**South Asia by the Bay 2017**

**Sana Ashraf,** Australian National University

*Between Victimhood and Heroism: Understanding the Extra-Legal Killings of Alleged Blasphemers by the Supporters of Anti-blasphemy Laws in Punjab, Pakistan*

The issue of blasphemy has become increasingly controversial in Pakistan over the past few decades, since the inception of the anti-blasphemy laws by Zia-ul-Haq in 1980s. In the proposed paper, I address the issue of extra-judicial killings in cases of blasphemy in Pakistan. Through an ethnographic study of Khatm-e-Nabuwwat Lawyers’ Forum (a group of more than eight hundred lawyers whose mission is to prosecute all cases of blasphemy free of charge) in Lahore, Pakistan, I aim to explain how these lawyers justify and support both the need for the anti-blasphemy law and the occurrence of extra-judicial killings at the same time. I argue that despite apparent contradiction, the supporters of strict anti-blasphemy laws in Pakistan do not see these two ways (legal and extra-legal) of dealing with alleged/perceived blasphemy as inherently contradictory or mutually exclusive, nor do they see the extra-legal means as simply the last resort due to their frustration with the legal system. Instead, these two ways of dealing with a blasphemer are seen as different gradations on the spectrum of love for the Prophet Mohammad. These are seen as progressive stages of one’s Ishq (intense love) for the Prophet, also described in terms of Maarifat (A concept within Sufism). I will explain this narrative with reference to the prevalent concepts of Sufism amongst the present-day Sunni Barelvis, the sect at the fore-front of anti-blasphemy protests and movements, to which my research participants also belong. Using case studies from my fieldwork, I discuss the forms of action deemed appropriate in response to a perceived blasphemy in terms of passionate and artistic ways of experiencing religion. This paper also discusses the performative aspects of the said actions and experiences, in particular, the acts of killing the alleged blasphemers and potentially sacrificing one’s own life as a consequence. The discussion of the perspective of supporters of blasphemy laws and associated violent action also demonstrates how the opposing concepts of victimhood and heroism are woven together in the narratives that glorify above-mentioned extra-judicial killings of the blasphemers.

**Swarupa Deb**, Birla Institute of Technology and Sciences (BITS) Pilani

*Verbal Abomination: Hijra Curses and Sexual Insults*

The hijra community of India has established their very own subculture outside the normative binary gendered society in resistance to a social structure that prevents their integration. An intricate network of the hijra community has managed to exist and thrive throughout every region of the country. Most of these hijras are known to undergo ritual castration and soliciting male companion. However, interestingly one thing that is common about the community is their precarious situation within Indian society inciting a sense of respect, however, mostly motivated by fear. As the hijra community has been commonly understood as a kind of between-the-sexes and the third gender, a systematically created social exclusion has continuously demeaned their societal position. In response, the community has employed a method of public vilification towards compensating for their own lack of social respect by assuming linguistic control of the immediate interaction creating an alternate socio-sexual space within a dichotomously gendered narrative. The hijra community is notoriously known for cursing and their lewd sexual insults. As a transgender person is deliberately considered outside the reproductive heterosexual system, it can be inferred that community members most often use sexual insults and curses to reclaim spaces normally unavailable to them. Due to the extremity of their marginality, the hijra community avails free range of verbal abuse. The hijra use of curses and insults fluidly transcends from being mardana (manly) and zenana (feminine). Thus, hijra curses are also a way to transcend between genders. In contemporary India, the credit for transgender visibility is perhaps best given to the community members who actively participate in day-to-day activism and employ in your face tactics at public gatherings in order to make their position heard. Clearly, hijras are not accorded respect in contemporary Indian society; they demand it though offence. This paper presents a psycho-social account of hijra curses and sexual assaults towards challenging the dominant cartographies of binary gender and sexuality. Moreover the study assesses the conflict of public morality and the response of the hijra community’s display of collective injury due to social exclusion, through insults and vilification.

**Gopika Jadeja**, National University of Singapore and King's College, London

*‘You Call me Dher’: Offense, Vegetarianism and Dalit Identity in Gujarat, Western India*

When you call me 'dher' I am hurt and wish to kick you in the belly when you call me untouchable I am offended and wish to slap you on the face […] when you call me Neerav Patel I suspect you called me convert (a crow that dyed his feathers white to be called a swan) and wish to turn away my face when you don't call me anything I am annoyed that you neglected me altogether… Neerav Patel

One of the ways in which caste as an organizing principle of social and political order in India has been contested is through the discarding and rejecting or claiming of identity through naming. Caste names have played an important role in the social sphere, allowing or denying access to individuals and groups based on their caste identity. Many of these caste names are now banned in India. Not only are they considered offensive if used in the public sphere, but they are also an offense and punishable by law under the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

In 2007, Dalit students in Gujarat set fire to the guidebook for Umashankar Joshi’s play entitled *Dhed na dhed bhangi*, which was a set text for their Gujarati literature course. Their objection was to the word ‘Bhangi’ in the title of the play. The word caused offense and hurt the sentiments of the Dalit students forced by the syllabus to study the play.

Another idea related to Dalit identity in Gujarat is the occupation of skinning and tanning dead cows and consuming cow meat. The incident in Raj Samadhiyala village that led to the recent Dalit protests in Gujarat resulted in Dalits refusing to carry carcasses of dead cows and process them. The rhetoric of the slogans and the poems that became popular during the movement responds to the ‘offense’ that the dominant Hindutva groups take to the supposed killing of cows and that of defiance and assertion of identity.

In this paper I explore the symbolic value of caste names and how narratives of injury and offense are deployed in Dalit claims for recognition and inclusion in the Gujarati Literary Sphere and by extension the cultural and political life of the nation. I will achieve this through a study of Gujarati Dalit poetry, slogans from the Dalit movement and other writing that reveals this contestation of identities and representation within the nation.

**Saad Lakhani,** University of Warwick (M.A. Social and Political Thought, 2015), Habib University (Adjunct Faculty)

*Offensive Existence: A History of Anti-Ahmadism and Muslim Rage*

Framed as inherently ‘blasphemous,’ ‘deceitful’ and ‘traitorous’ individuals, Ahmadis are deemed as causing offense to ‘Muslim’ sensibility by their very presence. Forcibly declared non-Muslim by the Pakistani state, the self-identifying Muslim sect is legally forbidden from acts or signs interpreted as ‘posing as Muslim’ or causing outrage to the religious feelings of Muslims in ‘any manner whatsoever.’ Such anti-Ahmadi laws are part of Pakistan’s blasphemy laws, which are best understood as a political technology of public order seeking to contain and control potentially unruly religious sentiments. First introduced with the 1860 Indian Penal Code itself, blasphemy laws were historically part of a larger ideological project that relied on the orientalist and racial division of the Indian masses as being especially predisposed towards irrational religious sentiment and of the ruling British class as being essentially secular, rational and neutral in judgment. Muslim groups accepted the reason/passion binary of the colonial administrators yet inverted its evaluation; passions were asserted as what gave Muslims superiority, and even otherworldly power, over merely worldly reason. This was not, however, a consistent and uniform discourse and it has been deployed for diverse reasons. The 1920s Rangila Rasul affair, when Muslim groups across India united in protest against the acquittal of the publisher of a controversial pamphlet, for instance, was more indicative of a politics of representation and enumeration in Colonial India than a spontaneous outbursting of rage. While Muslim groups employed a heavy handed language of emotional hurt, these protests are better understood as a way of counter-balancing an increasingly assertive Hindu majoritarianism. The Ahmadi community played a central role in this protest, and even led it at times. Today, however, anti-blasphemy discourse evokes the figure of the Ahmadi as its ultimate enemy; presented as a “deceitful”, “blasphemous” individual always hatching conspiracies against Islam. My paper looks into how anti-Ahmadism first took shape in the class politics of a Muslim Marxist group when it employed a conspiracy theory about Ahmadi collusion with the British to embody a general treachery of the Muslim landed elite in Punjab to 'downtrodden' Muslim masses. Anti-Ahmadism gradually lost this class dimension and became something in its own right—for figures like Iqbal and Mawdudi, Ahmadis were more a biological threat to Muslim nationhood than representatives of the class enemy. Finally analyzing a 1993 Supreme Court judgement, this paper will reflect on the state incorporation of anti-Ahmadism and the irascible Muslim subject.

**Murad Mumtaz**, University of Virginia

*Autonomy Under the Shadow of Colonialism: 18th and 19th century portraits of Muslim Saints from North India*

In his essay “The Material and Visual Culture of British India,” Christopher Pinney situates indigenous Indian artistic expression in the Colonial period under three distinct categories: “‘transculturation’, ‘purification’, and ‘autonomy’.” He describes the term “autonomy” as a form of cultural production “capable of creating its own history free from the shadow of colonialism.”

In the historiography of British period Indian art the primary focus has been to highlight the hybrid spaces and networks of interaction between the Indian and the British, interaction that falls under Pinney’s categories of “transculturation” and “purification.” Glaringly ignored in any colonial historical discourse of the Subcontinent are the intrinsic values of local patrons, rulers and populace that persisted and quietly resisted under the shadow of change and dislocation.

While critiquing this art historical injustice as a subtle continuation of colonial values within a neo-colonial garb, the paper will present one form of “autonomous” art making as an example of the continuity of indigenous systems of cultural production in the face of forced change. Representations of Muslim saints as icons in Indian painting constitute an important, yet surprisingly neglected, genre in South Asian art history. Developed under the patronage of the heir apparent to the Mughal throne Dara Shikoh and his sister Princess Jahanara in the 1640s, this art form rapidly gained popularity outside the imperial milieu and spread across most cultural centers in India. By the beginning of the 18th century this tradition had been firmly established. From the Pahari courts in the Himalayas to the southern Indian courts there are hundreds of paintings and drawings of known Sufi saints commissioned by patrons both as forms of devotion and as objects used in Muslim esoteric rites.

Crucially, the function of these artworks was intrinsically linked with Islamic spirituality in India, which by and large remained autonomous despite colonial interventions. This association allowed the genre to persist through the colonial period. By mapping the continuity of this genre from its period of germination in the 17th century to the art form as practiced under colonial rule I will argue that the visualization of these saints evolved according to its own inner dynamics “free from the shadow of colonialism.”

**Vivek Narayan**, Stanford University

*The Entrepreneurship Model of Violence*

Why the current regime of violence under the BJP government is different from previous regimes, OR why we should be worried about who the PM follows on Twitter.

Censorship has a long history in the Indian subcontinent. The seven decades of postcolonial India has been marked by significant interventions of power to channel, direct, channel, and outlaw, certain forms of discourse. Given that such discursive control is always accompanied by the threat of violence (whether by state, non-state, or quasi-state actors), I conceptualize censorship as a form of discursive violence.

But censorship is not merely repression or denial that obstructs the hollow idea of "freedom of speech," but it constitutes, as Kaur and Mazzarella point out, "one of the very preconditions of subjectivity" (2009: 4). That is, censorship has far greater implications for subjecthood and the public sphere. Censorship belongs, then, within a larger social matrix characterized by coercion and prohibition. Conceiving censorship as discursive violence allows us to put it in dialogue with other forms of violence – the bureaucratic, and the lumpen – to see larger patterns.

As recent examples show, the various forms of violence rarely work alone. In an interview with Swati Chaturvedi of The Wire, the disgruntled Right-wing ideologue and former Minister Arun Shourie pointed out that by following abusive trolls on Twitter, Narendra Modi legitimizes their discursive violence. This may be read, I will show, as an example of the alignment between lumpen and discursive violence. Adopting Dinanath Batra's books as textbooks in Gujarat sends out a similarly legitimizing message, backing up discursive violence with the bureaucratic. After the Dadri lynching, the police statement simultaneously assured murderers and warned activists by claiming to investigate whether the meat was indeed beef. Here bureaucratic violence brazenly legitimizes murderous lumpen violence. The gruesome assassinations, and subsequent non-investigations, of Professor Kalburgi, Comrade Pansare and Bharat Dhabolkar, as well as the ongoing harassment of noted academic and activist Bela Bhatia in Bastar, show the operation of all three forms of violence – the discursive, the lumpen, and the bureaucratic – working in perfect coherence.

Drawing upon the work of Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, K. Balagopal, Slavoj Zizek, and Veena Das, I will look at the peculiar orchestration of various kinds of violence by the Hindu Right in the last five years. I will argue that what distinguishes the efforts of the Hindu Right in recent years from the structural violence of previous regimes is their operational coherence. This coherence is critical for the political machine I describe as the "entrepreneurship model of violence."

Driven by the brand ideology of Hindutva, the entrepreneurship model authorizes franchises peddling wares of violence. This conjunction of the discursive and lumpen violence is protected and endorsed through the bureaucratic violence of the state machinery (police, judiciary etc.). Its profits accrue as political capital to its small-time lumpen operators, and as market control for the political overlords. Through a discussion of the specific instances of violence described above, I will describe and analyze the political economy of the entrepreneurship model of violence.

**Shakti Nataraj**, University of California, Berkeley

*The Ethical Endocrinologist: Indian Diabetology Imagined through the Transgender Subject*

In the past two decades, India’s LGBT Rights movement has made paradoxical strides. In 2014, the Supreme Court passed a landmark judgment affirming “transgender” identity and rights. This follows the increasing prominence worldwide, of “transgender” as a valid category, and surgery perceived as a state-guaranteed ‘right.’ At the same time, the Supreme Court continues to uphold Section 377, a colonial-era law criminalizing “unnatural intercourse” (traditionally understood to mean to anal sex). In this fraught landscape, transgender women are interpellated as both atavistic criminals and modern rights-bearing subjects. My paper examines how practitioners in the emerging fields of Indian endocrinology and urology have a stake in this field. Looking closely at recent journal articles in these fields, I explore how “eunuchs” are framed as practitioners of brutish traditions to be reformed by modern medicine. Using a framework drawn from the work of M.M. Bakhtin, I show that the vision of “transgender” as it emerges in these articles, condenses historical traces from a variety of genres, ranging from colonial medico-legal discourses, to Gandhian philosophy and popular science-fiction novels. Placing this analysis alongside my conversation with the doctor that authored the piece, I argue that contemporary iterations of “transgender” are not repetitions of a colonial past, but fragments with indeterminate meaning, bearing historical traces that flare up in volatile ways. I suggest that “transgender” itself has become a site at which debates about India’s modernity unfold, for both transgender and non-transgender identified persons.

**Naila Sahar**, State University of New York, Buffalo

*Blasphemy Law and Power Dynamics in Pakistan*

Religious groups and religious political parties have steeply increased their street political power in Pakistan for the past few decades, and as a result, blasphemy laws are used more as a means to intimidation rather than to challenge the religious discourse. Blasphemy laws that were introduced in subcontinent by British colonial rules in the 19th century, with the aim to control sectarian violence, were later amended by General Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan during the process of Islamization in 1980s. The law prescribed that defiling the name of prophet could trigger death penalty and the accused could be arrested without any substantial evidence. The unquestionable nature of this law has strengthened the ‘mullah mafia’ in Pakistan to an extent where blasphemy law has now become a power tactic through which religious extremist groups manipulate, mobilize and control the common masses and their minds by exploiting their religious sentiments. Where the common perception is that blasphemy law has been used to further marginalize the minority Christian population in Pakistan, a Muslim majority country, the fact is that many Muslims coming from elite backgrounds have also been victimized through this law. Considering the cases of Salman Taseer who was Governor Punjab, Junaid Jamshed who was a famous singer turned religious preacher and Junaid Hafeez, a Fulbright scholar who returned from the US for a teaching position in Pakistan, this paper intends to discuss the instances where the persons accused of blasphemy were Muslims and belonging to the upper echelons of society couldn’t save them from detention and extermination. The paper will contend that there have been political or social motivations behind these incarcerations and killings and it’s not only religious impetus that triggered these executions. The paper also aims to probe how blasphemy laws and fatwas have become a reason of deep divide within Pakistani society between religious extremists and secular leaders and how Pakistani government’s resistance to dealing with religious extremism and repealing the blasphemy law has added to Pakistan’s burden of history.

**Abhijit Sarkar**, University of Oxford, UK

*Fed by Famine: Hindu Communal Politics during the Bengal Famine of 1943'*

This paper deals with how providing food to the victims of the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 in India became a tool for publicizing the communal politics of the Hindu Mahasabha, a Hindu Right-wing party. Politicisation of famine-relief was most sharp in Bengal, as on the one hand the province had a Muslim League government in power, on the other hand the Mahasabha was strong in the province. Realising that the famine had thrown open a scope for religious conversion from Hinduism through distribution of free food, the Mahasabha rushed to provide food-relief to the Hindu vulnerable to ‘save’ them from converting to Islam in exchange for food. The Mahasabha demanded that Hindu famine-orphans should remain in the custody of Hindu organisations and Muslim orphans with Muslim orphanages, and thus dragged religion into food by advocating relief along communal line. This paper argues that in the Noakhali district, the site of a horrific Hindu-Muslim riot only three years later in October 1946, through ‘special food relief’ to Hindu teachers and lawyers, the Mahasabha increased its influence among the Hindu professional groups with the objective to counter the power of the Muslims in Noakhali. This paper demonstrates that Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the famous Mahasabha leader, presented the failure of the League government to prevent the famine as the proof of the economic un-viability of proposed Pakistan. He titillated Hindu sentiment by arguing that Bengal was being fed by the ‘generosity of adjoining Hindu provinces’. He campaigned that the fact that Muslim majority Bengal had to seek food in neighbouring Hindu majority provinces raises serious doubts about the food sustainability of proposed Pakistan, of which Bengal was going to be a part after the partition of India. There were counter allegations by the Muslim League that the Hindu leaders raised deliberate hindrances in the supply of food in the hope that starvation would compel the Bengali Muslims to surrender their demand for Pakistan; and that they wanted to teach the Muslim League government a lesson for demanding Pakistan. Finally, this paper shows that when government relief refused to make any special arrangements for the ‘high’ caste Hindu people, the Mahasabha’s ‘special relief’ allowed the Bengali ‘high’ caste Bhadraloks (gentlemanly class) to take rice to their homes and cook it privately, and thereby to avoid dining at crowded free kitchens with ‘lower’ caste people and thus to retain their claimed caste ‘superiority’.

**Durgesh Solanki,** Tata Institute of Social Sciences

*Creating Public Order: The Case of the Nuisance Clause*

The Bombay Municipal Corporation Act 1888, introduced by the colonial state, defines “nuisance” as “any act, omission, place, or thing which causes or is likely to cause injury, danger, annoyance or offence to the sense of sight, smelling or hearing, or which is or may be dangerous to life or injurious to health or property” (Mumbai Municipal Act 2010). The Act further imbues municipal authorities with the power to reclaim “unhealthy localities, the removal of noxious vegetation and generally the abatement of all nuisances” (ibid). A little more than a decade later, the Police Act of 1902 criminalized public nuisance and made it a punishable offence.

Bombay’s march towards modernization was halted by the rise of the “unintended city” which supplied labor to the textile mills (Nandy 1998:2, as quoted in Prakash 2002: 5). It was here that the plague epidemic originated in 1896 and spread rapidly. The colonial administration saw the epicenter of this epidemic originating in locality-specific conditions as opposed to the human body. It thus invoked the nuisance clause in order to carry out large-scale demolitions of existing settlements, attempting to sanitize their informality and enforce public order (Arnold 2012). This legacy has since been carried forward by the postcolonial state. As Partha Chatterjee observes “the postcolonial state in India has after all only expanded and not transformed the basic institutional arrangements of colonial law” (1993:15). In Mumbai, for instance, the unhoused and street vendors are regularly evicted by citing the nuisance clause. The municipal corporation has also employed various surveillance techniques such as “clean-up marshals” and “nuisance detectors” to maintain a sanitized public order.

This paper attempts to trace the history of the nuisance clause and how it has been invoked by the colonial and postcolonial state to discipline unruly bodies and spaces. What kind of public morality does this clause attempt to create? I assert that the state strategically uses the nuisance clause to cover its own failure to provide basic amenities and infrastructure to its citizens.

**Visakh Subha**, University of California, Berkeley

*Authority of Ulama in Mappila Muslim Community of Kerala, India: Reinventing Traditions and Modernities as Resistance/Reform*

The research attempts to understand the nature of authority of ulama among Mappila Muslims of Malabar, a region in the northern part of Kerala, India. Moving beyond the scripture/custom binary in which the questions of religious authority in Islam are often framed, it attempts to understand how authority gets legitimized across the ‘traditionalist’ and ‘reformist’ sects within the community by contextualizing the question vis-à-vis its engagement with regional understandings of modernity and Islamic reform in Kerala through historical and ethnographic observations. It focuses on how the development of mass communication technologies, intra-community identity formations, participation in state electoral politics and the new ideas of progress and development in ‘modern’ Kerala constituted the authority of ulama. An attempt is also made towards exploring the religio-political activism of ulama and the refashioning of their religious identities vis-à-vis the highly institutionalized and organizational structures in which they operate. Most of the studies on ulama in Mappila community have been concentrated on their role as leaders of anti-colonial struggles against Portuguese in the sixteenth century and British in the twentieth century (Malabar rebellion of 1921). Though such works have significantly contributed to counter the colonial construction and stereotyping of Mappila community members as ‘jungle mappilas’ and ‘religious fanatics’, the nationalist historiographic framework within which they are written precludes them from a critical appraisal of the community’s relationship with the region of Malabar and the history of modernity in Kerala. Consequently, the socio-religious reform movements among Mappila Muslim community of Malabar are often reduced as a ‘religious encounter with colonial modernity’ and hence fail to find adequate mention in the historical narratives on Kerala modernity. The paper tries to formulate certain grounds to address this gap and reimagine how the community and the ulama in particular responded to the colonial ‘vilification’ and later engaged with the post-colonial state in the context of a newly emerging ‘modern’ Kerala. Further, the paper gives hints to critically understand the relationship between authority and Knowledge in South Asian Islam that could enable us to more meaningfully engage with the questions of religious authority and the emerging modalities of attachment with religion in a secularizing, globalising world.