landscape illustration, and the miniature's conventions do not follow the vocabulary of the time, or the *Akbarnama*'s other miniatures. Moreover, research on this purported event quickly brings into question the veracity of the skull tower narrative as very little scholarly work and historical records exist for such practices by the Mughal Empire. However, the imagery and its provocation were successful, as once deployed into the public sphere, it quickly garnered outrage and further reframed the Mughal past as barbaric and antagonistic towards the Hindu.

[39] Minissale, Images of Thought, 26

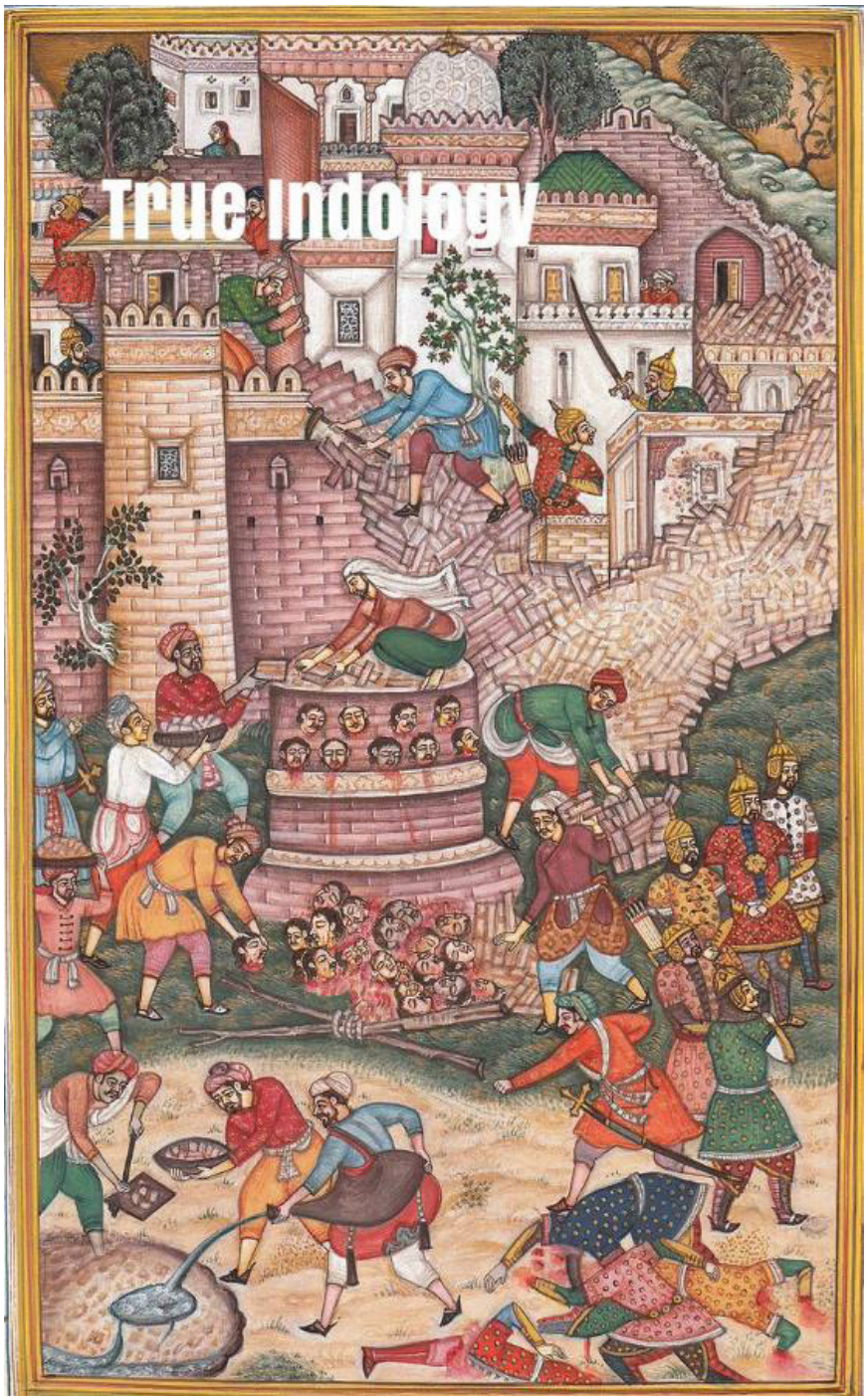
True Indology

Fig. 3.20 Akbar makes a tower of slain Hindu heads, Navrang, year unknown

Now more than ever, there is an acute need to revisit the past and empower a nuanced dialogue on the entangled history of the Hindu and the Indian-Muslim. Simultaneously, it is important to explore practices that situate the Indian-Muslim back into the conversation in India's future. In India's contemporary milieu, this thesis proposes to investigate the Mughal miniature painting tradition as a historical archive, mobilize its distinct capacity for evolving dialogue, and reinscribe the Indian-Muslim within the socio-political space of contemporary India. In re-inserting the miniature as an archive, my work seeks to bring a degree of complexity to contemporary discourse that is lost in the politicized narrative promoted by the Hindutva; specifically to the vilification and erosion of the Muslim in India.

Further to its role as historical archive, the miniature also has a unique capacity to hold divergent narratives creating a visual landscape for dialogue. The miniature's formation at the center of an intellectually diverse empire has informed a visuality where a multitude of interpretations can be retrieved from a singular image. Minissale notes that approaching Mughal miniatures requires new complex models of thought to unpack the "extensive and intricate, layered and nuanced" within, suggesting Deleuze's model of the rhizome as a root system of network of intellectual relations. In addition to the embedded visual complexity, architectural theorists like Shima Mohajeri note that miniatures are the sites of becoming, where the "immanent impulse of creation is inseparable from and simultaneous with the miniature space". Mohajeri goes further to define the site of becoming as, "the becoming of images of words. The becoming-creator of the created, and the becoming-time of space."[40] This thesis positions this quality of the miniature to be in a constant state of production and creation at once, which opens numerous avenues for reading and interpretation of a miniature. This is particularly important as it suggests the miniature is an animate document that provides no clear conclusion, but an evolving dialogue and interrogation.

[40] Shima Mohajeri, *Architectures of Transversality: Paul Klee, Louis Kahn and the Persian Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

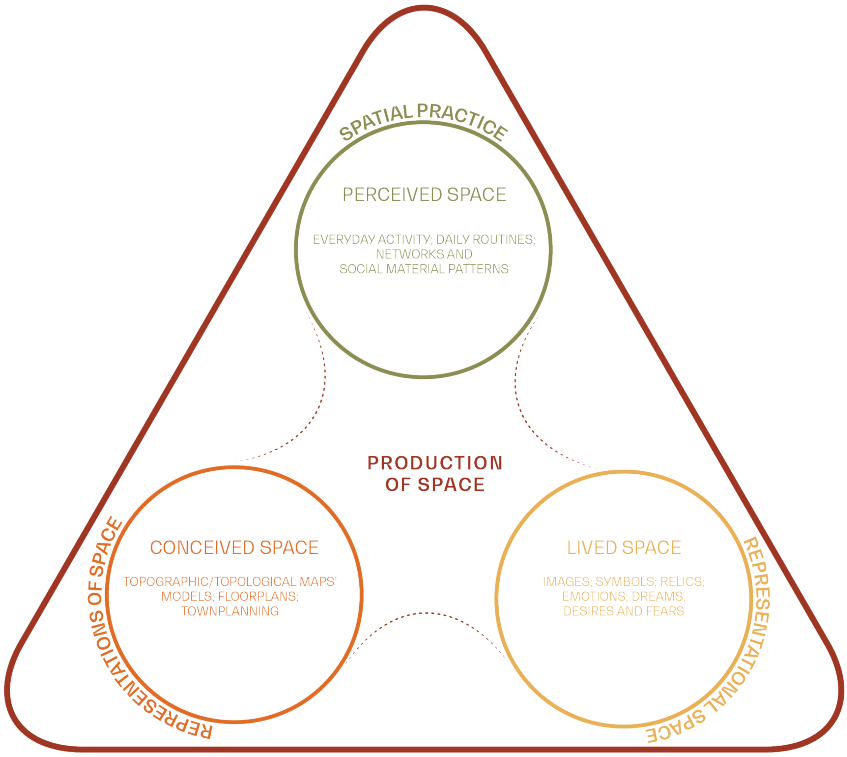

Fig. 3.21 Unitary Theory of Space, Image by Author, 2023

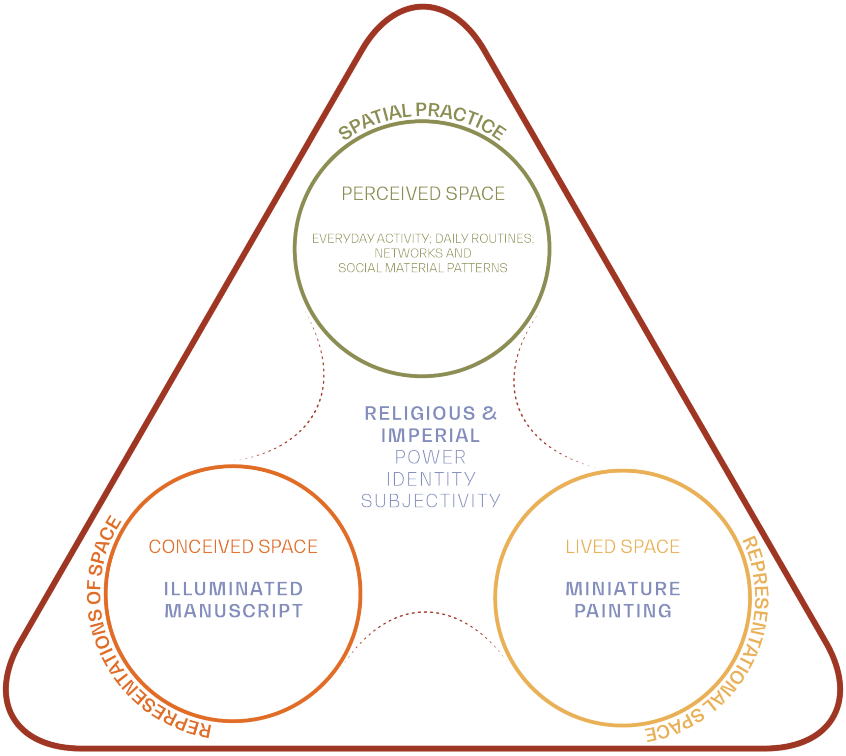

Fig. 3.22 Miniature painting as representational space, image by author, 2023

Furthermore, my research leans on the works of French philosopher Henri Lefevbre and theorist Michel de Certeau to support the deployment of the miniature as 'representational space' and 'tactic' towards re-inscribing Muslim presence in the socio-political fabric of contemporary India. Lefebvre's 'Unitary Theory of Space' states that space is a social product that is informed by three modes:

1. Spatial Practice or Perceived Space: The everyday practice of space, including social patterns and daily routines.
2. Representations of Space or Conceived Space: Topographic/ topological maps, floorplans, and town planning.
3. Representational Space or Lived Space: Images, symbols, relics, and emotions.

I situate miniature painting as 'Representational Space', embedded with symbols, allegory, and imagery to produce and inscribe space for the Indian-Muslim. The insertion of this node acts to reassert Muslim presence in space and resist the slow displacement promoted by the Hindutva project.

Similarly, the miniature also builds on the notion of tactics in Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Certeau defines tactics as creative subversion by the marginal Other against a rational order imposed by an institutional power.[41] As noted by Certeau, the marginal in his framework refer to a heterogeneous Other who are non-producers of culture. In the context of this thesis, the visualization of miniatures acts to "manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities" for the Indian-Muslim to challenge the 'strategies' of the dominant producers, the Hindutva.

A contemporary formulation of Lefebvre and Certeau's ideas come through within the concept of 'critical spatial practice.' Coined by architectural historian Jane Rendell, as well as more recent architectural educators Hirsch and Miessen, 'critical spatial practice' is defined as a broad range of activities that seek to reshape the built environment in counter-hegemonic ways. Originally developed in relation to the work of artists, the framework propounded by Rendell explores how architecture can expand its purview and begin interrogating existing social and spatial orders.[42]

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[41] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

[42] Written by Brent Sturlaugson and 2019 Published August 26, "Critical Spatial Practice," Critical Spatial Practice, accessed November 2, 2023, https://www.societyandspace.org/forums/critical-spatial-practice.

Framing critical spatial practice within this research, the visual practice of miniature painting acts as a form of historical and speculative spatial practice with the objective of critiquing, proposing, and challenging the established order of the Hindutva.

The significance of this work requires investigating art historian David Joselit's ideas on the power of art and images. In the seminal text *After Art*, Joselit attempts to shift the value of art from commodity to a complex assemblage of "force-potentials to produce effects and affects."[43] Joselit builds further and references Deleuze and Foucault to identify art's capacity to serve as a vehicle of power within networks and on multiple planes which are reproduced and multiplied as images are circulated. In this, the miniatures that I produce create new networks of connections, re-inscribing the Indian-Muslim, exponentially within the socio-political fabric of India.

Ultimately, the aim of this research is to produce images that expand and flex the limits imposed by the Hindu nationalist project and uplift the marginal Other. In *The Embodied Image*, Juhani Pallasmaa notes that there are two types of images, the first dictates, manipulates, and conditions, and the other emancipates, empowers, and inspires.[44] This thesis seeks to produce miniatures of the latter; images that inspire a dialogue on the Indian-Muslim.

[43] Tyrus Miller, "The Potency of Images: Reading David Joselit's after Art," crosspollenblog, October 21, 2018, https://crosspollenblog.wordpress.com/2018/10/21/the-potency-of-images-reading-david-joselits-after-art/.

[44] Juhani Pallasmaa, "Architecture and the Spectacle," chapter, in *The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture* (Chichester: Wiley, 2011), 21.

4. The Imaginary

4.1 Introduction

India is a nation of imaginaries. Through time, the subcontinent has been captivated by mystical and profane conceptions that have inspired hope, fear, and belonging. At the height of the Mughal Empire in the 16th century, the Mughal Emperor Akbar was the author of a comprehensive imaginary that encompassed all parts of society.

Proclaimed as a divine ruler, Akbar envisioned a kingdom that embodied the highest virtues of peace and tolerance. He would form this imaginary by introducing a number of novel ideas, among them *Sulh-I-Kulh*, an imperial policy towards universal peace. *Sulh-I-Kulh* would promote solidarity, compromise and balance between the diverse constituents under Akbar's growing domain. *Sulh-I-Kulh* would also be the foundation for *Din-i Ilahi*. According to Akbar's grand Vizier, Abu'l-Fazl, as Akbar was divinely appointed, he was not bound to any single faith but rather was a universal agent of God. In addition to these core ideas, Akbar would also pursue the Virtuous City, a notion formulated by the medieval philosopher and scientist Nasir Al Din Tusi. Tusi's Virtuous City provided a social order, outlining the behaviors of the ruler and the individual, as well as the organization of society, the city, and the state. Tusi's writing provides further detail on the Virtuous City founded upon key principles of social cooperation, justice, and prosperous economy.

These progressive ideals would inform Akbar beyond administrative policy and would materialize within the spatial construction of his empire. This is particularly evident in the illuminated images and manuscripts produced under Akbar's royal workshops. In a series of images from the *Akbarnama*, the reader can piece together Tusi's virtuous city manifesting itself within the urban fabric. In the two miniatures illustrating Akbar's new capital city of Fatehpur Sikri, the artist has depicted a vibrant scene of a city under construction as Akbar is toured through the streets. This massive undertaking speaks to the grandeur of Akbar's imperial planning and the economic prosperity of his kingdom. The image also emphasizes the empire's vast skilled labor force including stonemasons, bricklayers, and wood workers. In another scene, Akbar is seen touring the mainstreet on his royal elephant past a colonnade filled with shop-keepers peddling their wares. These scenes act as signifiers to build Akbar's imaginary of a powerful capital city that is a thriving hub of trade and commerce.

In another set of images detailing the celebrations after the birth of his sons Murad and Salim - the latter succeeding Akbar as Emperor Jahangir - build on Akbar's imaginary of a virtuous city by visualizing an extremely diverse and cosmopolitan capital. In one miniature, Akbar is shown personally handing out charity to an eager populace outside of the red sandstones of Fatehpur Sikri. In the other, nobles of varied backgrounds bring the emperor gifts of all kinds, from exotic cats to birds of prey.

Fig. 4.1 Akbar inspecting construction for his new capital Fatehpur Sikri, Balchand, c.1603-1605

Fig. 4.2 Construction at Akbar's new capital Fatehpur Sikri, Balchand, c.1603-1605

The detailed visualization of the populace and allied nobles speak clearly to the worldly composition of Akbar's empire.

A key element to note in Fig 4.1 is the urbanism constructed outside of the courtyard walls. The artist and, by extension, the patron deliberately visualize a city fabric dotted with diverse religious architecture. Across the top of the miniature is a domed structure with finials and a minaret suggesting a mosque, followed closely by another white structure with a tall spire suggesting a shrine of sorts, ending finally with the depiction of a sloped roof structure with a large cross across its facade implying a church or chapel space.

In reading these four miniatures, Akbar's imaginary begins to take shape and it speaks to a highly complex and idyllic society with a mature socio-political landscape. The images reinforce the virtuous city Akbar sought where imperial authority was rooted in a just and pluralistic society.

In the rich history of the subcontinent, this is one among many socio-political imaginaries that have taken a hold of the land. In 21st-century India, two prevailing imaginaries are in a tenuous stand-off in hopes of capturing the support of the people. While both express a vision of democracy and a united nation, one stipulates a deep commitment to the land and culture. This imaginary led by the BJP is Hindutva, and it's summarized through the slogan '*Bharat Mata ki Jai*'. Translated as *Victory for Mother India*, the slogan identifies the union of 'Bharat' (our land), 'Mata' (our heritage and culture), and 'Jai' (people's aspirations). It embodies the Hindutva ideology of the Indian geography as holy territory, and the people that come from this holy land to have a common culture defined by Hindu values.

A counter imaginary to the BJP is shaped by the INC political party, the primary collective that led India to its independence in 1947. The INC leans on its record of creating transformative change and imagines a progressive India that is based on inclusion and harmony. In this imaginary, differences are celebrated rather than viewed as lines of division. One of the INC's key values is embracing secularism, which is informed by indisputable national figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, and Indira Gandhi.[1] All individuals who have identified the contentious relations of the Hindu/Muslim communities and sought to promote unity and understanding. In the BJP's conception of India, the secular ideology pushed by the INC is dismissed as pseudo-secularism; a Western thought that is unnatural to India, one which panders to minority groups at the cost of the majority.[2]

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[1] Indian National congress, accessed November 2, 2023, https://www.inc.in/our-values.

[2] Hasan Suroor, *Unmasking Indian Secularism: Why We Need a New Hindu-Muslim Deal* (S.l.: Rupa, 2022).

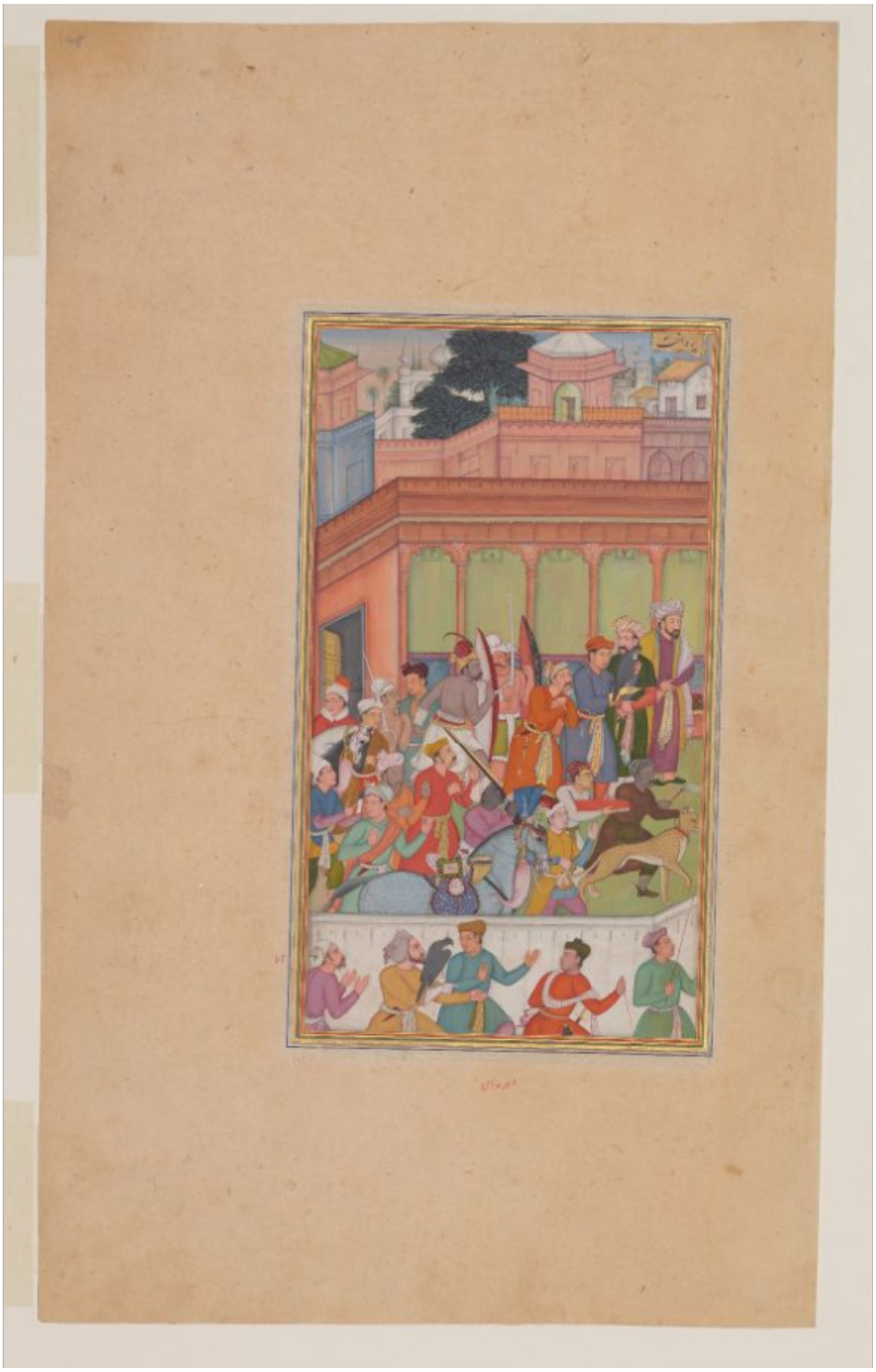

Fig. 4.3 Akbar receives congratulations and gifts on the birth of his son, Dharm Das, c.1603-1605

Fig. 4.4 Celebrations for the birth of Akbar's son Salim, La`l, c.1603-1605

4.2 Methodology

At the time of writing this research, two polar-imaginaries led by the INC and BJP prepare to initiate the largest democratic exercise in all of human history. In 2024, over 900 million Indians will collectively participate in the future of the nation. Their decisions will be informed by elaborate political campaigning and messaging put forth by each party. In parallel with this very critical moment for the future of the nation, I have added to the socio-political and spatial discourse by conceptualizing the two competing imaginaries through reconfigured miniatures. My conceptualization leveraged the capacity of miniature images to speculate on the socio-political and spatial construction of India in each imaginary.

In the first reconfigured miniature titled, *Achhe din aane waale hain*, the image took the BJP's 2014 campaign slogan as a prompt to speculate on the promise of a better tomorrow. The slogan translated as "good days are going to come" resonated deeply with a nation that decidedly broke a decade long leadership by the opposition, the INC party.[3] The core of this imaginary builds on the aspirations of the Hindutva campaign of a cohesive cultural identity reflected in the socio-political construction of the nation. In addition, the image also takes inspiration from the fictional work *The Muslim Vanishes* by Saeed Naqvi, where all 200 million Muslims of India vanish suddenly and inexplicably from the subcontinent.[4] The book explores the aftermath of this disappearance at a political and cultural level.

In contrast, the reconfigured miniature titled *Bharat Jodo* reuses the title of the INC's 4000km long political march from the southernmost tip of India to the Northernmost location.[5] Roughly translated as *Unite India*, the following reconfigured miniature explores the INC's agenda of a progressive democracy, with a focus on interfaith solidarity. In particular, this reconfigured miniature visualizes a number of contemporary and historic practices of communal unity and cooperation reflective of a united India.

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[3] Narendra Modi, "India Has Won! ," Twitter, May 16, 2014, https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/467192528878329856.

[4] Saeed Naqvi, *The Muslim Vanishes: A Play* (Gurugram: Vintage, an imprint of Penguin Random House India, 2022).

[5] "Bharat Jodo Yatra," Join Bharat Jodo Yatra, accessed November 2, 2023, https://bharatjodoyatra.in/.

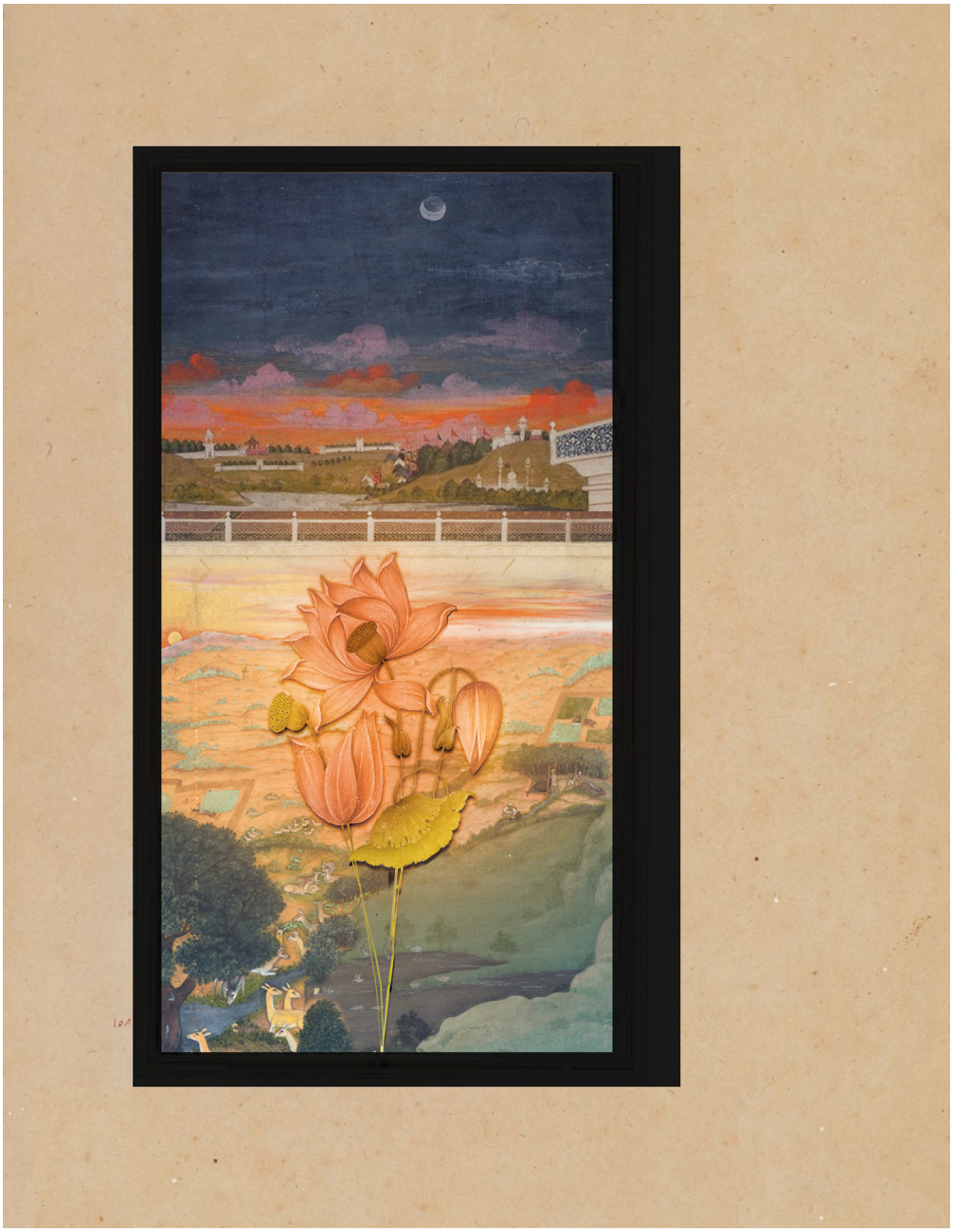

Fig. 4.5 Achhe din aane waale hain; a reconfigured miniature illustrates a Saffron lotus flower, a symbol of the BJP against the backdrop of a sun setting on the Mughal empire while simultaneously rising again on a new landscape without the Indian-Muslim. The image collages five Mughal miniatures including a Mughal study of a Lotus flower., image by author, 2023

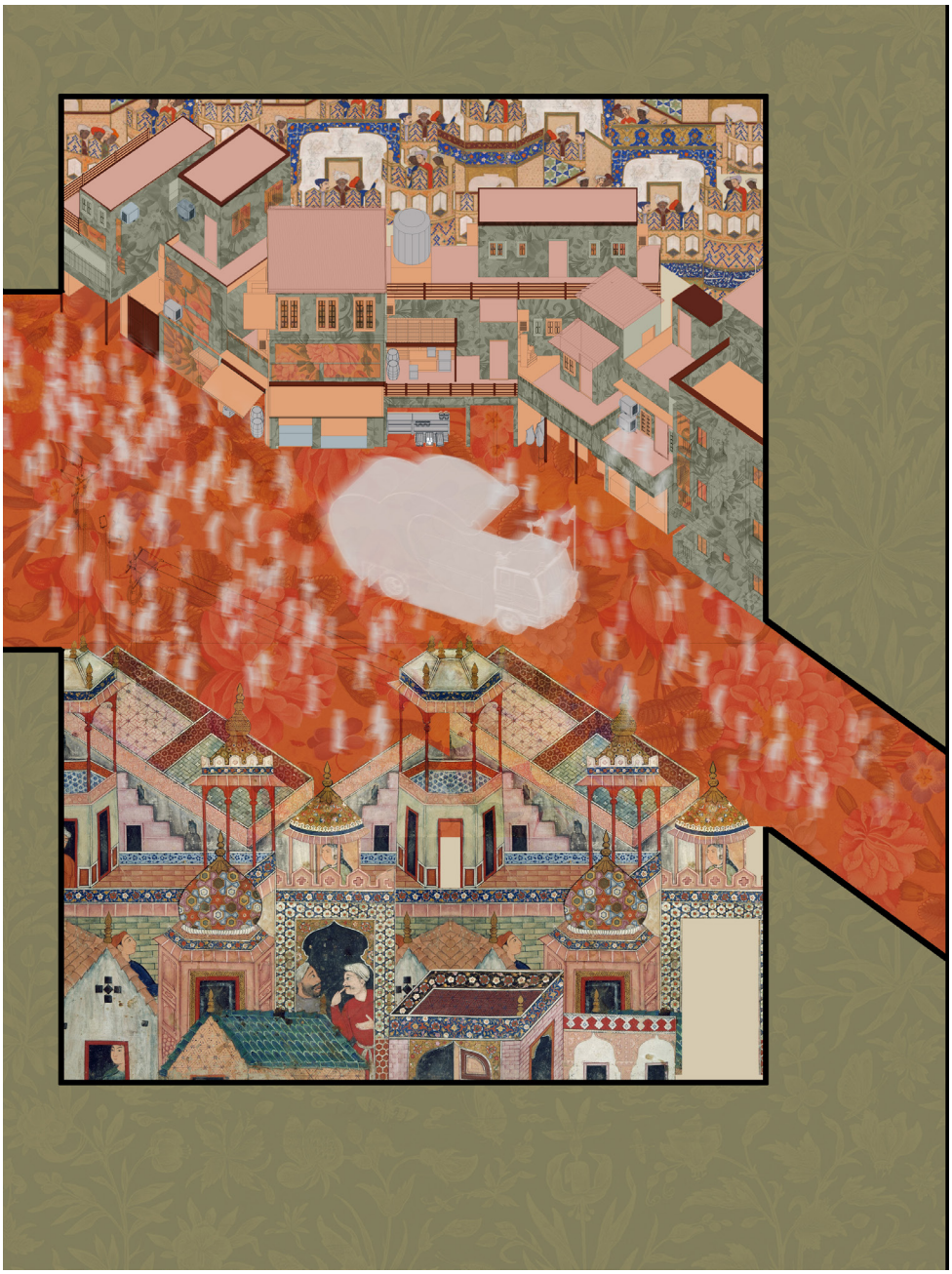

Fig. 4.6 Bharat Jodo; a reconfigured miniature illustrates the Bharat Jodo Yatra as a symbol of unity while also examining the trauma of yatras in the past, image by author, 2023

In my approach to the production of the two reconfigured miniatures, I have employed a digital-collage technique that stitched together a selection of fragments from an extensive library of Mughal-era miniature paintings. I used these fragments to frame and map space creating voids in the image. Subsequently, I generated new material that is overlaid onto the collaged figure ground to synthesize new meanings and narrative. The infill material I generated are signifiers and act as spatial and socio-political allegory related to the two imaginaries proposed in this thesis. My technique of digital-collage leans on the 16th-century Mughal miniature tradition, where Akbar's royal atelier engaged with European prints and Persianate paintings. Natif notes that Mughal artists would cut up Renaissance prints and reconfigure them into unique composite images that were 'Mughalized.' Furthermore, the Mughal artists would layer on additional meanings to the image essentially recodifying and producing a "multifarious visual understanding."[6] This technique is best represented by a miniature from the late 16th century titled *A composite Arrangement of a European Print and Persian Drawings*. This miniature features a European engraving of the Roman moon goddess Luna, two Safavid drawings, one of a kneeling scribe and three figures, and a painting of a recumbent lion attributed to the Persianate realm. Natif states that the miniature is reflective of the cosmopolitan imperial identity of Akbar's Mughal court but also how the fragmented articles maintain some of their original meaning and take on new allegory in their new composition.[7]

[6] Natif, Mughal Occidentalism, 112

[7] Natif, Mughal Occidentalism, 124

Fig. 4.7 A composite arrangement of a European print and Persianate painting, artist unknown, 1618

In the context of this research, I collaged and repurposed archival Mughal miniatures to produce new composite readings through juxtaposition and layering of fragments within a new context. In addition, by reconfiguring existing material, I reinforce the historical source material and subsequently re-inscribe the cultural presence of the Mughal Empire and, more broadly, Indian-Muslims that are currently under threat.

Conclusion

Indian National Anthem

Latin Transliteration

Jana-gana-mana-adhināyaka jaya hē Bhārata-bhāgya-bidhātā[b]!
Panjāba Sindhu Gujarāta Marāthā Drābira[c] Utkala Banga[d]
Bindhya[e] Himācala yamunā Gangā Ucchala-jaladhi-taranga
taba[f] śubha nāmē jāgē, taba[f] śubha āśisa māgē,
gāhē taba[f] jayagāthā.
Jana-gana-mangala-dāyaka jaya hē Bhārata-bhāgya-bidhātā[b]!
Jaya hē, jaya hē, jaya hē, jaya jaya jaya jaya hē.

-Rabindranath Tagore

Indian National Anthem

English Translation

thou art the ruler of the minds of all people,

dispenser of India's destiny.

thy name rouses the hearts of the Punjab, Sindh, Gujarat and Maratha,

of the Dravida, Orissa and Bengal.

It echoes in the hills of the Vindhyas and Himalayas, mingles in the music of the yamuna and Ganges

and is chanted by the waves of the Indian Sea.

they pray for thy blessings and sing thy praise.

the saving of all people waits in thy hand,

thou dispenser of India's destiny.

Victory, Victory, Victory to thee.

-Rabindranath Tagore

Conclusion

In 1911, Rabindranath Tagore would write a five-stanza hymn in Bengali that would touch on notions of pluralism and define India as the union of religions, languages, and provinces. Three decades later the first stanza would be appropriated as the national anthem of India, and Tagore would become a symbol of Indian nationalism. However, the Nobel Laureate would later describe nationalism as 'a great menace.' In a letter published years later, Tagore is quoted saying to a close associate, "even though from childhood I had been taught that idolatry of the Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity."[1]

Tagore's denunciation highlights the perils of unchecked nationalism where our common humanity is in danger. In its current form, the Hindutva movement has quickly dehumanized the Indian-Muslim and worked to move the minority group to the margins of society. The machinations of the Hindutva imaginary have seen it inscribe itself within the landscape of the subcontinent using a number of spatial strategies while simultaneously reclaiming Indian-Muslim space as Hindu space. My thesis research operated within this milieu, where the nation is entrenched along communalist lines and the shared history of myths and memories are at risk of being erased.

In the Hindutva imaginary, the Mughal empire represents one of many Indian-Muslim signifiers that threaten the notion of a homogeneous Hindu *rashtra*. Furthermore, the Mughal Empire and its monuments are symbolic of a dark colonial past where Hindus were oppressed and the land desecrated. In my work, I traced the entangled history of the Hindu and the Indian-Muslim and highlighted a cultural past that strove towards religious and ethnic unity and notions of universal tolerance. I also noted that the Mughal reign was a foreign entity that spread across the subcontinent, often through conquests and conflict; however, I uncovered that over successive reigns, the nonnative Mughal Empire successfully assimilated into the land, creating mutually rich cross-cultural exchanges and socio-political alliances. Finally, I examined the perceived fears that have produced insecurities within the Hindutva imaginary, such as the pan-Islamic ambitions of the Indian-Muslim and its framing as 'militant' and terror-associated.

[1] K. L. Tuteja and Kaustav Chakraborty, "Rethinking Tagore on the Antinomies of Nationalism," chapter, in *Tagore and Nationalism* (New Delhi: Springer, 2017), 22.

Recognizing that the Hindutva imaginary claim, as cited by Oza, is a narrative of spatial belonging and segregation, I have re-mobilized a historical painting tradition from within the Mughal empire, the Mughal miniature, as a disruptive spatial tool. I proposed the Mughal miniature's deployment as a critical spatial practice to negotiate the two dominant imaginaries at stake in India. In my reconfigured miniatures I interrogated the binary oppositions of the Hindutva imaginary and created opportunities to bridge the gap between the communalist divide.

I assert that this research is critical in that it uncovers art history and visual culture as a potent discipline to engage with conceptions of space. Furthermore, my work situates a historical painting tradition, the Mughal miniature, within the ongoing discourse on architectural representation and spatial production.

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GLOSSARY

Akbarnama — official chronicle of the reign of Akbar

British Raj — the rule of the British Crown on the Indian subcontinent

Bharat Mata — Mother India

Bharatiya Jana Sangh — an Indian right wing nationalist political party

Caliphate — an institution or public office under the leadership of an Islamic steward and a leader of the entire Muslim world.

Darbar — an imperial court

Dharma — a cosmic law underlying right behavior and social order in Hinduism

Din-i-Ilahi — "the religion of God' was a new syncretic religion introduced by the Mughal emperor Akbar

Divan — a term of Arabic origin referring to various types of reception halls

Ekamata Yatra — a series of pilgrimages and political strategies used to promote Hindu Polity or Hindutva.

Harivamsa — sanskrit literature believed to be an appendix to the Mahabharata

Haft Peykar — a romantic epic by Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi written in 1197

Hasht-Bihisht — a poem based on Haft Peykar, written by Amir Khusrow around 1302

Hindu rashtra — the Hindu nation

Hindutva — an ideology advocating, or movement seeking to establish, the hegemony of Hindus and Hinduism within India; Hindu nationalism.

Hijab — a garment worn by some Muslim women to cover their hair.

Ibadat Khana — "House of Worship", a meeting house built by the Mughal Emperor Akbar

Janata Party — a political party in India

Jati — a kind of caste or social group

Jharokha — a stone window projecting in an upper story overlooking the royal court

Kar sevak — religious volunteers

Khamsa of Nizami — the five poems by Nizami Ganjavi, also known as Quintet or Panj Ganj

Khamsa of Khusrau — Amir Khusrow's five poems, inspired by Khamsa of Nizami

Khilafat movement — a political campaign launched by Indian Muslims in British India

Mahasabha — a Hindu political organization advocating the interests of orthodox Hindus

Mahabharata — one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India revered in Hinduism

Mansab — rank or position

Manasabadar — an officer or holder of a rank or position

Mansabdari — refers to an individual who holds a mansab (rank)

Masjid — Mosque

Namaz — Islamic worship or prayer

Padshahnama — the official chronicle of the reign of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan I

Pitrubhoomi — Savarkar's term for "holy land"

Pracharak — RSS missionary

Ramjanmabhoomi — the birthplace of Hindu god Rama in Ayodhya

Ram Rath Yatra — a political and religious rally to support the building of a temple on the site of the Babri Mosque

Rajput — a cluster of castes and local groups originating from the Indian subcontinent

Rashtra — nation

Razmnama — a Persian translation of the Sanskrit epic Mahabharata, commissioned by the Mughal Emperor Akbar

Sanskriti — culture

Satyagraha — holding firmly to truth

Shiva — Hindu god Shiva

Shivling — an abstract representation of Shiva

Sulh-I-Kulh — peace with all or universal peace

Tejo Mahalaya — an alleged ancient temple existing before the Taj Mahal

Ulama — Muslim men of religious learning

Yatra — pilgrimage, religious procession

Wudu-Khana — a room designated for ritual washing before daily prayer

Zenana — part of a house reserved for the women