The Decolonial Killjoy: The British Raj as a Space of Political Utopia

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Abstract

Utopianism and colonialism have an intrinsically linked history. Thomas More's eponymous *Utopia* (1516) was a settler colony after all, and the global spread of colonialism carried an ideological justification that had an implicit utopian explanation. The historiography of the British Raj is no exception to this – the Raj represented an ideal society that the colonial powers were trying to create. Whether or not the word was explicitly used when discussing the Raj and the wider British colonial project, there is strong evidence to support the utopian impulse in its implementation, as well as in its rejection.

What is lacking is an exploration of the dynamics of this political utopianism, especially using Utopian Studies scholarship as opposed to a more generic (and often misrepresented) understanding of utopia as a perfect society. In this thesis, I embed the history of the Raj (1857-1947) within this scholarship to interrogate and deconstruct these dynamics. Broadly spread over the three themes of Language, Gender and Sexuality, and Cultural Artefacts, I consider both sides of the struggle – the blueprint that was being imposed to create a colonial utopia and the grassroots responses that aimed to create an anti-colonial utopia.

In particular, I am keen to highlight voices that are silenced in these conversations, such as religious and caste minorities, women, queer communities, and indigenous communities. I argue that their inclusion is vital if the anti-colonial utopia is to be a truly emancipatory space. In doing so, I not only interrogate the past of the Raj, but also embed decolonisation at the heart of Utopian Studies, hoping to create a killjoy moment that disrupts the status quo.

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Introduction

The impetus for this project lies in a simple and uncomfortable occurrence in the modern, supposedly post-colonial world. During the final stages of my undergraduate degree, my then-housemate and I were visiting a museum exhibition on colonialism. My response to it was muted; my housemate's was ecstatic and included the popular Niall Ferguson-esque refrain: "It's alright; we gave you the railways." Colonial paternalism has certainly not ended with the death of colonialism as a system of government. YouGov surveys conducted in the UK in the past decade have shown a steady majority of people firmly believing in the value of colonialism as a positive force, including many who responded in the affirmative when asked if the British Empire should return in some form or another.

Therefore, even from an early stage in my academic career, one truth became abundantly clear. The world we inhabit may be post-colonial in the strictest sense of the word, but it is certainly not *de*colonial, and one of the biggest reasons for that reality is the vision of Empire more so than its factual history. This also led to more personal and existential questions of why, hailing from a country that has been independent since 1971 and has not been a part of the British Raj since 1947, I still received an education in English (including completing my GCSEs), I was still subject to a justice system conceived in the 19th century, and I never really read about the destructive legacies of colonialism until I went looking for them on my own. In this brief Introduction to my thesis, I not only provide the more conventional academic standard of a chapter breakdown, I also feel it is imperative for me to explain and re-examine the reasons that led me to ask my research question in the first place.

Questions of the Good Life

The recurring obstacle when I asked questions about decoloniality was in how the concept of Empire has taken on a mythologised quality, even though, in real terms, British colonialism in Asia did not end until 1997 with the transfer of Hong Kong to China. It was an ideal vision, not a complicated (and often unjust) reality that

remained in the popular consciousness. Even some critical approaches to imperial historiography remain mired in soft apologia, such as in how William Dalrymple loathes the excesses of colonialism but never actually states that it was a system of oppression in its entirety. British India, in particular, has an aura akin to a Golden Age of living, a yearning for an imagined past that would leave many who lived through the period genuinely confused about the success of their dissent. In essence, it became a good place that never existed – a very literal embodiment of Utopia.

Yet, even the most sanitised histories of the Raj recognise its vast territorial scope and demographic diversity. To imagine it as a unified eutopic space akin to the likes of Thomas More's island – or even as a complete dystopic space such as Orwell's Airstrip One – was far too simplistic and lacked the nuance that would inevitably have existed in real life. My interest, therefore, shifted from considering whether the Raj was a eutopia or dystopia, to instead focus on its potential to be a space for political utopianism to take place in. Specifically, I became keen to explore how anti-colonialism created its own modes of utopian hope, especially considering the complicated legacies left behind by various liberation movements in the Raj.

What follows here is the exploration of that academic curiosity. I set out to specifically respond to my research question: **In what ways did the British Raj facilitate the practice of political utopia?**

Outline of the Thesis

I open my thesis with a detailed reading of Utopian Theory. While elements of it may have fit in with a conventionally longer introduction chapter, I choose to devote a dedicated section to my analysis of utopian scholarship. I consider definitions of utopia and the different responses that has elicited over the years. Favouring the work of Lucy Sargisson in *Fool's Gold?* (2012), supporting it with the theoretical and historical analyses of utopia carried out by Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent. I then consider the different ways to approach utopia; specifically, on its positioning as form, content and function. Alongside the aforementioned Sargisson,

Claeys and Sargent, I look at the scholarship of Ernst Bloch, Ruth Levitas, Krishnan Kumar, Tom Moylan, David Bell, and Lynne Segal, ultimately favouring a function-based approach to the topic. I then go into the theoretical understanding of dystopia as sub-topic of the wider utopian umbrella, rather than being an opposing concept. This is critical in letting me study the Raj, as its history is seen as subjectively either good or bad at the same time.

I look at how the theoretical underpinnings of utopianism can be used to study real-world cases, especially in the work by Stelio Cro in examining Spanish colonialism, a useful model for my own work. I then round off the Utopian Theory chapter with my own additions and conceptualisations, drawing on the decolonial scholarship of Ashis Nandy and Maia Ramnath, and the killjoy concept of Sara Ahmed. This particular section is arguably the most important in the entire chapter as it sets out the theoretical underpinning of the rest of my work, both within this thesis and in my personal and political convictions as a utopian.

The second chapter is on Approaches, which is primarily concerned with methodological questions. I provide a detailed explanation of why I choose to look at disparate moments in the history of the Raj, rather than trying to provide a single definitive narrative. This draws heavily on the focused nature of texts in the historiography of the Raj, with specific emphasis on Catherine Hall's work on visualising its civilising mission, South Asian scholarship on highlighting voices from below as advocated by Eric Hobsbawm, and an understanding of cultural history that is needed to support the varied nature of my case studies. I follow that with a section on archival research and methodology, especially highlighting the types of archives I had access to and the subsequent impact on which sources I was able to use.

I also include the constant presence of religious morality in the Raj's history and historiography in this chapter. Combining it with a reading of the religious underpinnings of early utopianism, I explain why I did not dedicate a full chapter to this specific topic, as it is a point that occurs and reoccurs in my substantive research chapters. I conclude with a more logistical concern regarding case study selection and categorisation.

The first of my three substantive chapters covers the theme of Language. In the opening section, dedicated to how colonialism attempted to implement a top-down vision of utopia, I concentrate on how linguistic policy and rhetoric was key to identity building in the Raj, especially in the creation of the political class and the subsequent limiting of legitimate dissent. I also provide examples of how the Raj was sold as a utopia in British literature. The next section focuses on anti-colonial responses, where I draw attention to the grassroots and bottom-up approaches to creating emancipatory utopias. I examine the legacy of Indian anti-colonial literature, the move to reclaiming local vernaculars, and the criticism of English as the medium of education in the Raj. There is also a fascinating case study of the oft-overlooked *Tanka* riots that were aimed to protecting oral traditions of indigenous communities, a demographic largely left out of the Indian decolonisation historiography. I end the chapter with an analysis of two key utopian texts from India at the time.

My second research theme is described in the chapter on Gender and Sexuality. Once again, I start by mapping some of the British attempts at imposing their utopian ideals on identity. My examples take in the role of colonial rhetoric and include an archival study conducted at the V&A Museum to chart the impact of colonial acceptability on clothing and gender. I then take a look at more obvious attempts at policing identity through legislation involving *sati*, *harems*, same-gender intimacy, and diverse gender identities. The anti-colonial responses in this chapter are rooted in grassroots politics, as before. While my case studies in the Language chapter were more overtly tied in with the chapter title, the anti-colonial utopias involving Gender and Sexuality are more nuanced, indicating that a broader and more intersectional reading is fruitful.

As with the previous two chapters, Cultural Artefacts follows a similar structure of first looking at top-down colonial utopias and then the bottom-up anti-colonial utopian responses. The colonial imagination is in full force here, using portraiture, sculpture, architecture, and cartography to promote the notion of the Raj as an idealised spatial entity. This is amplified in my analysis of the Imperial Durbar’s attempts to co-opt Indian traditions into British pageantry. The anti-colonial responses take into account

indigenous sculpture, street theatre, folk music, and art as a historical record of colonial atrocities. The goal here is to break the illusion of the Raj as an idyll, instead grounding it in the realities of cruelty and oppression.

My Conclusion brings together the threads presented in the substantive chapters to argue for a broader application of “The Decolonial Killjoy”. I make it a point to not leave the analyses of the three prior chapters hanging and disjointed; I use this time to put forward a coherent consolidation of all the work that has come so far. I also take time to reflect on the process, looking at how some things could have worked out differently while also ending on a hopeful note of looking to the future in a decolonial way.

The Need for Decolonisation

While the driving force behind my journey was an indication several years ago that the colonial imagination is painfully still alive – culminating in a flippant remark by someone in my proximity – the need to embed decolonial practices into studies of the past remains relevant. Indeed, with the world shifting towards a revitalised far right that is happy to engage in historical revisionism and toxic nostalgia, this need is even more pertinent than it was when I started the project in the closing months of 2014.

Decolonisation is not just about undoing the edifice of colonialism. If that was the case, it would a redundant endeavour. The primary goal is to embed an understanding of liberation from systemic oppression that has its roots in colonial history. Post-colonial states are not immune from such criticisms. Bangladesh has engaged in settler colonialism against its tribal communities. India carries out an ongoing occupation in the Kashmir valley. Pakistan was a colonial power in its own right after 1947, the history of which still needs to be resolved meaningfully.

Decolonisation is not just a call for Rhodes to fall, but also to acknowledge the damage done by Gandhi and the delegitimisation of radical grassroots protest. It is a lived form of political dissent, engaging in the necessary ideal of shaping a better

tomorrow. It is its own utopia, and what I have underpinned my thesis with from this point on.

Utopian Theory

The core theoretical aspect of my entire thesis is rooted in understanding of political utopia. This chapter is, therefore, key in framing the more substantive primary-research based chapters to follow on Language; Gender and Sexuality; and Cultural Artefacts. I also include an overview of the religious overtones of colonial utopia in my Approaches chapter. Over the course of this chapter, I go over the established scholarship on utopian theory, pointing out the thinkers I draw from most while justifying where I disagree with existing frameworks. I then draw out some of the key areas where I wish to add my own contributions to utopian theory, specifically in my framework of creating "The Decolonial Killjoy" of my title.

Definitions of Utopia

At the outset, it is vital to define what I mean by utopia and utopianism. There is a common misunderstanding in everyday usage of the term to refer to a perfect and static society, but this does not do justice to the rich scholarship and theory that exists in the discipline. In *The Utopia Reader* (2017), Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent provide a detailed historiography of the phenomenon of utopia. Ranging from the myths of the Golden Age, the political and philosophical treatises of classical thinkers, the religious understanding of utopian life, the fictions of the 16th-18th centuries, the communal societies and specific genre literature of the 19th and 20th centuries, and the protests, art and popular culture dystopias of the 21st century, it is a valuable resource. A similar book that includes more visual examples is Claeys' 2011 text *Searching for Utopia: the History of an Idea*, which situates utopia within the broader context of longing for the "good life" that is inherent to the human condition (Claeys, 2011: 6-7). But what exactly is utopia?

I primarily use the definition that is pioneered by Lucy Sargisson – utopianism refers to the impulse of critically engaging with contemporary socio-political debates with the goal of finding or suggesting new solutions to them, with the phenomenon referred to as utopianism and its manifestations referred to as utopias (2012, 7-9, especially the flowchart on page 9). This impulse stems from dissatisfaction and

offers political critique. It articulates this dissatisfaction as estrangement or separation from the status quo and subsequently offers a different narrative, from an alien (or new) space, which often carries subversive or transformative potential (Sargisson, 2000: 3).

The biggest reason I prioritise this definition is its broad scope. It does not focus on a narrow understanding of utopianism and it does not include a value judgement of whether the impact of the utopia is good or bad. This is particularly useful in conceptualising the subjective and potential conflicting nature of utopia; the colonial utopia being arguably dystopian for its subjects, while the anti-colonial utopia being arguable dystopian for its oppressive rulers. By considering utopianism as an umbrella term (with the distinction of dystopia explored later in this chapter) rather than something that carries an implicit moral value, Sargisson's definition lets me consider the contradictions inherent in competing visions of utopia without having to apply multiple theories at once. Moreover, it lets me bring a level of theoretical objectivity to the subjective nature of what constitutes the good life versus the bad life. Additionally, Sargisson's work builds on existing scholarship in the field, which I also use and expand on below.

A common feature of utopian thought is the ideal or imagined good life. Lyman Tower Sargent specifically highlighted idea of "social dreaming"; i.e., "the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives" (Sargent, 1994: 3). Or, as Ruth Levitas frames it: "Utopia is about how we would live and what kind of a world we would live in if we could do just that [achieve the heart's desire]" (1990 [reprinted 2011]). By focusing on an abstract dream or desire rather than a specific system or structure, this provides an ambiguity with regards to specific facets of utopianism. This makes the idea of utopia widely applicable to a great range of political phenomena, which can be seen throughout the course of this thesis as I explore concepts that are definitive and structured like legislation, language and protest, as well as more personal experiences such as religion, gender and sexuality.

A criticism of this line of thinking is that the ambiguity of the term makes it difficult to pinpoint the exact nature of what counts as utopian/utopia. At this point, therefore, it is important to engage with the concept of critical mass introduced by Tom Moylan (1986). Moylan suggests that there needs to be a certain amount of participants involved with a utopian goal in order for it to achieve a transformative value. Thus, while individual social dreaming can have utopian potential or utopian ideals, it cannot be practically implemented unless there is a critical mass of people to manifest it.

This does not refer to a formulaic percentage of people needing to be involved, and can actually involve single individuals as well, such as writers creating utopian texts. However, I argue that the utopian nature of such examples depend on how they are implemented or manifested. In the Language and Culture chapter, for example, I include an analysis of Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain's text *Sultana's Dream* (1905) as well as Thomas Babington Macaulay's *Minute on Education* (1835). Both are individually written projects that carry critical interrogations of their contemporary situations and provide transformative solutions. What makes them truly utopian, however, is in how they actually manifested. The latter is used by the colonial Crown authorities as the basis of their linguistic legislation, thus transforming it from an abstract ideal into a rigid top-down utopian goal. The former, by comparison, was a purely fictional text that became a subversive part of the anti-colonial movement, thus continuing to hold on to its abstract nature while still having a real-world (critical mass) impact.

I further argue that a distinction needs to be made between something being idealistic or optimistic versus being intentional in its critique of the current situation. All the cases that I explore in the following chapters, therefore, carry an implicit or explicit aspect of being intentional, rather than socio-political change being accidental or as a by-product. This is easy to understand when it comes to political movements and moments, such as legislation and protest. It is less defined in areas such as literature; what makes a specific (fictional) text utopian as opposed to political fiction or satire or science fiction or any other genre that may be radical? The aforementioned *Sultana's Dream* (Hossain, 1905) is an excellent example of a purely

fictional text that still serves to critique the status quo in a deliberate way, thus making it utopian.

It is important to make clear that this broad definition of utopianism is more relevant to exploring political utopias, than the commonly seen literary understanding of utopia as a fixed, perfect society and/or genre (Elliott, 2013; Greenberg and Waddell, 2016). The nature of political utopianism is less focused on specific formulaic aspects and more involved with its transformative nature over time.

Different Approaches to Utopia

Given the broad definition of utopianism and utopia, it is therefore unsurprising to see that finding facets of what constitutes a utopia is also varied. Traditionally, there are three categories of utopia: form, content and function. In this section, I provide an overview of the scholarship that underpins these categories and explain why I prefer to consider utopia as function more than form or content.

Utopia as Form

The form-based approach to utopia refers to the *how* of utopian manifestation – for instance, it could include a political system, a culture, architecture, music, medicine, fiction, or any other, single representation (Bloch, 1977 [reprinted 1980], cited in 1988 collection; Daniel and Moylan, 1997). Alternatively, Darko Suvin locates utopian form in science fiction, "[…] where sociopolitical institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than the author's community […]" (Suvin, 1973: 132).

I argue that a form-based approach comes with restrictions that would only be applicable to certain aspects of the British Raj. The key problem comes with the focus on form manifesting as a single representation (mentioned above). Although there are many different types of representations that are viable for the study of utopianism, a form-based approach would suggest that cases that occupy different spheres cannot be compared with each other because they are not the same type of representation. For the scope of this project, this limits my capacity to be able to

explore different facets of the Raj as part of a wider project, instead looking at each aspect or policy as a stand-alone attempt at utopian change – though it is important to note that these individual utopian moments can fall under the category of form, such as a top-down legislation blueprint.

The shortcoming of this approach to utopianism is in its narrowness and prescriptiveness. While it serves the purpose of satisfactorily defining both the colloquial and literary understanding of utopia, it automatically imposes a stagnancy to the political potential of utopianism, both in terms of temporality and its interdisciplinary nature. With regards to its temporality, a rigid understanding of utopian form can only provide a snapshot of political systems, which are inevitably prone to change. This is true of the utopian canon; even fictional societies that have lasted for several centuries like More's Utopia or Huxley's World State are only presented in the form of the narrative present. While historical backgrounds for both are provided, the engagement of the reader with the good life of these texts is with their specific understanding of the here and now.

Utopia as Content

The content-based approach to utopianism is a formulaic approach which is aimed at answering the most commonly-asked question of *what* a utopia actually is. It suggests that a utopia has certain criteria or ingredients that define it, coinciding with a specific understanding and thrust of wish-fulfilment (Kumar, 1987 [reprinted 1991]). While fictional utopias are more easily understood through the form-based approach due to its descriptiveness, the colloquial idea of utopia is perhaps more commonly understood through the content-based approach, because it provides a certain leeway with regards to the exact dimensions of utopian implementation while still giving a specific end result.

Like the form-based approach, however, this is still too rigid in how it engages with political utopias. By restraining the scope of utopianism to specific criteria, it removes the possibility for a utopian system to evolve beyond a certain point. Since the definition of political utopianism that I am using engages with *contemporary* debates (Sargisson, 2012: 7), a content-based approach removes the possibility for utopias

to react to changing contexts and issues. After all, the criteria for the good life can, realistically, change from year to year and the 90-year timeline of the British Raj means that using fixed criteria is not the best way to study its utopian potential.

Content can also be understood in literary terms as the presence of certain tropes and features, such as the outsider-narrator, that are common in fictional utopias (Sargisson, 2012). This approach provides broad strokes that make it easier to define utopias, although this is not relevant to this thesis because it is applicable almost exclusively to utopian fiction.

It should be noted that some scholars, such as Claeys (2011), consider the application of content-based utopias from an ideological perspective, considering said ideology to have utopian content if it fits the criteria of the ideal life. In this instance, the criteria that the utopia aims to fulfil are shaped by the ideological need for change. Again, part of this is applicable to the British Raj – especially in light of aligning its "civilising mission" with an understanding of political utopianism. However, I argue that the need for having criteria in the first place is what makes this approach unsuitable for my thesis. Although the Raj did have end goals in mind, the ideological success of their policies did not have a tangible measure or formula by which to determine whether they had been achieved or not.

Utopia as Function

The most useful approach to utopianism, in my opinion, takes both form and content into account by looking at how they interact to give the utopian impulse a wider function (Sargisson, 2000: 9). In this reading, utopianism is not understood in terms of what it is but what it hopes to achieve. While form and content provide a type of checklist to what utopianism can *look like*, a function-based approach eschews that in favour of understanding what a utopia could *be* (Levitas, 1990 [reprinted 2011]: 6).

This is useful for two very important reasons. The first is that it still contains elements of form and content – which do play a part within the scope of Raj, as mentioned above – but develops them further (Sargisson, 2000: 40). For instance, the idea of utopias as a blueprint with specific markers would fall into a form- or content-based

approach. However, utopias that serve the function of being a blueprint remove the rigid constraints of having definitive features while still acting as a political force for change. In the case of the British Raj, the imperial penal code was conceived as a means of implementing a British value-driven blueprint for Indian society, but the individual laws within this blueprint were subject to change by reacting to the spatial and temporal contexts in which they were written, thus changing the initial blueprint form into a blueprint function.

The second is that it ties in with an ideological understanding of utopianism that is more in line with the rhetoric of political systems. By removing the specifications of what a utopia is but still maintaining its thrust towards a better, or at least a different, society (Sargisson, 2000: 41), a function-based approach is more compatible with studying if and how utopianism can be used to examine to examine large-scale systems like imperialism instead of being used to examine specific small-scale communities.

Justifying the Preference for Function

In my understanding and implementation of a function-based approach to utopianism, I would like to propose that it provides a greater degree of nuance and abstraction than form or content. When read on a scale, I argue that the form-based approach provides the least room for interpretation, the content-based approach provides a bit more, and a function-based approach provides the most. As the scale moves from form to content to function, the parameters of what tangibly constitutes a utopia become less rigid. While this might seem counter-intuitive to defining what utopianism is, I suggest that this flexibility is vital to understanding it in the context of the British Raj.

The timeframe that is being examined in this thesis is extremely broad. Even the 90 years that fall within the Crown rule of India are influenced by decades, if not centuries, of East India Company rule before it, as well as having an impact on the realities of modern-day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. To prescribe a narrow reading of utopianism to such a long period that, moreover, also coincided with a lot of socio-political upheavals in the region would be limiting and, ultimately, damaging

to this analysis. Using a function-based approach would allow me look at key moments in these 90 years that have utopian implications or potential and tie them in to a wider push for a utopian project, rather than having to examine them as unrelated incidents.

Furthermore, the wide geographical scope of the British Raj means that there was a range of different contexts that were involved in its conceptualisation. The variety of religions, ethnicities and languages that were contained within the territorial reach of the Crown meant that the civilising ideology at its heart, and the anti-colonial counter-utopias that responded to it, had to be implemented in different ways. By providing a greater level of abstraction, the function-based approach takes these discrepancies into account and allows the spatial *topos* that is central to the etymological reading of utopia (the good place that is not a place) to remain. This is especially important because thinkers such as David Bell in *Rethinking Utopia: Power, Place, Affect* (2017) argue that utopian ideals without a geographical space to implement them in undermine the core idea of utopian *topos*.

Conceptualising Dystopias

Another key definition needs to be addressed before moving forward. The common perception of dystopia is as the anti-thesis or opposite of utopia, something that is supported in the mainstream understanding of utopianism due to the oppositional nature of utopian and dystopian fiction. Literary scholars, particularly of genre, do not tend to challenge this binary viewpoint (Elliott, 2013). However, when considering political utopianism, the debate is more complex.

Dystopia as Opposition to Utopia

Most notable among those who favour positioning dystopias in opposition to utopias is Krishnan Kumar. He specifically refers to them as “anti-utopias”, defining them as being devoid of the positive connotation of utopia and, therefore, arguing that they should be seen as a different category (Kumar, 1987 [reprinted 1991]: 99, 447). A loose reading of this argument can be applied by focusing on how he uses the subtitle ‘Shadow of Utopia’ in the chapter analysing anti-utopias (Kumar, 1987

[reprinted 1991]: 99), suggesting that a dystopia may be the absence, rather than the opposite, of utopias. However, this does not take into account the subjective nature of how political utopianism and political utopias affect different groups.

Dystopias as a Sub-Topic of Utopia

Going back to the definition of utopianism introduced earlier in this chapter, it is anything that critically engages with and offers solutions to contemporary issues. Unlike Kumar's use of the term, there is no explicit mention of utopianism having a positive or a negative effect. While the etymological root of utopia is a double pun of being a good place and a no- (or non-)place (Levitas, 1990 [reprinted 2011]: 2-3), it provides an incomplete understanding of the term.

Thomas More's coining of the term in 1516 is only a double pun because there are two distinct Greek roots to it. One of them, *utopos* or *outopos*, refers to the non-place. The other, *eutopos*, refers to the good place. The approach that Sargisson uses in her definition of utopias is by placing the eutopian good life as a sub-category of the wider field of utopianism. Similarly, dystopias – manifestations of the bad life – are placed under the wider umbrella of utopianism, in opposition to eutopias but not to the root concept.

In other words, both eutopias (positive manifestations) and dystopias (negative manifestations) fall under the category of utopias (Sargisson, 2012: 9). This is not simply a pedantic interpretation of semantics. For one thing, dystopias have far too much in common with eutopias to be a direct opposite. Both are aimed at providing coherent and innovative solutions to existing problems. The distinction boils down to whether these solutions manifest in a positive or negative social structure. This also supports the more function-based approach to utopianism that I am using in this thesis because a dystopia can still achieve certain transformative goals, although its form and/or content are not positive (Levitas, 1990 [reprinted 2011]: 6).

In *Dystopia: A Natural History* (2017), Claeys points out that "each of these types of dystopia [political, environmental, technological] might be understood as independently aligned to ideas of utopia in some way" (5), reiterating that the two

ideas are not necessarily oppositional. Indeed, Thomas More's vision "was founded by civilizing its barbarians […] Utopia remains an imperial power." (6) This does not negate the positive eutopian potential of such ideas, but it does point out that oppressive dystopias (such as colonial exploitation) are often part and parcel of a wider utopian tradition. To try and separate the two would, therefore, be disingenuous.

As such, detaching dystopias from a wider understanding of utopianism would deprive the historiography from being utilised to its fullest extent. Vast swathes of imperial policy would have to be set aside on the simple basis that they had negative goals or even by-products. This is not a case of positive bias in case selection; a multi-faceted reading of utopianism provides a more nuanced approach to my project. I eventually consider some forms of utopianism to be more emancipatory (as I explain later in this chapter), but I do not reject potentially dystopian elements of the Raj from my reading. Even scholars like Kumar at least take the trouble of defining dystopia within their utopian writings, supporting the idea that dystopias can never be fully separated from the study of utopianism and should, therefore, be considered from a more comprehensive angle.

Utopias in the Real World

It would be a disservice to write this chapter without acknowledging the relevance of political utopianism to studying real world cases such as the British Raj. While the common perception of utopias is that they are largely, if not exclusively, fictional – supported by the etymological paradox of being a no-place as well as by the use of fictional texts in analyses by political utopian scholars – it is incorrect to assume that large-scale political systems like imperialism cannot be analysed using utopian theory.

In his introduction to utopianism, Lyman Tower Sargent notes how the concept of utopia varied depending on temporal and spatial contexts. While a lot of utopias in the Christian tradition and the Western canon were indeed textual (Sargent, 2010: 86-88; Claeys, 2011: 28-30, 58-65), the broader history of utopia is far more diverse.

Alongside textual examples such as folklore and fables from South-east Asia, they also covered territorial examples (Ashoka's kingdom), philosophical examples (Confucius), and grassroots movements (indigenous rights protests, anti-colonial movements) (Sargent, 2010: 50-56). Sargent (2010: 102-103), Sargisson (2012: 129-135) and Claeys (2011: 128-139) also examine contemporary intentional communities when studying political utopianism.

Claeys provides further examples of the philosophical and symbolic nature of non-Western utopias that are not textual. For instance, he looks at how rituals and performative acts can be used to bridge communal and economic divisions. Religious celebrations such as Holi in India (Claeys, 2011: 47) can represent an idyll within a specific temporality that makes pockets of real utopianism plausible. In fact, Claeys takes European and Christian utopianism out of the textual and into the tangible realm as well. While he agrees that a lot of moral notions of the good life were derived from theological texts and tenets, their implementation through the use of social norms and institutions like the Church and even through the legal rulings on matters like marriage and divorce positions them far from the popular image of utopia as fiction (Claeys, 2011: 28-31). He also suggests that the rhetoric of progress surrounding industrialisation and urbanisation – a key case that is examined in this thesis – shows how the development of humanity through the advancement of technology and machinery can be viewed as a utopian undertaking (Claeys, 2011: 113-114).

Erik Olin Wright provides yet another detailed reading of what he refers to as Real Utopias[1] (2010). He looks at three possible ways in utopian change is manifested. This can be an overthrow of the existing system (ruptural transformation; 308-310), gradual change through socio-political interactions (interstitial transformation; 321-325), or a bottom-up movement for change that keeps the existing system but changes the group(s) in charge (symbiotic transformation; 337-341). I should point out that my thesis will not differentiate between these types of transformations.

[1] The capitalisation here is important because it provides a distinct emphasis on the tangibility of both the real and the utopian, instead of simply being an off-hand concept (Wright, 2010: 1).

However, the range of my cases cover all three types, which backs the proposition put forward by Wright on the richness of tangible utopianism.

Wright goes on to argue that the reason utopias are real and, in many ways, inevitable is that society and politics are not stagnant, and this constant movement must manifest itself in innovative or new ways (366-368). The Raj – as a system that evolved from certain historical conditions, evolved during the course of its implementations, and continues to shape the modern evolution of South Asian politics – supports this statement.

Another recent scholar who has explored how utopianism can be applied to the real world is Paolo Magagnoli, who has looked at how digital artefacts such as films, websites and social media can be used to shape and implement notions of the good (or bad) life (Magagnoli, 2015). While these examples are not pertinent to the time period that is being studied in my thesis, it is important to note that cultural artefacts can be used in utopian analyses.

Utopianism, Empire and South Asia

Areas that are being covered in my thesis have also been explored using utopian theory before. Stelio Cro has written about the utopian ideology and thrust behind the Iberian colonisation of South and Central America. His work is focused largely on the Christian ideology behind Spanish imperialism (Cro, 1994a) and on documentary evidence that looks at the actual impact of this ideology on religious communities set up in Paraguay (Cro, 1994b). In both, he argues that imperialism is always going to be a utopian endeavour because it includes changing the power dynamics that had been present in the colonised areas in pursuit of an ideal replacement. Although his geographical scope is smaller than the British Raj and includes a more detailed look at theological ideology than the political approach I am favouring, it is nonetheless crucial to see how his approach to imperial utopianism lines up with how it is being used here.

Similarly, specific South Asian case studies have also been explored using utopianism. The preservation and use of historical documents to shape nationalist

narratives in India and their interaction with different income groups has been deconstructed in the framework of an idealistic change towards a better life (Chakrabarty, 2010: 73-76). The narrative of lower caste emancipation has also been analysed in the same utopian terms (Nigam, 2010: 250-252). Less direct in its link to utopias, but following a similar pattern, is the examination of political ritual and architecture left behind by the Raj as a means of shaping a post-colonial legacy (Rai, 2014). As is the case with Cro's work, I will not directly be engaging with the examples that are mentioned in this paragraph. However, the sheer volume of work that is available proves that the notion of utopianism being strictly or even largely applicable to fiction is incorrect.

Utopia as Reaction to Multiple Oppressions

Sargisson (1996, 2012), Moylan (2000), Levitas (1990 [reprinted 2011]) and Bell (2017) all note how the transformative nature of political utopianism is inevitably involved with redressing imbalances in the political system. These imbalances are commonly conceptualised as a binary, defined as a Self/Other, Us/Them, Oppressor/Oppressed, among others. This Otherness is generally perceived as being a homogenous group with a single identity that can be challenged or made to provide an opposition to the Self (Sargisson, 1996: 183-184).

In my reading of utopianism, I firmly believe that this view also highlights the danger of attempting to universalise utopia. Some scholars, such as Bell, argue that utopianism is about creating a utopia that is an "authentic place [for the] common good" (Bell, 2017: 102-106), with an implicit understanding that the common good can be ultimately universalised. While this is a promising and radical outlook for a utopia that is not-yet, I think it limits the understanding of utopias in the historical record. In Moylan's reading of critical mass, he connects the critical in utopia with the idea of a "common historical bloc of political opposition" (Moylan, 1986: 11), which brings different groups together against a common opposition.

While the Raj can be read as Moylan's common opposition and anti-colonialism as Bell's common good, I think there needs to be a further level of nuance added to this discussion. The Raj was a multi-faceted project which had context-specific

approaches to its view of the good life. This resulted in opposition that was, likewise, specific to those approaches. In some cases, such as the internal solidarity seen in specific tribal communities or parts of the feminist movement, the anti-colonial counter-utopias did not actually form a broader bloc of political opposition but rather acted as multiple fronts against the same enemy. Trying to retroactively view them as a single universal utopia is disingenuous to the reality on the ground. Therefore, I argue that political utopia in the Raj needs to be viewed in the form of utopian moments. Rather than trying to provide an exhaustive and definitive recounting of *all* utopias within the time and space of the Raj, I prefer to look at individual cases that all contribute to a broader utopian space, with power and change going in multiple directions.

Specific subsections of utopian theory help to theorise this even further. Feminist utopianism provides an alternative reading to this by arguing that, while there might be a binary in terms of the Oppressor/Oppressed relation, the groups within this binary are not homogenous. Instead, they inhabit a variety of identities that may (or may not) unite for a common purpose, but that does not mean that their different identities and agencies are nullified (Sargisson, 1996: 199). Queer utopian theorists, José Esteban Muñoz and Sara Ahmed key among them, likewise consider the impact that different identities within the LGBTQ+ umbrella – as well as overlapping identities of class, disability, race, nationality, age, religion, and other such demographics – have on how radical a utopian project may be (Muñoz, 2009; Ahmed, 2006, 2010).

Absences in the Narrative

Feminist theory, queer theory, postcolonial theory and Subaltern Studies all provide an antidote to one of the most problematic areas of studying a historical case study such as the British Raj – the absence of large swathes of material. I provide a more detailed understanding of my methodological counter to such absences in the Approaches chapter, but I want to take this opportunity to point out how my theoretical framework also considers these absences.

Marginalised theories suggest that the best way to counter these absences is by reflexively being aware of their role in shaping the narrative. Voices that have been left out of mainstream historiographies have usually been left out for a reason (Freeman, 2010). By examining these reasons, they can provide a better understanding of the context in which periods like the Raj (and its ideology) functioned, thus providing a more dynamic understanding of their implementation as a utopian project. It is not just that the Raj's civilising mission viewed certain behaviours and norms as indefensible, it is that its utopian blueprint actively suppressed such views. As a response, several anti-colonial utopias were centred on these "barbaric" behaviours, such as *tawaifs* and *nautch* dancers challenging colonial patriarchy, *Hijra* and *Kothi* challenging colonial heteronormativity, and indigenous protests challenging colonial linguistic favouritism. Understanding both sides of this dynamic is, therefore, crucial in exploring the extent to which utopia can be achieved or analysed in the context of the Raj.

The analysis of the Raj as a utopia can be shaped not only in terms of how different groups were impacted by its policies – with individuals falling within multiple groups in the examination of agency – but also in terms of the power relations that dictated certain groups being left out (McCormack, 2014). This goes back to the point raised at the beginning of this chapter about intentionality. If a group is actively left out of the ideal of a (e)utopian "good life", it automatically provides a constraint on the scope of the utopia and its long-term legacy. At the same time, it provides a more tangible exploration of the utopian project by providing distinct parameters instead of being a vague, universal ideal.

The Decolonial Killjoy

In this final section of the chapter, I build on the scholarship examined in the previous parts and add my own humble contribution to the utopian academic canon. In particular, I stress the importance of why my exploration of utopianism takes on both the "decolonial" and the "killjoy" of my thesis title. In terms of my research, this particular angle of utopianism evolved organically over the course of the project, which led to all of my chapters first tracing the top-down colonial utopian project and

then tracing the bottom-up anti-colonial utopian response(s). Through this exploration, I was increasingly drawn to the potential for utopias to speak to voices and communities that are often ignored, if not outright erased. As a queer immigrant of colour, I am painfully aware of the lived impact of such erasure. As a utopianist, I am determined to contribute to scholarship in a way that is meaningful, inclusive and accessible – at least, as much as it is possible to do so within the remits of a traditional PhD project.

Decolonial Utopia

Ultimately, I argue that utopianism as a form of radical change and emancipation must ultimately reject imperial dynamics. Although the Raj can be viewed as a utopian space and, indeed, colonialism is subjectively eutopian for certain groups (i.e., colonial powers), it is an act of violence against colonised bodies. Over the course of this thesis, I explore how the utopia imposed by the Raj was more about control and being prescriptive, whereas the anti-colonial utopian moments were much more rooted in liberation politics and grassroots concerns. While my overall thesis idea is to consider how the Raj acted as a space for moments of political utopianism, I repeatedly end my chapters on a note of anti-colonial dissent.

I am able to understand the utopian potential of top-down colonialism insofar as it created a vision (or partial visions) of a good life. However, I ultimately reject this as anything more than a utopian blueprint that is often intentionally antagonistic towards the context it is implemented in. Instead, I want to focus on utopianism that is emancipatory and bottom-up, because it carries a more grassroots notion of what counts as critical engagement with the present.

Over the course of the thesis, I refer back to Sargisson's definition of utopia wanting to find new solutions to contemporary problems, with the understanding that colonialism (while creating a vision of subjective utopia) was firmly understood to be the problem by the anti-colonial movement. I also consciously pull from Moylan's work on critical mass (in terms of the anti-colonial utopias being both critical intellectually and in terms of the numbers of people involved) and Claeys' look at the history and theory of colonial sceptics.

In addition to this, I make it a point to draw heavily from two South Asian academics who work on utopianism as a mode of decoloniality. Ashis Nandy's work on *Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias* (1992) is one key text, specifically when he states that the context of utopia in South Asia is inherently shaped by its history of colonial exploitation:

> "Thus, no utopia can be without an implicit or explicit theory of suffering […] A third-world utopia – the South's concept of a decent society, as Barrington Moore might call it – must recognise this basic reality. To have a meaningful life in the minds of men, such a utopia must start with the issue of man-made suffering which has given the third world both its name and its uniqueness." (21)

Nandy is clear in his interpretation of utopia serving a decolonial function, including an open rejection of utopias as blueprints or form, including calling out Karl Popper. Similarly, I am keen to reject the idea of the realities of colonialism and anti-colonialism happening in a vacuum; colonialism was not a simple benign ideology, but a very real process of exploitation and suffering. As such, my idea of a positive utopia firmly places the value of decoloniality at its centre.

The other decolonial South Asian utopian scholar I use is Maia Ramnath. While Nandy considers the place of the once-colonised third world (including South Asia) as a periphery to the colonisers of the past, Ramnath takes it a step further. In both *Haj to Utopia* (Ramnath, 2011a) and *Decolonizing Anarchism* (Ramnath, 2011b), she stresses that there are margins within the margins of society. Vulnerable groups exist within the broader space of exploited South Asia and have existed historically as well. The Raj was not just an imposed hierarchy but an entrenched structure of oppression, which allowed some Indian subjects to rise higher than others (Ramnath, 2011b: 26-27). Over the course of this thesis, my exploration of utopian moments lets me not only critique British colonialism but also consider the power dynamics, clashes and moments of solidarity within the anti-colonial movement.

Therefore, I am keen to highlight that the decoloniality in utopia is not informed by simple markers of nationality, but by clear rejections of various types of oppression.

Utopia as a Killjoy

Having explained the "decolonial" nature of my conceptualisation of utopia, I now turn to the "killjoy". Calling utopia a killjoy sounds oxymoronic; utopian thinking is supposed to be about lofty ideals founded in hope and communal imagination. But, as previously noted by Nandy and Ramnath, this denies the material realities of utopian politics. In each case study examined in my thesis, the problems that are being solved through utopian thinking are, crucially, not considered problematic for everyone. That is to say, when there are solutions to such problems, not everyone is going to be receptive of change.

Sara Ahmed makes a distinct case for queer feminism as a form of killjoy in her utopian work in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010). She argues that queer feminism can only joy specifically by disrupting the joy of an inherently cisheteropatriarchal society. Said society frames itself as being ideal but emancipatory politics of any kind brings about the realisation that "proximity to the fantasy of the good life does not mean proximity to happiness." (51) Thus, in order to create a moment of liberation means shattering that fantasy, through which joy for the liberated subject is achieved at the expense of the joy of their oppressor.

Lynne Segal goes down a similar path in considering the importance of joy in a communal, rather than individual, sense. Her book *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy* (2017) challenges the perceived joy instigated by modern capitalism and instead pushes for a reactionary, anti-capitalist form of joy that is more in line with what communities would genuinely consider to be utopian. Her argument falls just short of Ahmed's more radical call to be active killjoys, which I read partially as the inevitable result of Ahmed's subjects being distinctly marginalised bodies. In both instances, the cases being studied are modern examples, unlike the historical case studies of my thesis.

Nonetheless, their position is crucial to my own. In developing my conceptualisation and study of utopianism – particularly in recognising the very real fact that the anti-colonial examples in my thesis were severely criticised, and actively suppressed and challenged by the imperial status quo – it was inevitable that the decoloniality in my work would itself become a killjoy. Thus, the “Decolonial Killjoy” of my title became the lens through which I completed this project, both in explicitly exploring how anti-colonialism was disruptive and in implicitly developing my own utopian politics.

Approaches

Before delving into the substantive research portion of my thesis, spread across the themes of Language, Gender and Sexuality, and Cultural Artefacts, it is necessary to understand the framework that I apply over the course of this research. I have already explained my reading of utopianism and how I specifically focus on "The Decolonial Killjoy". In this chapter, I map out my use of sources and historiography, I share reflections of working in an archive, and I justify the categorisation of potentially contentious case studies.

On Utopian Moments

I mentioned in the chapter on Utopian Theory that I reject the usage of universalising utopias and instead choose to focus on utopian moments that add up towards a similar goal. Part of this is my own personal belief that utopianism needs to be mindful of context and, since context is always going to be diverse and different depending on its spatial *topos*, it is difficult to reach towards a grand utopia without first building up bursts of concentrated utopia instead. Another key aspect of this has been my own experience with how the historiography of the British Raj has been recorded.

The Raj – and, consequently – my thesis spans 90 years over a vast territorial footprint. To create any single definitive analysis within the remit of a PhD thesis that retains academic rigor is impossible. But the tradition of writing about the Raj and, indeed, more broadly about colonialism is one of focusing on key moments as well. By linking various case studies through common themes and patterns, it is still possible to provide a strong account of utopian politics within the Raj. I should also note that most major works of utopianism such as the publications by the likes of Sargisson, Claeys, Moylan, Levitas and Tower Sargent (all described in-depth in the Utopian Theory chapter) share a similar pattern of looking at different examples spread across broader themes.

A similar trend can be seen in the historiography of the Raj, with different pieces focusing on specific examples rather than attempting to be all-encompassing. William Dalrymple has written a series of books, each dealing with a different upheaval in pre-colonial and colonial India. Niall Fergusson has focused on the technological advancements of the colonial project. Alex von Tunzelmann draws attention to the dynamics of the independence movement in the 1940s in urban India. Tristram Hunt, meanwhile, draws attention to the prevalence of colonial metropoles. I ultimately do not use these historians in great detail, mostly because I feel that their approaches are not conducive to looking at emancipatory bottom-up histories. Nonetheless, I mention them here to highlight that narrowing down the focus of a project on colonial history is a valid form of scholarship.

Using the Historiography from Below to Build Utopian Scholarship

The British Raj is one of the most widely covered periods of colonial history. While specific areas may be comparatively underdeveloped, the overall history of the Raj does not want for sources and scholarship. That said, there were specific key pieces of work that were integral to this project.

Catherine Hall's conceptualisation of the British civilising mission is inextricably linked to my conceptualisation of the Raj as a space of utopia. In *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (2002), she traces the central ideological role of Englishness and its associated superiority in the Caribbean, in Australia, and in pre-Raj India. While her cases do not overlap with my own, her methodology is rooted in understanding colonialism as both a lived reality and an experiment in creating new ways of being and living. Thus, while she narrates facts and retells stories lost to the record, she also has an underlying thread of colonial ideology – a model I recreate in my chapters by tying in historical facts with the broader narrative of colonial and anti-colonial utopia.

Although I do not use Eric Hobsbawm as a direct source, his general framework of looking at history through less viewed lenses is also critical to this reading. In particular, his collection of essays *On History* (1997) challenges the prior mainstream notion of history being an absolute truth that is unchangeable. While historical facts

may be a matter of record, there is always new information and interpretations to be gleaned from them depending on the methodology and purpose of study. Hobsbawm notes that colonial history, in particular, has long played a role in legitimising the modern framing of the nation state and the excesses of global capitalism (1997: 238). In using utopianism – a relatively niche theoretical field – to study a period so well documented as the Raj, especially in choosing lesser analysed case studies, I am hoping to emulate, in some way at least Hobsbawm's hopes for histories from below:

> "[I]n looking back upon the history of ordinary people, we are not merely trying to give it a retrospective political significance which it did not always have, we are trying more generally to explore an unknown dimension of the past." (Hobsbawm, 1997: 270)

South Asian scholarship has been important in challenging the established historical record by refocusing the impact of colonialism on the colonised bodies rather than by the ideologies and testaments of the colonisers alone, thus creating an established record of Hobsbawm's history from below for the British Raj. The work of R. Palme Dutt (1940 [reprinted 1994]) was well ahead of its time in trying to shift the narrative without giving into the zealous nationalism of immediate postcolonial South Asia, but others have since taken up the mantle. Arundhati Roy (2004), Amartya Sen (2005), Pankaj Mishra (2013) and Shashi Tharoor (2016, 2017) have reframed the history of the Raj as a whole from a bottom-up perspective. Meanwhile, Madhushree Mukerjee (2010), Maia Ramnath (2011), Sunanda Sanyal and Soumya Basu (2011), have looked at specific case studies – Churchill's policies, the Ghadar Movement, and pan-Islamism in India, respectively – to challenge the narratives of the historical record. I use a mix of how the former group was able to look at broad colonial themes with how the latter group narrowed down on to specific cases.

Tying all of this together has been the debate around using unconventional sources, as I do in chasing oral histories, using archives of clothing, and specifically in the gaps in the narrative. This is vitally supported by the work of cultural historians like Peter Burke (2019) and Terrence Ranger (the latter in conjunction with Hobsbawm,

1983 [reprinted 2013]). Of particular relevance is the fact that both connect the importance of symbolism and symbolic acts with wider strands of history and resistance:

> "The common ground of cultural historians might be described as the concern with the symbolic or its interpretations. Symbols, conscious or unconscious, can be found everywhere, from art to everyday life […]" (Burke, 2019: 3)

> "The concept of Empire was central to the process of inventing tradition within Europe itself [and in its colonies]." (Ranger, 1983 [reprinted 2013]: 211).

This is heightened in the context of colonial history because it involved dealing with the politics of "existing centralized rituals of honour and degree" (Ranger, 1983 [reprinted 2013]: 211), thus embedding the importance of using a cultural historiography when studying colonialism and anti-colonialism. (On a vital semantic point, this is why my chapter dealing with cultural practices is titled Cultural Artefacts rather than the more nebulous Culture.) I am not claiming to be a cultural historian, but the cultural turn of focusing on the meaning of actions and dissecting their symbolic value is, I feel, crucial to understanding how utopian values can be ascribed to historical moments.

On Archives

A significant portion of my research was done using direct archival material. I was fortunate to have the support of the department's PGR funding scheme, as well as grants from the Asia Research Institute and the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice, in letting me conduct months of work directly in archives. I also had a collection of material from previous trips to archives from earlier in my academic career.

British Archives

The three most used archives in my project were the holdings of the British Library, the V&A Museum, and the University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections archives. These were easily accessible during the course of my work and, in many cases, it was also possible to trace the origins of the documents in question. (I cite the relevant authors wherever I can, and otherwise cite the archive I used.)

Working in these institutions was extremely rewarding and productive from an academic perspective. Yet, I was also increasingly reflective during this period. I am fully aware that large parts of colonial materials are derived from plunder through unequal power dynamics. Even artefacts that are gifted may be done so through coercion or socio-political pressure. While most of the British Library papers were parliamentary in nature and would, therefore, have normally been kept in those holdings, the V&A and University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections archives included several objects whose provenance is difficult to ascertain.

I do not feel there is any clear resolution to this unease, nor any cathartic transformation in simply being a South Asian working on these materials. However, I do think there is value in using resources that are tainted with colonial trauma in the interests of a project that is ultimately aimed at creating conversations around decoloniality and anti-colonialism. Hopefully, that act can be part of the wider call being made to institutions to repatriate artefacts or pay for their acquisition.

South Asian Archives

Access to archives in South Asia were limited by more practical concerns. I was fortunate to have worked extensively at the Indian National Archives during previous research projects, which proved invaluable to my research here. Access to the National Archives of Bangladesh was likewise made feasible during my trips back home over the course of the PhD project. But it was impossible for me to access more archives than just those two – and their lack of digitisation means it is difficult to retrace some of the vaguely catalogued materials.

I was also constantly aware of the limits imposed by my own linguistic skills. I am fluent in reading and writing Bengali, so I was able to make use of sources in that language a lot more easily, including providing some brief translations when referring to personal writings later on. However, I could not make proper use of the rich and diverse holdings of these archives in other Indian languages. This was one of the more significant considerations that organically led to the utopian framework of using moments rather than a universal, definitive narrative.

Gaps in the Archive

A recurring problem in both British and South Asian archives is their inherent selection bias. The politics of the colonial archive are excellently illustrated by Thomas Richards in *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (1993). He points out that the very creation of an archive, most often a physical space, is an attempt to create a "possibility of comprehensive knowledge" (11). His use of possibility is the core of his overall argument; that archives are, by design, projects of omission that serve a purpose, at least at their inception. While many of these archives may have since become dedicated to cataloguing all forms of knowledge, the damage is often already done.

It is imperative to understand that the decision to hold or, as is more often the case, withhold materials from the historical record is part of the broader commentary on acceptability that has raged on since before the time of the Raj. I am very aware that even my most marginalised cases are somewhat privileged in being recorded in the first place. The work of scholars like Taj ul-Islam Hashmi has been invaluable in these instances for being the definitive and most accessible research on moments like the Tanka riots.

The broader concern of absences in the narrative continues to be a key debate in historical studies – including in ongoing campaigns such as Decolonising the Curriculum. I believe that my intentional focus on the margins and unusual case studies, alongside my analyses of more mainstream examples, is part of a wider trend in academia to not only build on existing knowledge but critically challenge the ways in which that knowledge has been produced. At the same time, my use of

utopian moments deflects from the possible criticism that I am creating a false sense of definitive history-making; I am categorically disavowing any such potential interpretation by stressing that this is a record of some moments that speak to a wider narrative,

Religion as a Constant Underlying Factor

Over the course of working on this thesis, there were several conversations with my supervisors about which areas to examine as broad chapter themes. Ideas that came and went included chapters dedicated to wealth and technology. Religion, however, was a more complex sticking point because of its pervasiveness in the history of the Raj. There is, of course, the undeniable impact of religion in terms of the Divide and Rule policy. Most political divisions were stoked through heightening and, in some cases, creating communal tensions between Muslims and Hindus (and, occasionally, Sikhs). The Bengal Partition of 1905 was officially a bureaucratic decision, but it was also an intentional and significant experiment in breaking anti-colonial dissent in the region along religious lines. While the Partition itself was reversed in 1911, the schism it left behind has not healed to this day.

Similarly, campaigns for broader religious autonomy within the Indian independence movement are some of the most obvious examples of utopia. Pakistan as a physical manifestation of a homeland for Indian Muslims is an archetypal *topos* of good Muslim living. Similar assertions can and have been made about the Deobandi and Khilafat Movements (in the case of Muslims), Hindutva nationalism (in the case of Hindus), and the Ghadar Movement (in the case of Sikhs).

Yet, many of these instances also bled into other areas of concern. Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain critiqued Abrahamic patriarchy but the utopian potential of her work was imbedded in language, not theology. The Self-Respect Movement was about religious reform but one of its most radical and utopian impacts was on gender and sexuality. And the spiritualism of Lalon and the *Baul* movement cannot be examined without considering its position within wider cultural revolutions. Moreover, I strongly feel that the exclusive utopianism of religious communalism was not

transformative enough to be truly emancipatory. Unlike the context-responsive examples mentioned earlier in this paragraph – which were ultimately about ways of expanding inclusion – the religion-focused utopias often recreated colonial dynamics of control. While intriguing and important case studies in their own right, I felt they would not be properly examined within the structure of this thesis (though perhaps they could be examined using a similar model to what I use in my analyses). Subsequently, I decided to scrap religion as its own chapter but highlight its influence on colonial rule (in creating models of acceptability) and anti-colonial responses. In order to understand those specific references, it is therefore important to understand the role of religion in utopianism as a whole.

Religion and Utopia

As Gregory Claeys notes in *Searching for Utopia: The History of an Idea*, "Western utopianism is firmly rooted in Christianity [and] its aspirations rest on two images in particular: Eden, the original birthplace of humanity, and heaven, the believers' hoped-for final destination." (2011: 29) Subsequently, any Western form of government that is aimed at creating a better state of being for those in its care – and it is important here to note that colonialism was justified using similarly paternalistic and benign language – has inevitable links with the Christian aspiration for the good life. This is even more obvious in structures like British colonialism because of its open links with Christian values.

Some of the earliest texts about improving society are written primarily as theological treaties.[2] St. Augustine's *City of God* (c. 413) is a key example of utopian millennialism, whereby the perfect society is achieved in the afterlife as a direct reward for moving towards perfectibility in the now. It is important to note that St. Augustine's work makes an explicit link between striving towards social change rather than simply being pious on an individual scale. His work appeals the reader to collectively work towards a greater good, not just an individual reward. He points out that the "[the idealised] Heavenly City lives on earth as an alien; it secures its citizens from every nation" (cited in Ferguson, 1975: 187), despite cultural and

[2] While these texts can be understood to be political in the sense that they can have an impact on how society is to be governed and managed, they were not written exclusively or primarily with a political audience in mind, unlike later texts such as Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516).

linguistic differences, thus placing Christian piety in the centre of a utopian commonwealth geared towards spiritual salvation.

The vast majority of early theological texts can be read in the same vein, though St. Augustine's does stand out due to its explicit appeal towards societal action alongside individual spirituality. It is the more canonical early utopian texts that really drive home the link between religious (Christian) thought and good governance, although this might not seem quite as obvious given the genre's tendency towards creating completely fictitious societies, including their own religions. Thomas More's genre-defining *Utopia* (1516) does not immediately spring to mind as a defender of Christian theology. Its god is named Mithras, not taken from any of the Abrahamic faith traditions, and its proselytising clergy includes women, considered heretical in the Christian faith at the time of writing (such as the case of Elizabeth Barton, a self-proclaimed Catholic priest who was executed for speaking out against Henry VIII).

But a deeper and more contextual reading does actually show its inherent Christian piety. Its monotheistic society is specifically shown to include members of different sects who may have varying liturgical practices but are essentially beholden to the same deity and overarching spiritual hierarchy. More was writing at the time of the upheaval between Catholics and Lutherans, a split that would play no small part in his own execution later on due to his devout Catholicism. I read his description of Utopia's tolerant monotheistic structure as a metaphor for how More wished Christianity would respond to its contemporary fractures, rather than trying to create his own religious tradition. Given the fact that religion does play a crucial, if private, part in how society is structured – specifically in its prescriptions around acceptable behaviour in this idealised society – I see More's text as continuing the tradition set down by St. Augustine centuries earlier, but in a more subtle way.

It is also no coincidence that early utopian texts also had another distinct link with the spread of Christianity – that of the voyage abroad. More's seminal work, as well as Michel de Montaigne's *On Cannibals* (1580), Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1623), Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), and Margaret Cavendish's *The Description of a New World Called the Blazing World* (1666) all involve journeying to

a different, isolated land, in pursuit of utopia. Real-world voyages into the New World are popularly known to be about the pursuit of gold and resources, but they were also intensely religious in their motivation. Christopher Columbus was “a man obsessed with God and gold in about equal measure [who] saw himself as being both inspired by the Holy Spirit and fulfilling the destiny of ancient prophecies” (Claeys, 2011: 76).

Travelling to these faraway lands was a means of arriving at a space of utopia, a place that was good and also not-yet in the context of the voyages’ point of origin. Yet, despite the distance from traditional European civilisation, these fantastical utopias were also framed around existing modes of knowledge (as, indeed, were Columbus’s dealings with the indigenous populations he went on to exploit, a precursor to systemic colonial expansion). Campanella, Bacon and Cavendish made direct links with Christian liturgical practice and the achievement of a utopian social structure, although, like More, their theology was couched in abstract and fictional terms. The essay by de Montaigne is an interesting outlier in that it explicitly rejects the debauchery of European ‘civilisation’ in favour of a more nature-oriented spirituality practised by his titular cannibals, but even there, the spiritual structure is shaped around a monotheistic concept of a higher/greater good (Coverley, 2010). Thus, the utopian ideal of achieving a good life vis-à-vis the European “civilising” mission is inextricably linked with the Christian tradition, even if it is not explicitly mentioned.

The Raj as a Christian Utopia

In the pre-imperial period of British expansion into India, the mercantile territories of the British East India Company (EIC) were solidified by legitimising the presence of missionaries. Although the EIC was less concerned with the grand civilising project that later Crown control would bring, it was also not against other institutions taking up that burden. This created a symbiotic relationship between the EIC – ostensibly a trading organisation in the public sphere – and the Anglican Church – ostensibly a spiritual organisation in the private sphere. The former would not interfere in the workings of the latter but would also tacitly prevent other non-native religious groups from proselytising by denying them legitimacy. In exchange, the latter would

strengthen the position of the former by not only promoting Christian values but also British ones.

When the Crown took over after the Indian Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, this religious dependence had entrenched itself into the fabric of colonial expansion. Thus, taking the colonial project forward inevitably meant pushing an implicitly religious agenda. This was enhanced further by both the long-standing links between religion and voyages of discovery (discussed earlier) and the nature of the British Government being, at least nominally, connected to the Church through its Head of State (the monarch also being the Head of the Church of England).

As a result of this strong connection, justifications of colonialism were also framed from the perspective of the Christian faith. In particular, the idea of “civilisation” meant bringing the native population out of sin. Conversions to Christianity were a common tactic in battling what was seen as the local debauchery of immodest Indians. Specific colonial influences, such as the introduction of the blouse to women’s saris, were not only tied in with cultural contexts (such as the gender roles discussed in the chapter Gender and Sexuality) but also to spiritual ones. Making Indians, and especially Hindu (i.e., non-Abrahamic) women, modest was seen as implementing a virtuous and, therefore, better way of life (Cohn, 1996: 138-140). So too was the suppression of tribal languages practiced by pagan and animist communities. Therefore, the “civilising” mission at the heart of colonial ideology was constantly shaped by Christian ideals of the good life, even if the links were not always made explicit by colonial authorities. This same constancy is present in my chapters, made explicit where relevant.

Separating Topics

A final logistical challenge that must be addressed before continuing on to the substantive research chapters was in terms of demarcating lines between topics. Religion was, in some ways, easier to handle by simply removing it as a separate theme, but the topics for the remaining chapters would inevitably still be porous. The deciding criterion was whether the nature of utopia discussed in the case study fell

within the remit of the relevant chapter heading, i.e., Language, Gender and Sexuality, or Cultural Artefacts.

Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain in Language Chapter

The analysis of Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain's texts *Sultana's Dream* and *Padmarag* was the first such encounter of difficult categorisation. The topics discussed within the texts were heavily involved in questions of femininity and female autonomy (therefore, Gender and Sexuality), artistic practices (therefore, Cultural Artefacts), and education and linguistic practice (therefore, Language). Splitting the analysis into three sections would weaken the case study. In this instance, it was important to critically consider the nature of the material itself – that it is to say, both are written texts that are explicitly utopian fiction. Therefore, I decided to include this analysis in the Language Chapter, especially given the long tradition of utopianism in literature.

Imperial Rhetoric in Gender and Sexuality Chapter

A large part of my analysis in the Language chapter revolves around identity creation and nationhood through the rhetoric of English and the Anglosphere. Yet, I had to make a conscious decision to separate some aspects of rhetoric from that analysis. There is a significant overlap with the Gender and Sexuality chapter in terms of the use of colonial language to shape identity. However, in the latter case, the rhetoric is strictly associated with notions of masculinity and femininity, and what constitutes the good life therein. As such, I included my analysis of that specific aspect of rhetoric within the Gender and Sexuality chapter, given the focus of the topic rather than the language it was discussed in.

Omnipresence of Theatre

Theatre, unlike the two previous cases, was a much broader topic. Although nominally understood to be a Cultural Artefact – including a detailed analysis of the role of people's theatre in the anti-colonial movement – there were some subsections of the subject that needed to be analysed separately. It is explicitly cited in the Gender and Sexuality chapter in terms of challenging colonial narratives of gender expression through costume choice. It is also implicitly part of the broader question of literary traditions as protest in the Language chapter.

In spreading its scope across the three chapters, I also make a specific point about utopias – they are subjective to context and come in different forms with different contents. By focusing on the function of the utopian moment in question (as I explained earlier in the Utopian Theory chapter), it is logical to divide the analysis into its relevant constituent chapters rather than trying to create yet another theme – or ignoring the analysis altogether.

Language

The first substantive research chapter of my thesis focuses on the impact and usage of language in the pursuit of utopia in the Raj. Language was a powerful tool in colonial policy. It not only allowed for communication, but also contributed to the shaping of lived realities on the ground. Over the course of this chapter, I consider three broad strands. First, I look at the ways in which English was used by colonial authorities to create power dynamics and control in the Raj, including its use for legitimising (and delegitimising) dissent. Secondly, I look at the ways in which local vernaculars were used to counter this British vision of the good life, with specific case studies used as examples of wider trends. This section also includes an example of how tribal and oral traditions had difficulty fitting in with the anti-colonial linguistic movement. Finally, I take a look at two key utopian texts from India that are explicitly anti-colonial in their narrative. By considering these disparate moments, I trace the long history of language as a part of the political utopia of the British Raj.

The Significance of English in Constituting Identity

One of the most tangible legacies of the British Empire in the Indian subcontinent is the prevalence of the English language. It was used in official government capacity and was spread widely during the Raj – and has since been adopted as a working language in independent India, Bangladesh and Pakistan (Chandra, 2001). In this section of the chapter, I explore the ways in which English was an important tool in the utopian project of the Raj. In particular, I consider its role in the rhetoric of Empire as a “civilising mission” and why this has strong utopian connotations.

A good starting point for this understanding is in the inception of the English language for federal purposes under the Raj. Prior to Crown control of India starting in 1858, the East India Company (henceforth, EIC) used Persian as its official working language due to the prevalence of the language under Moghul ruleand included Sanskrit and Persian printing in its publications. Officers travelling to the region to work for the EIC were provided dictionaries and books of translation in these languages, as well as some regional languages like Bengali, to help foster

stronger economic links (Gust, 2017). However, even under the auspices of the EIC, the supposed superiority of English was heavily promoted within its ranks.

The most noteworthy document in favour of English linguistic superiority is the *Minute on Education* (also referred to as the *Memorandum on Indian Education*) by statesman Thomas Babington Macaulay. As part of a discussion in Parliament on the upcoming English Education Act of 1835, Macaulay argued strongly in favour of educational reform that used English as the sole medium of teaching. He argued that, by using English in higher education, it would be possible to create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" for "a single shelf of English literature is superior to all the books of India and Arabia combined" (Macaulay, 1835). He pushed for the immediate ceasing of printing books in Indian languages by the EIC in order to force the local population to change its linguistic preferences – although he did not take any issue with Indian languages and works like the *Bhagavad Gita* being translated to English, allowing officials to work with local values and traditions from a more informed perspective (Brendon, 2008: 33).

Although the eventual parliamentary act would not be as strict as Macaulay envisioned it, I want to highlight the specific value judgement that he made as a precursor to the use of English by the Raj. Macaulay's speech is not just advocating the use of English for practical purposes; he calls the language superior and makes an explicit link to morality. His claim that English-language education would be instrumental in propagating English values shows how linguistics were conceptualised not just as tools for communication but also as representations of power dynamics and control. It ties back to the notion of Empire as civilisation highlighted by academics such as Catherine Hall, Michael Mann and Harald Fischer-Tine. In turn, this feeds back into my central premise of the Raj as an attempt at utopia, because I argue that the superior civilisation represented by the use of English bestows a utopian function on to the use of the language.

This is one of the reasons why the Crown made a shift towards using English as a federal language when it took control of the Raj after the fall of the EIC. It became

important to create a stamp of authority. While the EIC functioned as partners-in-trade, albeit with more power, the Crown was there to rule. Language and specifically English became an important signifier of this dynamic of control by showing an explicit manifestation of which culture was now considered the default, which reflects on the linguistic theory of dystopias written by David Sisk in *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias* (1997). Although Sisk's analysis focuses on fictional dystopias, the element of control inherent to the linguistic policies of the Raj fits the same type of power relations described by him.

Sisk's central thesis argues that within any structure of control, language is a direct mode of power because it shapes narratives, actively creates voices, inherently creates silences, and is the means by which dissent can be controlled on a foundational level. It is not just a means of description, but an active means of shaping the world itself (1997: 13-15). This is central to understanding the ways in which linguistic policy was used to shape notions of acceptability and dissent against it. The Raj was explicitly part of the wider Anglosphere project, as reflected by its focus on areas like education and literacy. As such, its vision of utopia was framed and understood in English.

Within this framework of control and civilising morality, English became a means of reconstituting identity and existence within the Raj that moved away from the religious and cultural diversity of the region to a more uniform Anglicised version of existence. Sanskrit *Brahmin* (a specific Hindu caste indicator for the highest castes) became un-casted and almost secular "priests"; Punjabi *paga* (a specific term for the religious headgear in some sections of Sikh society) became "turbans" devoid of religious significance; spaces of female autonomy like the *zenana* and *harem* (both secluded spaces for women in mostly Muslim households but also practiced in some Hindu and Sikh households, where significant female autonomy and home economics were practiced) became bastardised and sexualised "hareems" which were symbols of Indian inferiority due to supposed lust and femininity; and texts like *Kosha* which had been used for both spiritual and temporal guidance became simple "dictionaries" (Cohn, 1996: 53; Nair, 2000: 224). The lived realities of the populations of India – diverse in their cultures, their religious identities, and their languages –

became part of a single blueprint of societal understanding and control (Fischer-Tine, 2004).

Of course, a large part of this was a pragmatic approach to the running of British bureaucracy. English was a common language to all officers of the Raj while the subjects within the Raj had a wider vernacular. That said, it is important to recognise that the question of logistics was not the primary rationale behind the enforcement of English. For starters, as mentioned earlier, the EIC was quite efficient in balancing Persian as the lingua franca while still exerting extremely strong (and often exploitative) capitalist control in the region. Were it not for the ideological impetus behind championing English, it is doubtful whether the Crown would have pushed for the change in its official language (Bragg, 2003).

Yet, the power of the Crown was not enough to prevent a counter-flow of Indian influence into English, as highlighted by the scholarship of V. G. Kiernan (1995), Joanne de Groot (2000) and Melvyn Bragg (2003). English may have been framed as the harbinger of civilisation but the language was still influenced by Indian vernacular. Words like “avatar, “juggernaut”, “bungalow”, “bazaar”, “dungarees”, “khaki”, “chai”, “pukka sahib”, “chintz”, “muslin”, and the aforementioned “hareem” became part of wider English use by the end of the 20th century. Some of these came from the exchange of materials and goods like textiles (as in the case of dungarees, khaki, chintz and muslin) but that is not universally the case; avatar and juggernaut came from an exchange of religious culture for instance. Crucially, this back-and-forth flow was seen in the first half of the Raj – considered the ascendency period due to the lack of coherent independence or anti-colonial movements – so it cannot be attributed to an attempted rejection of English. Thus, a rigid attempt at creating a specific vision of utopia was, in reality, more of an organic negotiation of control that saw power dynamics flow both ways, albeit in unequal amounts. In any case, English was always at the centre of the discussion.

English, the Political Class and Nation Building

At the heart of the Anglicisation of the Raj was the way in which English was deployed as a political tool. Macaulay had already set the foundation for the Raj to

take a more rigid approach to linguistic policy when it took over in 1858. Almost immediately after power shifted from the hands of the EIC to the Crown, the English Education Act of 1835 was reissued with the added proviso that the Raj would be using English as the only working language of the administration. This had the result of immediately delegitimising political spaces that did not adhere to this structure. Royal courts, many of which functioned using Persian under Mughal control but which also included non-Persian speaking courts controlled by the Rajputs, the Afghans and the Marathas, would come to be defined by pageantry and symbolism rather than their agency or influence (Bragg, 2003). They immediately became symbols of an outdated era, with a growing redundancy in the everyday politics of the Raj.

At the same time, there was a sense of paternalism in trying to empower certain groups of Indians by making them learn English. For example, the Asiatic Society of Bengal, which had been set up in the 18th century as a research centre for Oriental Studies and which had tentatively opened up its membership to select Indians in the dying days of the EIC, began to provide English lessons to Indians who could afford to pay for them. As part of this opening up, Indians were also allowed to stand for leadership roles within the Society, with Rajendralal Mitra becoming president in 1885, but only provided they stuck to the ethos and, of course, the language of the society itself. It must be stressed here that, while the English lessons were almost purely grammatical in nature, the politics of the society naturally swung towards English superiority due to its politics on orientalism and othering, which means that Indians could only aspire to positions of influence if they were sufficiently Anglicised and critical of their own shortcomings (Brendon, 2008: 33). Crucially, members of the armed forces and especially sepoys were charged a lower rate in order to instil a sense of “English discipline” (Brendon, 2008: 34). This was no doubt triggered by the fallout of the 1857 rebellion which led to the fall of the EIC and the formal foundation of the Raj, but it also aligned with the wider mission of enlightenment and civilisation through Anglicisation, as evidenced by the ideological description of military unity as specifically “English”.

Perhaps the most important point in this stage of Anglicised nation building was the formation of the Indian National Congress (henceforth referred to as either the INC or simply Congress). The INC would grow to become the leading anti-colonial voice alongside the Muslim League in the final stages of the Raj but, at its inception, it was essentially a space for English-educated and privileged Indians to express political opinions. Founded by retired British civil service officer Allan Octavian Hume in 1883, its goal was to allow a representation of Indian interests in the body politic. However, this space would initially only be open to male members of the Indian middle and upper class who were able to converse and write in English. While Hume's intentions leaned towards empowerment, it was inherently limiting in its scope and made complicated by the INC's indebtedness to its founder. In fact, Hume is known to have fondly said many times, "Congress c'est moi" (Burke and Quraisihi, 1996: 97) without pausing to consider whether he was willing to be influenced by Congress itself.

This hierarchical gratitude was also seen in the ways in which the INC voted and functioned. Early INC strategy "placed more hope for success in its demands on British public opinion and Parliament than on the bureaucracy in India" (Burke and Quraishi, 1996: 99), which reflected on its connections with the English language and the English establishment, such as electing Sir William Wedderburn as chairman of one of its committees until 1918. There was hardly any grassroots engagement within India and, therefore, no need to consider political mobilisation using local vernaculars. Early Indian members of the INC were equally as enamoured of English as they were grateful to the likes of Hume and Wedderburn:

> "A variety of circumstances together began to create the consciousness among Western-educated Indians that the geographical unit south of the Himalayas constituted a nation. […] They [INC officials across India] had a common language in English, which not only enabled them to understand one another but also made them aware of the institutions and, not until much later, freedom movements of other lands." (Burke and Quraishi, 1996: 90)

Of course, like the decision of the Crown to make English its working language, this championing of English did carry a pragmatic angle as well in that allowed a multilingual body to converse in one common language without having to afford primacy to one locality or another. What this meant, however, is that the original language of potential dissent was, by very definition, the language of control, which limited the scope of its actual subversiveness and its potential to create a different vision of utopian mobilisation. And if the British were supposedly benevolent in their support of English as a means of empowerment, they were also aware of the potential danger of other languages in the political sphere. The Vernacular Press Act of 1878 had already gagged the Indian press while allowing British and, more widely, European publications to continue uncensored. This took place a full eight years before the first meeting of Congress in 1886, which meant that there was already a backdrop in which English was the only means of becoming engaged in the political process.

The INC, to its credit, was quite canny in its use of English as a political tool. While it may have ignored grassroots mobilisation in India in its early years, “Congress workers in Britain issued pamphlets, contributed articles to newspapers and magazines, addressed public meetings, sought interviews with influential persons and held social functions” (Burke and Quraishi, 1996: 112). Indeed, their mobilisation in Britain cut across different social classes because all classes understood and spoke English.

But Britons were also playing a part in this experiment of political empowerment, most notably officers of the Raj living in India. While some, like Hume, engaged in Anglicisation of the Indian population, many others were concerned with the appropriate Indian-ness of their own colleagues. A key point in this was how officers who moved to India were consciously labelling themselves as “Anglo-Indians” (Darwin, 2012: 10) despite the Crown rejecting trappings of Indian assimilation that had been comparatively lenient under the EIC. This was done to symbolically reference a sense of organic and mutual rule, but it was contingent on the linguistic and cultural Anglicisation of Indian politics as well as the dominance of English as a language in order for the term to stick. Note that the terms were always “Anglo-

Indian" and the "Anglicisation of the Indians" rather than "Indo-Britons" and the "Indian assimilation of the Britons". This also allowed officers to conceptualise Empire in India as its own identity, one that was uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between the two peoples but still keeping English as the superior force.

When the anti-colonial struggle became more prominent in the 20th century – the specific impact of non-English linguistic dissent being discussed later in this chapter – the INC had to strike a crucial balance between continuing its outreach to English speakers while shifting its main focus to grassroots mobilisation. This was exemplified in many ways by the personal and political transformation of one of its key leaders, Mohandas K. Gandhi, who rose to prominence as an English-educated lawyer before switching to a keenly Indian form of civil disobedience. He shifted his tactics away from the legal courts to a more Indian regime of *satyagraha* (Sanskrit for resistance through truth) in 1906. Not only was the form of protest grounded in its Indian identity – the rejection of English textiles for homespun cotton, protesting salt taxes by making salt by hand, and appealing specifically to Hindu and Muslim sensibilities (to varying and often controversial levels of success) – but by reframing it in a local tongue, it became anti-colonial even in its very utterance, a stark contrast to the earlier political efforts of the INC.

Yet, even Gandhi's grand gestures could not escape the reliance on English. His autobiography and his political writings had initially been written in his mother tongue of Gujarati, the language in which he first translated the anti-imperial *Letter to a Hindoo*, his correspondence with Leo Tolstoy. He also agreed to its translation into other major Indian languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Punjabi and Tamil. However, as Mahadev Desai noted in 1940, his treatise on Indian Home Rule, *Hind Swaraj* (1909), had to be translated into English in order to be weaponised as a political tool against the colonial hierarchy.

Another key text is Rabindranath Tagore's essays *Nationalism* (collectively published in 1913). Tagore was a polymath who wrote in various languages; one of his non-English contributions is discussed later in this chapter. *Nationalism* examines state building and culture through three cases – those of the West (especially Britain),

Japan, and India. In it, Tagore argues that Western nationalism is focused on a narrative of unified superiority that manifests itself in material ways such as military victories and industrialisation. He points out that Japan had historically wanted to emulate that model and often succeeded. But he goes further to state that India, long subject to Britain's influence, must reject that method and forge a path that is based on natural social norms and accepting diversity. This explicitly includes an acceptance that linguistic diversity could create problems for a coherent form of nation building but that the use of English must not undermine the message. A key example of this belief was in his public rejection of knighthood in a letter:

> "The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in the incongruous context of humiliation, and I for my part, wish to stand, shorn, of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen who, for their so called insignificance, are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings." (Tagore, 1919)

Unfortunately, for many supporters of Empire, the content of the critiques was overshadowed by the language of its delivery. This assertion is not difficult to support; in various parliamentary papers and diaries held in the archives of the British Library, which includes speeches by MPs and future Prime Ministers such as Winston Churchill, Clement Attlee and Anthony Eden, a common phrase of relief was that "The Indians may be revolting but they are revolting using our words" (British Library papers). For the British, the ideological victory of an English utopia – an Anglotopia as it were – was reinforced even in the protests against it. Gandhi and Tagore may have been ferocious critics of imperialism, but they still relied on the language of their conquerors to make their case – an overly simplistic view, but one that did serve to bolster morale for the pro-imperialist camp.

What the English had to Say

At the same time, English writing was a potent tool for nation building and critiquing colonialism from a purely British perspective. The use of literary works as a form of political identity creation and a specific selling point of the Raj covers a remarkably vast scale. It has been called "a literary self-creation as remarkable as that of any

conquest state in history" (Darwin, 2009: 189) with special mention going to the histories written by Sir George Chesney (*Indian Polity*), Sir William Wilson (*History of British India* and the magazine *Imperial Gazetteer*) and Lord Curzon (*The Place of India in the Empire*) – all of which were aimed not at Indian dissidents but at British readership to continue selling the virtue of imperialism as a means of strengthening British civilisation. Curzon, incidentally, has also had a lasting impact on Indian education by virtue of supporting the remit of Dhaka University, where a central building was named after him in 1904.

One of the most prolific litterateurs in favour of the imperial project was Rudyard Kipling. Kipling was a staunch believer of the virtues of colonialism and was keen to lionise what was perceived as its achievements in many of his verses. For instance, the banning of *suttee* (the practice of self-immolation by Hindu widows) by the British had been viewed by many Indian intellectuals such as Ram Mohan Roy as misguided paternalism as it simultaneously framed the ban as a virtue of British civilisation, ignored grassroots attempts at challenging and dismantling *suttee* by Hindu organisations, and created a backlash against the law that actually led to the practice becoming politicised (Gust, 2017).

Kipling, however, was adamant that imperial civilisation was beneficial, even if it meant enforcing beliefs on others. In his poem *The Last Suttee* (1890), he narrated a fictional instance of a "Rajpoot" (Rajput) widow's death, describing it as a huge loss through a case of mistaken identity and highlighting the personal tragedy of the widow lost to a barbaric practice. Yet he was hardly a champion of oppressed voices or of feminism; his *Jungle Book* series (1894 and 1895) and *Under the Deodars* (1888) includes many passages which describe the local women as uncouth and unworthy of attention especially compared to their British counterparts, while most of his verses in *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888) and *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892) are about complimenting the British army and the values it supposedly inspired in its Indian contingent.

Particularly noteworthy are the poems "Gunga Din" and "The White Man's Burden", both published within a year of each other and both being particularly pro-colonial,

albeit in very distinct ways. “Gunga Din”, which was the first of the two published in 1890, tells of how the eponymous Din, an Indian water-bearer in the British army, faces regular abuse at the hands of his officers before sacrificing his life to save one of the white men who had made his life so difficult. At face value, it appears to be a condemnation of British callousness and respectful of the Indian central character. However, a deeper reading of it implies that the reason that the British soldiers became so callous is because they got used to their Indian surroundings while Din’s heroism stems from improving his natural kindness with British values. Thus, the roles, while seemingly subversively reversed, are actually reinforcing existing stereotypes – that Indian culture can corrupt British stoicism while British superiority can enhance the few Indian virtues.

“The White Man’s Burden”, published in 1899, is a far more explicit defence of the virtues of colonialism. While not exclusively aimed at the British Raj – in this instance, the subject matter relates to the USA’s occupation of the Philippines and how it should emulate Britain – Kipling’s argument centres on the premise that, ideologically, Empire is a worthy goal that can only serve to improve the lives of its subjects. He does make note of the material cost of imperialism – hence, it being a burden – but he justifies it as a necessary price for the noble cause of saving colonised nations through Western enterprise, industrialisation and morality. I must highlight the extremely racialized and Eurocentric gaze of the poem in its focus on the “White Man”, not only as a means of exalting the British Empire (in 1899, the largest colonial power in the world), ironically enough to one of its former colonies, but also as an unintentional means of erasing Eastern imperialism. By doing the former, Kipling places Britain on a pedestal. By doing the latter, he suggests that imperialism, the noblest form of governance, is only applicable to certain civilisations and, thus, the ideal life (utopia) can only be achieved by a certain racial version of authority.

One of Kipling’s staunchest mainstream critics was George Orwell, who not only pointed out the one-sidedness of Kipling’s understanding of imperialism, but also highlighted his reliance on the status quo. For Orwell, colonialism and its passionate defenders had stagnated into an outdated vision of what the world should be like.

Utopia was not achieved, not because it failed to be positive, but because it failed to be radical and it failed to have a grip on the human imagination, finding comfort in questions of pragmatic reality instead:

> "[Kipling] identified himself with the ruling power and not with the opposition. In a gifted writer this seems to us strange and even disgusting, but it did have the advantage of giving Kipling a certain grip on reality. The ruling power is always faced with the question, 'In such and such circumstances, what would you *do?*' […] anyone who starts out with a pessimistic, reactionary view of life tends to be justified by events, for Utopia never arrives […]" (Orwell, 1942).

Orwell, an avowed anti-colonialist ever since his experiences in the Raj and in Burma, was especially critical of the ways in which the colonial project relied on framing some individuals and, by extension, their understanding and experiences of the world, as inferior, while failing to recognise its own shortcomings. In *Burmese Days*, the protagonist is "the lone and lacking individual trapped within a bigger system that is undermining the better side of human nature" (Wilkinson, in her 2009 introduction to Orwell's text), exemplifying the taxing and eventually dehumanising nature of colonialism on its original population. At the same time, the locals are described as "interesting, no doubt, […] but finally an inferior people" (Orwell, 1934 [reprinted 2009]: 35).

Other political and social opponents of colonialism within Britain were keen to highlight the archaic nature of colonial nostalgia. Richard Congreve used Comte's interpretation of positivism to criticise the use of Christian moralising in the administration of the Raj, especially in how the implicit religiousness of the Raj was at odds with the lived realities of its subjects (Claeys, 2010: 58-59). The likes of William Morris and the Fabian Society were critical of the capitalist aspect of the Raj, particularly in how it linked its exploitation of the resources of India with a promise of civilisation (Claeys, 2010: 168, 179-180). Most notably, John A. Hobson, in his works *Psychology of Jingoism* (1901) and *Imperialism* (1902), warned readers that falling into the trap of viewing imperialism as the benevolent and sanitised mission its

supporters claimed was not only dangerous but actively destructive of many cultures and experiences. He was especially harsh on the role that the likes of Kipling played in using language and literature to misrepresent the realities of Empire.

Thus, both sides of the debate around the imperial project were quick to utilise and critique the role of language in how Empire and its utopias were being conceptualised. Indeed, "[i]n retrospect, we can see that this whole vast literary enterprise was part of the secret of Anglo-India's tenacious grip on the British imagination, unmatched by any other dependency" (Darwin, 2009: 189), for better and for worse.

Non-English Dissent and Un-English Utopia

So far, I have used this chapter to discuss the scope and scale of political ideology and its manifestation through the use of the English language. In direct opposition to this were the sections of the anti-colonial movement that predicated their stance through a rejection of English both as a political identity and as the lingua franca. By virtue of the linguistic diversity of the Raj, the number of linguistic anti-colonial movements was extremely varied and it is impossible even for an entire thesis, let alone one section of one chapter, to do it justice. Nonetheless, it is vital to understand how challenges to the Raj came to be and the utopias that they promised in their own right, including the levels to which they were understood and accepted.

In an earlier section of this chapter, I briefly explored Rabindranath Tagore's essays collectively titled *Nationalism* and his repudiation of the knighthood that had been bestowed on him. Tagore was a well-established figure in the global literary scene, having become the first non-white winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. But it would be a disservice to his linguistic legacy in thinking of it only from a Western and Anglicised lens whereas it is far richer and entwined with the wider anti-colonial movement.

Tagore was a prolific writer of anti-colonial prose, poetry and songs in the local vernacular. He mostly wrote in Bengali, his own mother tongue, but did make

contributions to Hindi and Sanskrit literature. In 1916, he wrote the novel *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World*). A key example of the Bengali neo-renaissance of the early 20th century, *Ghare Baire* follows the Indian independence movement in Bengal through the eyes of two different characters – one a pacifist who believes that there is some virtue in British traditions, the other a radical revolutionary who wishes to reconnect with his ancestral roots and overthrow the British by any means necessary. The novel provides an emotional exploration of the analysis Tagore had made in *Nationalism* (1913). A key narrative point is in the revolutionaries rejecting English in their town meetings on an ideological basis; by continuing to speak in the language of the oppressors, their liberation would only be understood in those same terms. In putting that critique in writing, Tagore explicitly has his characters avoid the trap that many in the political class had already succumbed to. Culturally, he also frames his anti-colonial movement as a revolution responding to its context. His characters spoke Bengali, which would not be applicable across the Raj, but which did make their movement more grounded in their lived experiences and, crucially, made it accessible across all classes.

Ghare Baire has a utopian ideal in its response to colonialism. It not only wants to solve the problem created by Empire, but it wants to do so in a way that is radical and accessible to the masses. Being a novel, it was still limited to those who were literate, but one of Tagore's earlier works and its impact on the independence movement truly encapsulates this message. The poem "Ekla Cholo Re" ("Go Your Own Way Alone"), first written in 1905 and later published as a song in his 1931 anthology *Gitabitan* (*Garden of Songs*), became the same accessible rallying cry for the masses that Tagore envisioned his fictional town meetings to be in *Ghare Baire*. The poem was written as a response to the growing sectarianism of the Bengali anti-colonial movement, particularly along religious lines. At the time of its original writing, Bengal was a hotbed of anti-British politics and organising, and one of the colonial responses was to separate the region along religious lines in the 1905 Partition of Bengal. This Divide and Rule tactic served to undermine the political unity of the movement.

Tagore responded with “Ekla Cholo Re”, imploring fellow nationalists to stand strong in the face of adversity. It would become an influential protest song against *Bango-bhango* (breaking of Bengal) and would later be cited by such diverse figures as Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar and Bose as influences in their wider, national anti-colonial politics. A major factor in its popularity was its language. By writing it in the local vernacular, Tagore was able to reach the masses and it became an important mobilising tool. As a recited poem and, later, as a performed song, it allowed people who could not read to share in its nationalist message. Tagore’s popularity through music is a key example of the spread of an anti-colonial politics within groups who were prevented from engaging in the traditional political processes of the early INC and the British civil service due to their reliance on English and on literacy. Thus, the utopic politics of *Ghare Baire* were actually being implemented by Tagore, and by many other writers who subverted linguistic paternalism by writing in the local vernacular, such as Kazi Nazrul Islam (Bengali), Hem Chandra Barua (Assamese), Dalpatram Dayabhai (Gujarati), Baba Padmanji (Marathi), Harinarayan Apte (Marathi), Raja Shiva Prasad (Hindi and Urdu), Sridhar Pathak (colloquial Hindi), Vedanayakam Pillai (Tamil), Kandukari Vinesalingam (Telugu), Chama Raja Wodeyar (Kannada), and Kesari (Malayalam).

As this extensive list of examples shows, Tagore was just one of many writers who challenged the status quo of English as a language and as a means of political organisation. In that sense, he was part of a wider act of dissent that presented a specific version of utopia. At the same time, he also stood out from his predecessors and contemporaries in his specific championing of traditional education as a form of anti-colonialism. From 1901 onwards, he used the site of his family’s Hindu ashram to organise nationalist rallies and festivals that celebrated traditional forms of living and governance. The site became a regular space for anti-colonial dissent, leading Tagore to convert it in 1921 to a university called *Visva-Bharati* (the Communion of the World with India).

In both the book *Creative Unity* (1922) and the article “Ideals of Education” in the April-July 1929 edition of *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, Tagore categorically said that English as the sole medium of learning was never sufficient and that an

understanding of the local vernacular was imperative in the creation of a truly engaged political subject. English would be learnt out of necessity, but it was the students' mother tongues that would make them able to work in tandem with an anti-colonial idealism. This is the key reason why so much anti-colonial literature was ultimately written in local vernaculars – including in the realm of the performing arts as discussed in the later chapter Cultural Artefacts. If the British wanted to restrict political consciousness by using a universal language, the means to challenge it must be rooted in a diversity of local dialects and tongues.

Oral and Indigenous Protests

The literary tradition of anti- and non-English political mobilisation, exemplified by Tagore but practised by hundreds of others, would suggest that there was a consistent level of success or, at the very least, engagement when it came to anti-colonial narratives. However, one of the pitfalls of linguistic diversity was that there were still hierarchies in play when it came to which voices were legitimised in the political struggle. And while the voices that were heard continue to be studied as established parts of postcolonial and anti-colonial histories, the silences of the time period continue to leave behind some notable gaps.

Perhaps the biggest linguistic loss in the archives and the historical literature is that of oral and indigenous traditions. In terms of a material archive, the loss is rational, if still unsavoury. There is no tangible way to collect all oral histories from a temporal and spatial range as broad and wide as the. Especially difficult is the fact that many forms of oral dissent and organising would have taken place before the widespread use of audio recording equipment in the study of history.

However, it is disconcerting to see how little information is available on the contributions of tribal and indigenous voices in the historical research of the period. A revealing case study I came across during the course of my own work in the British Library is that of the *Tanka* riots that took place shortly after the Partition of Bengal was reversed in 1911. The most substantial history of the riots can be found in the book *Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920-1947* by Taj ul-Islam Hashmi (1994), although some references remain in the

National Archives of Bangladesh. The riots occurred across the Bengal Presidency, in areas that constitute the modern Indian states of West Bengal and Assam and parts of modern-day Bangladesh. Initially instituted by the Hajong tribal community before being picked up by other tribes such as the Garo and the Chakma, *Tanka* had a two-fold aim – the first objective was to protest the exploitative economic policies of the British through the use of contracts written in English that the communities could not read or challenge, and the second was to protect wider indigenous culture including the importance of oral traditions (Hashmi, 1994: 233-235).

Unfortunately, the suppression of the protests was very successful. Due to the focus on tribal and minority indigenous languages, the local press barely picked up on the story. The timing of the riots, coinciding with the reunification of Bengal and the subsequent focus on Bengali identity, allowed the British to completely ignore the demands and even go so far as to suggest that the Bengali anti-colonial movement might be threatened by the potential splintering represented by *Tanka* (Hashmi, 1994: 236). This led to local political figures distancing themselves from the potential power of the riots and the broad geographical scale of the movement made it difficult to coordinate disparate groups without a written means of communication. The newspaper stories and diary entries from 1911 that make any mention of the riots which I found in my research at the National Archives of Bangladesh simply brush them off as “local disturbances”, “minor tribal grievances”, “linguistic dilution” and even “noble but ultimately misguided” [translations my own]. Hashmi suggests that similar movements in other tribal communities may have likewise been ignored and then quelled with little recognition or protest from the wider anti-colonial struggle, especially as they carried an implicit critique of emerging Indian linguistic nationalism as well as being anti-colonial (1994: 237).

Thus, we can see a limit to the subversive potential of rejecting English. While non-English writing and their oral counterparts were recognised and celebrated as forms of un- and anti-English grassroots mobilisation, dissent that relied purely on oral languages faded. This was doubly so in the case of tribal communities. Utopias in the Raj needed a written testament without which they could not anchor themselves into the public consciousness.

The Politics of Utopian Literature

At this point, I must also draw attention to the centrality of language in utopianism as a field of study. Even in its most theoretical form of political analysis, the discipline has traditionally relied on speculative fiction to express its imaginings of human hope. In this section, I examine the two most influential utopian texts from India written during the time of the Raj, but before I go any further, it is important for me to revisit the inherent colonialism in the etymological roots of utopianism (which I briefly referenced through Gregory Claeys' work in the chapter Utopian Theory).

Utopia stems from Thomas More's 1516 book of the same name. In it, More describes the fictional island nation of Utopia and its radical egalitarianism. It is a deeply humanist text that provides a strong critique of contemporary European monarchies. Yet, the very existence of the island is due to forced settler colonialism. Utopia used to be a peninsula inhabited by the Abraxans until General Utopus conquered it. The general then oversaw the digging of an artificial channel in order to "separate them from the continent, and to bring the sea quite round them" (More, 1516 [reprinted 2001]: 83). It is important to note that the Abraxans are described as "rude and uncivilised" (More, 1516 [reprinted 2001]: 83), the same type of rhetoric that is seen in the implementation of the Raj as a utopian civilising mission.

It is therefore easy to state a case for utopia in the vision of the Crown and its officers, but it makes it an inherently difficult prospect for anti-colonial texts. Yet, those utopian texts clearly exist as well. I am not referring here to the works of Tagore or the oral traditions of *Tanka*, which serve a utopian function but are not utopian in terms of their genre. The speculative fiction of *Sultana's Dream* (1905) and *Padmarag* (*Essence of the Lotus*) (1924), both by Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain, are specifically utopian stories. And, despite the troubled history of the island Utopia and the colonial rhetoric of its founder Utopus, Hossain's work exemplifies the function of utopia discussed by Sargisson by categorically dismantling colonialism as a social problem, as well as the form of utopia as a literary genre, including the tropes associated with it.

Sultana's Dream is a short story, written in English to prove that female Indian writers could, in fact, make impactful statements in the language of the colonisers. It takes place in an alternate reality as the eponymous protagonist, Sultana, gets the opportunity to visit the fictional Ladyland. In this technologically advanced nation, gender roles have been reversed due to the effects of foreign conquest. Women, who used science instead of military might, now rule while men are confined to the "mardana" – a masculine version of the *zenana*. Hossain's intent is multifaceted. On one hand, she critiques the patriarchal nature of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Muslim Bengali society, particularly its enforced seclusion of women. She is simultaneously critical of colonialism and its aggressive expansion. Hossain makes note of how the success of Ladyland is also tied to its rejection of Abrahamic faiths like Islam (critique of Bengal) and Christianity (critique of Britain) in favour of a faith based on morality: "Our religion is based on Love and Truth. It is our religious duty to love one another and be absolutely truthful." (Hossain, 1905 [reprinted 2005]: 12)

The story acknowledges material security, but not by means of capitalist and expansionist gain. Instead, the fictional Ladyland focuses on the nurturing of scientific progress and a balance with nature. The diet consists entirely of fruit, while only renewable resources like solar energy, wind power and hydroelectricity – all speculative concepts at the time – are used for work. Trade with other nations is allowed but only if they do not subjugate women or seek colonial expansion: "No trade was possible with countries where the women were kept in the zenanas and so unable to come and meet with us […] We do not covet other people's land, we do not fight for a piece of diamond though it may be a thousand-fold brighter than the Koh-i-Noor, nor do we grudge a ruler his Peacock Throne" (Hossain, 1905 [reprinted 2005]: 14) – a direct reference to the British colonial plunder of Indian treasures.

Sultana's Dream is well ahead of its time. It was written a decade before Charlotte Perkins Gilman published *Herland*, often cited as the first modern piece of feminist speculative fiction. Yet its approach is more grounded; *Herland* creates a society that is only inhabited by women, completely isolated from the rest of the world and with a fantastical form of motherhood, while Ladyland is based on reversing gendered

norms in more believable ways. This makes it a powerful piece of utopian writing because, while its science is purely fictional, its social change is genuinely achievable.

It is that grounded approach that makes *Padmarag* (which translates to *Essence of the Lotus* and the moniker of one of the characters), a novella written in 1924, equally impactful. Unlike *Sultana's Dream*, it does not make speculative leaps in its science. Nonetheless, it is a radical text aimed at reforming women's education. Set in a women's boarding house and girl's school in Bengal named Tharini Bhavan (Tharini's House), the story follows its all-female staff. The institution is revolutionary in its secular approach to education, aimed at providing equal opportunities for local girls regardless of class, religion or caste. It was written at a time when girls' education in Bengal was mostly restricted to domestic vocations or specific religious branches. While those who were well off could afford to provide private education to their daughters, the average Bengali woman did not receive the same academic opportunities as the men. This is reflected in my earlier examples of intellectual dissenters, all of whom are men.

Hossain had been among the privileged few, receiving linguistic tutoring from her family. But she was fully aware of her circumstances and knew that improving education for women regardless of their financial means would be a radical step towards equality. *Padmarag*, written in the language of the masses (Bengali) instead of the colonisers (English) was therefore far more critical of classist obstacles in academia than her previous works. (The translation of the text in the 2005 reprint is courtesy of Indian utopian scholar Barnita Bagchi.) A detailed description of the workings of the school in Chapter Nineteen, "Holding Court in School", points out how many parents pressured their daughters with high expectations without paying due consideration to their individual circumstances; Tharini Bhavan wanted to cater its curriculum to individual students based on their situations at home, defying parents who wanted their daughters to "learn English […] speak fancy" (Hossain, 1924 [reprinted 2005]: 137), which also served as a critique of Bengalis and the wider Indian political class who were willing to assimilate with English education in order to achieve success.

Like *Sultana's Dream*, *Padmarag* is highly critical of the impact of colonialism more directly as well. It calls out the restrictive roles that British women had in the administration – officers' wives or chaste missionaries – which reinforced patriarchal restrictions on femininity in India because of the association of British life with superiority. Thus within the fiction, both parents and the British authorities criticise Tharini Bhavan for going against the grain too much instead of letting their pupils gain a "respectful English education" (Hossain, 1924 [reprinted 2005]: 151) or become "civilised as Bengal had" (Hossain, 1924 [reprinted 2005]: 161). But, by clearly positioning the staff of Tharini Bhavan as the protagonists and focusing on a story of feminist redemption, Hossain proudly calls out colonial respectability around gender.

I must also point out that studying the works of Hossain is an active step in decolonising the field of utopian studies as it provides an important rebuttal to the colonial legacy of utopian literature. While modern writers such as Octavia Butler have explicitly dismantled the white supremacy of the utopian genre, there is an erroneous assumption that the discipline's canonical texts are exclusively Eurocentric and almost exclusively male. Hossain debunks that myth and provides an alternative route to utopian literature in a way that is important to acknowledge and explore even further.

Conclusion, and an Urgent Reflection

Language was a critical tool in the conceptualisation and mobilisation of the imperial utopia. English in particular was a key factor in the creation of a political class and identity, and the politics that said class initially engaged with. As a counter-point, non-English languages and traditions created a strong wave of anti-colonial utopias that saw various levels of success. Written texts like the works of Rabindranath Tagore were more accepted but oral traditions like the *Tanka* riots did not succeed in equal measure. There also exists the utopian genre in Indian writing in the works of Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain, which further highlights the importance of needing to diversify utopianism's canon.

In keeping with the format I explained in the Utopian Theory chapter, and the methodology I explained in the Approaches chapter, my analysis was mostly split down two lines. The first was the use of a top-down utopian politic by colonial authorities in order to create the ideal good life. The second was the bottom-up responses of anti-colonial dissent. These latter moments have a broader variety – and different levels of success – which highlights the necessity to understand utopia as contextual and reactionary rather than as a universal blueprint. Crucial to my framework is the disruptive nature of all of these different examples. They were all aimed, in one way or another, at dismantling the comfort of the status quo. While colonial policy planned on killing the joy of supposedly barbaric practices, it did so through a prescriptive approach. The killjoy of decoloniality in language, by contrast, was much more communal and grounded – a move towards emancipation rather than suppression.

It is imperative for me to also reflect on the dynamics of language, and specifically of English, on the actual discourse within my work. As far as (de)colonial studies is concerned, the mainstream academic analyses of imperialism, both positive and negative, and particularly those of the British Empire, are still carried out within a framework that centres the use of the English language. This is not only due to the long tradition of colonial history in British literature, ranging from the conservative works of Churchill and Niall Ferguson to the leftist analysis of Eric Hobsbawm, but also in no small part due to the prevalence of English as a common tongue in India. Thus, politicians, historians and scholars like Jawaharlal Nehru, Shashi Tharoor, Pankaj Mishra, Amartya Sen, Arundhati Roy, S. M. Burke, Al-Din Quraishi, Rabindranath Tagore, Mohandas Gandhi, Taj ul-Islam Hashmi, and Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain have written in English as well.

My own thesis is written in English, despite my identity as a Bangladeshi and my aim of decolonisation in academia. The legitimisation of critique in academia relies heavily on its appeal to a certain subsection of readers and this means that even criticisms of unfair and exploitative power dynamics run the risk of falling into the same traps they seek to dismantle. I am distinctly aware of the position in which I

place myself; on the one hand hoping to challenge mainstream narratives of colonialism but doing so within a British university setting using the same language that was used to control spaces of dissent. I end this chapter with the fervent hope that providing a nuanced examination of language and the colonial legacy it has left behind contributes to countering its pro-colonial history while simultaneously working to decolonise the English study of utopianism and colonialism.

Gender and Sexuality

In this chapter, I look at the ways in which the British Raj addressed gender and sexuality in its attempts to create a political utopia. Pre-colonial India had a range of approaches to the topic due the variety of kingdoms and states within its borders, and the unity and ideology of Empire was used to impose a specific set of values to counter these differences. With specific regards to the order in this chapter, it will cover the following areas – the role of gender in the push towards civilised utopia by colonial authorities, including the impact of colonial rhetoric on clothing; the active suppression of bodies and practices considered subversive; and anti-colonial responses to such bans. The impact of colonialism in such a fundamental aspect of life as gender and sexuality shows the pervasiveness of colonialism as an ideology as much as it was a system of government. It extended to the private sphere, with a specific emphasis on the personal as the political, with legacies that continue to this day.

More so than my other chapters, this relies heavily on specific archival research, including my involvement in two research projects during the course of my thesis. The first was as an independent researcher collaborating with the LGBT Research network at the V&A Museum, where I was able to look at their curation and artefacts in the South Asia wing to help trace the impact of colonialism on gender norms. During this period, there were also specific exhibitions on Indian textile and jewellery that helped illuminate my findings. This not only resulted in significant resources for my thesis but also a published paper in the journal *Sociology Study*.[3] The second was as a research assistant to and exhibition co-curator with Dr Onni Gust, focusing on the collection of imperial papers held at the University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections archive housed at the King's Meadow campus. The exhibition, entitled "Threads of Empire: Rule and Resistance in Colonial India, c. 1740-1840", did not coincide with the time of the Raj, but it was invaluable in finding information on context and histories of gender and sexuality. Additionally, I draw on

[3] Ahmed, I. (2016) "Clothing the Other: How the British Raj Used Fashion to Shape Gender Perceptions in Pursuit of an Imperial Utopia", in *Sociology Study*, 6(7). Pp. 436-447.

field work conducted at the British Library, the Indian National Archives and the National Archives of Bangladesh.

Empire and the Gendered Rhetoric of Civilisation

From its outset, British involvement in India was very critical of what it perceived to be the debauchery and moral depravity of local customs. Although the East India Company (henceforth, EIC) did not have the authority to police matters as heavily as the Crown did later, even pre-Raj Britons were not secretive about their contempt for Indian practices. The following excerpts are taken from a collection of speeches on Indian policy archived by A. Berriedale Keith, available at the British Library. In a speech to Parliament, Thomas Babington Macaulay explicitly says that India was in a state of turmoil before the British arrived under the EIC:

> "In what state, then, did we find India? And what have we made India? […] At Delhi, as at Ravenna, there was a mock sovereign, a mere pageant immured in a gorgeous state prison. He was suffered to indulge in every sensual pleasure. He was adored with servile prostrations. […] All the evils of despotism, and all the evils of anarchy, pressed at once on that miserable race. They knew nothing of government but its exactions. Desolation was in their imperial cities, and famine all along the banks of their broad and redundant rivers. It seemed that a few more years would suffice to efface all traces of the opulence and civilization of an earliest age." (Macaulay, 1833)

The references to pageantry, sensuality and opulence are not simply hyperbolic exaggerations; part of the sense of imperial superiority stemmed from a belief that better governance and better civilisation were a result of a detached, chaste and impersonal rule of law that separated physical intimacy from power. By contrast, the rest of the speech upholds British values as a cure for these problems:

> "[Looking at British rule], I see scarcely a trace of the vices which blemished the splendid fame of the first conquerors of Bengal. I see

> peace studiously preserved. I see faith inviolably maintained towards feeble and dependent states, I see confidence gradually infused into the minds of suspicious neighbours. I see the horrors of war mitigated by the chivalrous and Christian spirit of Europe. I see examples of moderation and clemency, not debauchery, such as I should seek in vain in the annals of any other victorious and dominant nation. […] I see a government anxiously bent on the public good. Even in its errors I recognize a paternal feeling towards the great people committed to its charge. I see toleration strictly maintained. Yet I see bloody and degrading superstitions gradually losing their power. I see the morality, the philosophy, the taste of Europe, beginning to produce a salutary effect on the hearts and understandings of our subjects. I see the public mind of India, that public mind which we found debased and contracted by the worst forms of political, religious and sensual tyranny, expanding itself to just and noble views of the end of government and the social duties of man." (Macaulay, 1833)

This same sense of incompatibility is also reflected in personal accounts of the time, supporting the idea that British perceptions of Indian customs were not solely in the arena of public displays and court practice. Journals housed in the University of Nottingham archives point out the disbelief of visiting British officers and their wives regarding the "overt womanhood" and "sensual trappings" of their hosts, betraying both a sense of puritanical Victorian morality and a discomfort at non-patriarchal traditions. In a series of letters written to her sister from 1837 to 1840, Emily Eden, the wife of the then Governor-General, notes how the differences between British and Indian lives manifested in deeply personal and intimate ways, and that any political attempts to reconcile the two would have to take into account these different cultural contexts. Referring to relationships and romance, she writes:

> "Our native servants look so unhappy. They hate leaving their families, and possibly leaving two or three wives is two or three times as painful as leaving one, and they cannot endure being parted from their children […]

> How strange that they can be faithful to more than one person." (Eden, 1837 [reprinted 1984])

Following the establishment of the Raj in 1858, the imposition of British values was formally taken up as part of imperial policy. A speech by George Cornewall Lewis when discussing taxation and the judiciary suggests that "these effeminate Bengalis need to be shown the way for their own good" (Lewis, 1858). Travel writings from the time show a similar sense of distaste towards Indian customs, with an implication that they either needed to be corrected or selectively performed as exotic remnants of a quaint way of life. Kipling's self-professed "charity […] towards those poor devils" and Forster's "disgust [at the] incoherent" local customs reflect an implicit view that anything not British was automatically inferior (works cited in Spurr, 1993: 104).

Thus, based on documents from just before the start of the Raj and at in its early stages, it is possible to say that the imperial outlook towards Indian practices of gender was less than positive. This outlook then had an impact on policy making.

The Problem of South Asian Gender Norms

The imperial rhetoric regarding Indian socio-cultural norms did not occur in a vacuum but was a reactionary response to what was perceived as being immoral. In this section, I look at excerpts from *Readings from Literature and History: Same-Sex Love in India* (Vanita and Kidwai, 2000) in order to create an overview of the largely tolerant approach to gender identity and sexuality that was being challenged by the Raj's utopia; that is to say, these are the social problems that needed to be solved.

Texts from various periods show that the religious approach to gender in Hinduism was one which viewed it as both performative and lived – which is to say that an individual's identity was seen as a composite of physiological aspects such as sex organs and how the individual embodied certain traits and characteristics. Gender was therefore not understood as a static dichotomy between male and female, but a fluid spectrum that moved between the two. Many texts also supported same-sex

intimacy and romance, which, once again was in direct contrast to the moral views later imposed by imperial policy.

Pre-Raj texts such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Kama Sutra* made several references to same-gender intimacy and to the performativity of gender as a lived experience. Their approaches to performative gender were firmly entrenched in Indian social norms, including well into the early years of the Raj, when they were being challenged. The oral testimonies of Shri Ramakrishna contain a section where he reveals how, in 1879, he "yearned deeply for a young male disciple" and then "approached him dressed as a woman, but with the full revelation of who [he was] and [he] was accepted in that moment as [his] feminine self". (translated from the original by Vanita).

In the Bengali novella *Indira*, published in 1973, the titular characters is a woman who has a deeply passionate and physical relationship with another woman, Suhbashini, with a specific focus on hyper-femininity as a prerequisite to intimacy:

> "She wiped my face clean. Then, having massaged my hair with fragrant oil, she started to tie my hair into a chignon […] She then took one of her own clean and beautiful saris and started to drape it around me […] she proceeded to take *mollika* [jasmine] flower buds from a jardinière and made me wear bracelets, anklets and a necklace of these buds. Then, she produced a brand-new pair of golden earrings. It was only then that we could find comfort in each other." (Translated from the original by Ghosh)

Clothing, Gender and Propaganda

The performative representation of gender in literature was a reflection of the material world and real bodies. The body in the British Raj was a politically charged space because it was a living representation of identity and its associated ideals. By being a visual indicator of conformity, or the lack thereof, it became a powerful means of reinforcing the civilising ideology at the heart of the imperial project, an ideology which represented a move towards a utopian good life (Collingham, 2001).

Symbols of the native body and its autonomy were a direct contradiction to the supposed supremacy of Anglicised morality and values. By the start of the Raj, the British perception of gender was one where roles and norms were rigidly defined and projected as a male-female binary (Spurr, 1993), which was certainly not the case in India. While traditional roles for men and women did exist in most parts of the Raj – such as militancy being equated to maleness and peace-keeping to femaleness – negative perceptions of gender, masculinity and femininity, and a uniform, unwavering definition of acceptable desire did not exist (Collingham, 2001; Nicol: 2014).

In order to create a unified colonial Self that could be used as a utopian blueprint for acceptability, an undesirable Other had to be conceptualised as a counter-point against which the Self could be held up. This Self/Other relation creates a path to attain perfectibility by framing certain actions and/or individuals as (part of) the problem. In doing so, it implies a solution to said problem by punishing the Other in order to protect or strengthen the Self (Kristeva, 1938). Gender, especially through clothing, was a natural choice for this dynamic to be played out because it was already conceptualised differently by the colonisers and the colonised.

The V&A archives provide a revealing glimpse into the style of clothing that was common in different parts of the early Raj (and its immediate precursors in the EIC). Courtly dress, especially in Muslim royal courts such as those of the Mughals, had similar style lines for both men and women. The *jama* (top) was always knee-length, with long sleeves, intricate embroidery and a flared-out bottom half from just below the chest area. The *pajama* (literally, foot-*jama*; bottom) was traditionally loose-fitting to allow for ease of movement and sitting down. Regional variations aside, such as the predominance of certain colours or fabrics, and the volume of sleeves or of the flared bottom half of the *jama*, this silhouette was common to nearly all the states and kingdoms in the region, including Bengal, Oudh, Delhi, Rajputana, the Punjab, Kashmir, and across what is now central India, and could be worn by both men and women. In specific regions, women would usually wear a long piece of wraparound cloth known as a *sari*, which men did not wear, but the standard silhouette for

separates was universally androgynous, with the difference being that men would wear caps or go bare-headed while women would wear a shawl (Crill, 2015).

Both men and women also wore necklaces and rings, with size and intricacy reflecting status and influence rather than gender or identity. Men wore turban and, while women had a range of hair ornaments; both wore earrings, bracelets and nose rings. In the wealthier social strata, jewellery was made of fine metals and gems and worn regularly, but individuals in the lower strata also had similar styles made from earthenware and cheaper metals to be used in religious ceremonies and on special occasions such as weddings or harvest festivals (Stronge, 2016). Like clothing, styles and silhouettes for jewellery were largely androgynous, with the single exception of turban ornaments largely reserved for men and hair ornaments largely reserved for women.

An interesting example of how clothing was used to specifically highlight gender as a performative act was in the courtly ceremonies of the *nawab* (ruler) of Oudh, a princely state. The *nawab* was always male due to the patrilineal line of succession but, in order to represent his subjects more evenly, he would spend specific fortnights in the year wearing a shawl instead of a cap, wearing female jewellery like hair ornaments, being addressed using female pronouns, and even taking on a male consort. The sign that these fortnights would be commencing or ending came from the dress of the *nawab*, which acted as the cue for how they would then be addressed; the consort was largely for the private sphere and could not be used as a definitive marker of the *nawab*'s gender identity at any given time (Nicol, 2014). This was quickly framed as an unacceptable act under British control with the practice being banned shortly after the state's annexation into the Raj.

An additional point of clothing and propaganda was the impact of the military, specifically against the "effeminate" natives and their lifestyles (McClintock, 1995). The fact that the armour of the rebel forces imitated the androgynous silhouette of standard clothing (Crill, 2015; Richardson and Bennett, 2015) was highlighted and ridiculed (Sinha, 1995: 150). Imperial artwork showing the key actors in the military success of the British consciously depicted British officials in positions of "masculine

power" (Smith, 2016: 102) while the Indian leadership was portrayed as "dainty [and] weak" (Corbeau-Parsons, 2016: 132, 135). This rhetoric was made effective by the simple and undisputable fact that the British forces won. By tying in their military superiority with their perceptions of gender, they made the latter seem like a valid interpretation (Gott, 2011).

The evolution of clothing in the V&A archives shows the effect of this rhetoric. In the period immediately after the 1880s, when such propaganda was being widely shared, there was already a distinct change in silhouettes. While the length of the *jama* was still to the knee, the flare of the bottom became less pronounced for men, with the overall shape becoming boxier and with straighter lines. Meanwhile, the neckline for women becoming squarer, mimicking Victorian fashions and sensibilities regarding the bustier.

Over the following decades, these changes became even more pronounced, with a tilt towards Victorian inspirations seen as a sign of moral superiority as well as civilisation (Crill, 2015: 11-12). The men's *jama* became shorter and eliminated any feature that was billowy or loose-fitting. Women's clothing, by contrast, extended to the foot, with ribbing and corseting in the upper half juxtaposing a free-flowing bottom half. Similarly, jewellery became exclusively female, although male rulers still wore them when putting on ceremonial or courtly robes. Additionally, a blouse began to be worn underneath the wraparound *sari* in order to reduce the supposed sexual nature of the silhouette (Stronge, 2016). Thus, the changes in clothing can be seen as a reflection of the success of colonial ideology in pursuit of the good life, even in the absence of hard policy – which is what the following section will look at.

Suppressing Subversive Bodies

In this section, I look at four moments of regular Indian life that were seen as problematic by the Raj and were actively targeted for change. The examples are diverse in their subject matter and really reflect the breadth of colonial impact on gender and sexuality. It is particularly worrying that the legacy of three of the four colonial "fixes" remain active in some way or another in the modern world –

specifically, the continued sexualisation of the *harem*, the presence of anti-sodomy laws in many parts of the Commonwealth, and the socio-political stigma and disenfranchisement of gender diverse communities.

Abolishing *Sati*

A key example of using colonial virtue and norms was in the banning of the practice of *sati* – where Hindu widows immolated themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres. The practice was initially tolerated under the EIC but it gradually became a part of the Company's few social reform policies. The practice was banned in Bengal in 1829 under the auspices of the EIC before similar bans were carried out across the region. Under the control of the Raj, a general countrywide ban was issued by Queen Victoria in 1861, by which time it became a symbol of the benevolent rule of British colonialism.

Yet, the actual campaign for the ban was spearheaded mostly by Hindu reformers and included support from Muslim rulers at the time of the Mughal Empire. Indeed, EIC support was a pragmatic decision that was pushed largely by growing outrage in Britain rather than any concern within India itself; *The Times* in London, for instance, citing the EIC failure to deal with *sati* across its territories "a disgrace to a Christian company and an offence to our common humanity" as late as 1841 (cited in Major, 2010: 42). At this time, it was the Indians themselves who were working to dismantle *sati*, and do so in a much more organic and non-prescriptive way, but framing the ban as a colonial initiative allowed the narrative to be reframed as a means of protecting womanhood and its virtues.

The University of Nottingham archives include two documents from Bengal that underline the dynamics between Indian reformers and the EIC. The first, an undated petition but which predates the 1829 ban in Bengal, is a plea by leading Hindu reformers including Roy for the EIC to not simply ban the practice outright, as it would be impossible to police and might lead to a spike in the practice as a form of protest. Instead, the reformers urged the authorities to work with the community instead and push for education and women's empowerment as a means of shutting the practice down from a grassroots level. The second document is a collection of

transcribed interviews across all the territories of the Raj, ranging from 1827 until 1835. A recurring topic was the populace's thoughts on *sati* reform. A striking interview (undated but likely to be before 1829 as it mentions the "upcoming ban in Bengal") is of an anonymous woman – a voice often left out in the historiography of *sati* reform, even on the Indian side of the debate which prefers to focus on male reformers – who claims "[…] I would not practice suttee[4] myself; there are better ways to prove our piety. But if the British are heavy handed with imposing their values, there is bound to be a backlash."

These warnings would prove to be prophetic as the Bengal ban in 1829 and the later national ban in 1861 would not see an end to the practice, but rather a brief spike after each instance followed by the continuation of it at pre-ban rates (Major, 2010). Yet, the Crown was quick to use their ruling as a means to promote their understanding of civilisation and, tellingly, omitted the role played by Hindu reformers and of Indian women's autonomy. Thus, the politics around *sati* not only shows an active attempt at creating a colonial utopia, it also did so at the expense of genuinely transformative reform by the affected bodies.

Autonomy and the *Harem*

Without suggesting in any way that there was a universal and feminist (in the modern sense) way of being a woman in pre- and anti-colonial India, it is important to understand that there was still a level of autonomy and ritual in the practices of the region. One such space was the *harem* or *zenana*. Mostly practiced in Muslim households but also present in some Hindu and Sikh households, it was a secluded space for women to live in, often tied in with notions of *purdah* (covering for decency), but also allowing a great deal of freedom within its confines. A common feature in said households would be for the *harem* to be the centre of economic control, as that is where decisions regarding food stocks and other such resources were determined.

[4] As the word *sati* originated in Sanskrit, there was no standardised English spelling, with various sources alternating between *sati*, *satee*, *sattee*, and *suttee*.

Unlike *sati*, there was no apparent moral prerogative to ban or delegitimise the *harem*, but it did not fit in with the broader concept of the colonial good life. In particular, it undermined the narrative around femininity present in visiting British women who were either officers' relatives or missionaries (Cohn, 1996: 115-116). This domesticised and dependent nature of British women under Crown rule included attempting to convert Indians through women-only missions that were permitted into the *harem* (Cook, 1996: 124-126).

As such, the *harem* underwent a concerted smear campaign designed to frame it as a space of sexual depravity rather than feminine (and, arguably, feminist) autonomy. Popularly reproduced images of the *harem* centred on the visual of a man seduced into a delirious state by the abundance of scantily clad women in the space, heavily implied to be his mistresses or concubines. The actual reality, of course, was that men would not be allowed in the confines of the *harem*, that women in a society practicing *purdah* would be modestly dressed, and that their relationship to the nearest men (i.e., the men of the adjoining household) would be familial either through marriage or blood. None of this mattered (Cohn, 1996: 128). The resulting outcry pushed Parliament to try banning the institution altogether. Although this was unsuccessful, unlike with *sati*, the tarnished image of *harems* did the necessary damage and completely undermined an autonomous space in favour of a more rigid vision of idealised gender norms.

Outlawing Same-Gender Intimacy

The imperial utopia and its civilising project placed a lot of focus on the appropriate spheres for masculinity and femininity, and largely implemented that by shaping gender norms. Part of this extended beyond questions of gender expression as a rigid binary and went into the sphere of intimacy and attraction. Sexuality became a political battleground, with a focus on what was acceptable in the pursuit of a vision for an ideal utopian society.

The most notable act of colonial policing when it came to sexuality was the introduction of Section 377 of the penal code, which came into force in the Raj in 1860 before being subsequently exported to other parts of the British Empire. The

ruling decreed that “Unnatural offences: Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished [with imprisonment]” (Baudh, 2013). Aimed at curbing any sexual act that was not aimed at procreation, the law evolved to start specifically targeting acts of same-gender intimacy (although its wording never changed).

Section 377 took its moral stance from the Anglican viewpoints of British society. Although not religious in its definition or implementation, it is generally accepted that it takes its positions from the ideals of a Christian society (Kolsky, 2010: 69-71, 108). This reflects the fact that colonial laws were aimed not only at bureaucratic control of an imperial resource, but at civilising the region into an idealised life – understood to be Christian and Victorian in values. As is the case with all attempts at enforcing (rather than organically creating) utopia, a set of almost dogmatic principles needed to be enshrined in the popular conscious so that there may be an ideal which can be strived at (Sargisson, 2012: 55-58). This meant that certain groups needed to be offered as examples of ill behaviour – and potentially even moral and divine judgement (Baccolini and Moylan, 2003: 5-6; Moylan, 2000: 148, 185-186).

British antagonism regarding same-gender relations stemmed from the fact that intercourse in these instances could not lead to conception. Early British rhetoric even criticised groups that allowed for contraception, such as the vocal criticism of the use of sheep-skin condoms in France (Tannahill, 1980: 138, 259). It is important to remember that, in a literal sense, Section 377 was aimed at anal or oral intercourse, including between opposite-gender couples, However, the logistical impossibility of policing all forms of intimacy meant that the actual targets of the decision were those individuals most obviously incapable of procreation – those in same-gender relationships (Shahani, 2008: 103-107).

In addition to the perceived immorality (and religious sinfulness) of same-gender intimacy, it was also considered to be socially inferior, thus suggesting that a shift away from it would lead to a better society from both a spiritual and bodily perspective. Earlier in this chapter, I noted how Indian behaviour and clothing were

considered inferior because they were seen as effeminate. Same-gender intimacy was placed in this same category and policed heavily with the new law.

The biggest challenge in pursuing this line of thinking from the colonial standpoint was with regards to the very physical nature of homosexual sodomy in particular. Suggesting that an act between two men could be interpreted as having feminine traits was a difficult prospect. In this instance, the condemnation was made on the basis of the ways in which intimacy was depicted in literature and art – in conjunction with the existing Christian disapproval and the criticism of androgynous clothing.

Unlike the acts of homosexuality that were associated with ancient civilisations, such as the intimacy seen in Spartan military units or the more oppressive acts of male-on-male rape in combat carried out in several pre-Christian traditions, there was no direct connotation of traditional masculinity when it came to perceiving same-sex attraction in Indian culture (Tannahill, 1980: 140-142). If anything, the literary descriptions such as those cited earlier in the chapter paint a picture of compassion and delicacy, with a focus on specific cultural signifiers of romance. In a British context, these would be seen as feminine and, therefore, unworthy of the idealised utopian male (McClintock, 1995), rather than being seen as part of a broader part of the human condition.

Whereas clothing and direct visual references to gender were in the public eye and could provide some challenges from the local population, sexuality was a private affair. Its loose conceptualisation was aided by the fact that it was seen as an act of intimacy between two individuals where the only judgement could stem from a lack of consent or the presence of infidelity. The range of territories and associated norms within the borders of the Raj were largely quiet on sex as an act beyond a basic tenet of live-and-let-live, with the most notable references being in religious and cultural texts. Unfortunately, this loose conceptualisation also meant that there was no single identity or practice to rally behind and defend, as had been the case with *harems*.

After 1860, it was the colonial narrative of acceptable desire that took hold most strongly. Due to the private nature and loose conceptualisation of sexuality, there was no single narrative that was present to challenge the new notion of sexual acceptability and deviancy introduced under the colonial utopian project. It is especially pertinent to note that the private nature of sexuality had not been a matter of concern for local religious leaders prior to Section 377 – which, paradoxically, also meant that there were was no concrete defence of diverse sexual practices from the religious communities, often the centres of communal solidarity (Weeks, 2012: 104-105). Private acts had previously been considered off-limits to public morality unless they affected someone else, such as instances of adultery. Another example is in how pre-marital sex in Muslim communities was challenged on a pragmatic level because it could lead to complications of inheritance by an older illegitimate child. By contrast, same-gender relationships were ignored. However, the new political morality introduced by the British scrutinised private acts as much as, if not more than, public displays of moral goodness, and with the lack of a compelling and universal counter-narrative, the illegality of certain forms of sexuality went unchallenged (Weeks, 2012: 105-106).

It should also be noted that there was an added gendered element in how Section 377 was implemented. Of the three instances of Section 377 being cited in court, the two that resulted in convictions targeted men. In the outlying case, Queen Empress vs Khairati in 1884, the defendant was called out for “dressing ornamentatively” but did not result in any conviction as it was difficult to prove that her intentions towards the other woman were sexual rather than elaborately platonic. Emperor vs Noshirwan in 1934 saw two men (Noshirwan and Ratansi) being arrested for sodomy and both were judged to be “a despicable specimen of humanity”, although the sentence of imprisonment was ultimately dropped as there was no proof of penetration. Emperor vs D. P. Minawala in 1935 was also against two men (D. P. Minawala and Taj Mohamed), arrested and charged for sodomy in public, spending at least four months in jail (Rangayan, 2015). This reasserted not only the exclusive acceptability of opposite-gender relationships, but also elevated masculinity as an ideal that needed more protection from unnatural and immoral acts.

Outlawing Gender Diversity

In contrast to the lack of recognised sexual identities before the colonial narrative of outlawing same-gender intimacy vis-à-vis Section 377, gender diversity was much more widely practiced and accepted in India. Particularly important was the visibility of bodies considered in modern parlance to be part of the "third gender" non-binary umbrella. This range included individuals who actively shunned the male-female binary like *napunsakudu* and *aruvani* (in South India), and *jhanka* (in the Punjab); individuals who presented as a different gender to that they were socialised and biologically recognised like *hijra* (prevalent across the Raj), *pavaiyaa* (mostly in central India), and *durani* (in Bengal); and those who flitted across the spectrum depending on their role in romantic and sexual relationships, like *kothi* (Hinchy, 2014: 274).

These identities existed on the fringes of society and often practiced self-segregation for spiritual and traditional reasons (similar to the segregation of the *harem* discussed earlier), but they were conventionally understood to be part of the broader social fabric. In fact, many *hijra* communities were actively involved in matters pertaining to blessing rural weddings, raising abandoned children (especially if they were intersex) and physical community maintenance (Hinchy, 2014: 280; Baudh, 2013: 288). However, colonial authorities were adamant that their existence represented a failure of Indian society and evidence of their inherent barbarity (Baudh, 2013: 291). Subsequently, the 1871 Criminal Tribes Act was enacted in order to formalise the unacceptability of gender diversity. By framing these identities as distinct "Tribes" rather than as gender identities that crossed linguistic and ethnic boundaries, they were legally separated from mainstream society.

Unfortunately, their normal practice of self-segregation worked against them because it allowed for the act to be implemented more easily. While Section 377 saw a lack of dissent due to the novel nature of identifying sexuality, the Criminal Tribes Act was enforced by exploiting existing structures of separation and stigma. The concurrent move towards legitimising and recognising Indian identity through the use of religion (and religious communal divisions) resulted in secular notions of identity

such as gender and sexuality being left behind in the shuffle, although there were some attempts to reclaim such identities (as discussed below).

Responses

Unlike the cases examined in the other chapters, anti-colonial responses to the policing of gender and sexuality tended to be much more subversive. They often connected with other concerns, such as cultural autonomy, political symbolism through clothing, economic freedom, and religious reform. Instead of being anti-colonialism that was couched as liberation for gender and sexuality, local traditions were tapped into in order to undermine the broader British notion of gendered superiority and sexual deviancy. This is in addition to the obvious presence of women in the anti-colonial movement such as Tarabai Sindhe, Savitrabai Phule, Annie Besant, Kamalademevi Chattopadhyay, Begum Hasrat Mohani, Herabai Tata. It should be noted that the record on specific gender diverse anti-colonialists is conspicuously missing, an indictment on the erasure of such identities rather than their absence in the movement itself.

The Arts

Theatre productions actively exaggerated traditional Indian silhouettes in their costumes, including when adapting British plays to the stage such as the works of Shakespeare. The practice of cross-dressing on stage became a quiet but powerful political act that stood in defiance of strict gender norms, especially when allowing third gender performers to discreetly practice their identity publicly (Baudh, 2013: 330). Indian classical dance performances also undermined the male-female dichotomy as the story-telling aspect of the dance styles meant the performer would embody male and female roles at various times on stage (Cook, 1996). In fact, theatre and dance were such strong visual representations of Indian identity that, when the anti-imperial movement began to turn into a universal call for independence, cultural performances, including the nuances of costume, were used as preludes to speeches during political rallies (Tagore, 1918 [reprinted 2009]).

Clothing as Political Symbols

As a counter-narrative to the idea of an imposed British utopia, an organic and grassroots utopia that focused on Indian traditions became the new standard of the independence movement. One of the most successful aspects of this was the use of clothing by its leadership. Much of the leadership, including Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohandas Gandhi, had been educated in Britain and took to wearing Western clothing when dealing with other political operatives and with British officials. Part of this stemmed from the belief that negotiating with the British on their terms would prove to be more successful.

However, the increasing rejection of Indian demands for autonomy and respect, combined with the lack of support for the region during World War I despite the number of Indian soldiers who went to war and incidents like the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, led to widespread disillusionment amongst the political elite. Nehru began to wear a distinctive *kurta* and *pa-jama* combination in all public events, including when meeting foreign officials (Crill, 2015).

Gandhi took it a step further, renouncing not only British silhouettes but also British textiles. The *khadi* movement became one of the most iconic forms of anti-imperial protest. *Khadi* is a type of hand-spun cotton that was and continues to be common across South Asia. Gandhi utilised it as a political tool, instructing fellow Indians to spin their own *khadi* by hand as a means to both reclaim their heritage and also contribute to a self-sustaining local economy that could survive without British imports (Mawby, 2015). His choice of clothing – a *dhoti* made from hand-spun *khadi* – was a clear statement against British ideology because it subverted the dress code expected from political figures. This clearly angered key British politicians:

> “It is alarming and nauseating to see Mr Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir […] striding half-naked up the steps of the Vice-regal Palace.” (Churchill, 1931)

Clothing had been used for decades as a way to impose the cultural aspect of a British good life. When that utopia was challenged, it was inevitable that clothing

would once again become a representation of the counter-narrative. Adding the gender and sexuality aspects on top of the existing critiques of masculinity and femininity made it a particularly potent weapon in protecting local notions of (utopian) life. Additionally, spinning *khadi* could be done equally proficiently by men and women, and was a powerful way to bring domesticised femininity back into the political arena. As such, while there were no legal challenges to colonial imposition, there were certainly several moments of dissent and subversion – in addition to the obvious subversion of simply living as gender diverse and non-heterosexual people.

Kotha, Economics and Autonomy

A small but important utopian moment of dissent also came about through the ownership of *kothas* by women. A *kotha* was a home for former courtesans, *tawaifs* and *nautch* dancers – women who had skills in hospitality, music and dance who held courtly positions during the Mughal era but who had since become unemployed since the start of the Raj. *Kothas* acted as a new institution where they could continue their skills and uphold their practices, distinct from Western concepts such as bars and cabarets imported in the 1920s and distinct from the physical pleasures of brothels (Mukhopadhyay, 2014). The initial goal of the *kotha* was not in any way anti-colonial; it was not set up to challenge British propaganda around womanhood, nor was it trying to be critical of the end of Mughal tradition. It was simply set up as a response to the changing realities of economic opportunity (Oldenburg, 1990).

However, the model of ownership for these spaces ended up creating a strong front for emancipation in the move towards women's suffrage. Voting rights were to be extended to Indians by the time of the 1920 elections for the Imperial Legislative Councils and Provincial Councils, but the discussions around who would get such rights had been kickstarted by the formation of Indian political bodies like the Indian National Congress ever since the 1890s. Parliamentary papers indicate a move towards allowing property owners the right to vote – a suggestion that was partially made in order to use existing tenancy laws to the advantage of upper- and middle-class Indians who would be likelier to support British reform rather than total independence (British Library papers; Indian National Archives). Had this decision gone ahead, it would also have allowed for the enfranchisement of a certain group of

women – the *kotha* owners – who were much less positively inclined towards British rule (Singh, 2007: 1,678).

As a result of this, the question of suffrage was directly addressed in legislation in the form of the 1917 Franchise Bill, the 1918 Representation of the People Act, and the later Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. In these decisions, the all men aged over 21 were given the right to vote regardless of whether they owned property or not, but women were only allowed if they were over 30 and owned land or property with a value of over £5 (or had husbands with similar property values). Since *kotha* owners were unmarried and the property value was significantly lower than that, this effectively quashed any attempts at expanding the vote to such an outlier group. Unfortunately, given the fact that these reforms were being made in the context of increasing women's suffrage as a whole across the British Empire, the broader coalition for women's rights agreed on the terms, thus denying a chance at truly radical change (Dawson, 2010: 375; Roberts, 2001).

Religious Reform and Feminism

Gender also became a crucial part of religious reforms aimed at anti-colonialism and emancipation. The Self-Respect Movement, founded in 1925, was focused on eliminating caste discrepancy by uplifting the lower, unsuitable castes and focusing on their voices. Part of its critique was aimed at conservative Brahminical patriarchy and its collusion with colonial nation-building (vis-à-vis Divide and Rule favouring some religious identities over others). Indeed, the Self-Respect Movement was arguably the first large-scale feminist movement during the call for Indian independence. There was an active call to remove Brahminical patriarchy from women's rights to choose regarding physical, sexual and reproductive freedoms (Periyar, 2007).

In the model advocated by its leadership, women were explicitly allowed access to contraception and birth control measures, as a direct defiance to conservatism and colonial expectations of motherhood and femininity (Ramusack, 2010: 38). This was especially radical as even the mainstream Indian independence movement being spearheaded by Gandhi at the time often used the notion of feminine purity (through

sexual chastity and motherhood) in its ideology. Thus, while Gandhi's anti-colonialism took on some gendered aspects through its use of clothing, the Self-Respect Movement was much more overtly and radically feminist (Ramusack, 2010: 60; Geetha, 1998: 12).

Interestingly, there was also a challenge to heteronormativity, as there was a strong advocacy for the erasure of the colonial gender binary, respect for the communities affected by 1871 Criminal Tribes Act (though no formal calls for its repeal), and a complete rejection of the dichotomy of masculinity as public power and femininity as domestic duty. Unsurprisingly, these ideas attracted several women from all walks of life, including former prostitutes, courtesans, wage labourers, doctors, and teachers (Hodges, 2005: 252-253). The movement also considered intersectional concerns such as domestic violence and barring of women's entry to temples, thus creating a challenge to not only colonial hierarchies but broader patriarchal oppression as well (Srilata, 2003: 48).

Conclusion and Queering the Record

When the Crown wanted to implement its vision of a utopic good life, its civilising mission had to combine the personal with the more formalised political. Institutional and legal recourse had to be complemented with concentrated propaganda and rhetoric. Attacking established norms of gender and sexuality, especially in the wake of a powerful military, was one of the ways in which this was achieved.

Clothing was one of the areas which was directly influenced as a way to redefine gender to fit with a Victorian understanding of a masculine/feminine dichotomy. When this utopia was later challenged by a different vision of the ideal life – one of an independent India with a reclaimed culture – clothing once again became a potent political weapon. Female agency was similarly derided and had to be reshaped in order to suit the needs of the moment.

Sexuality was directly challenged and forcibly changed using legislation and policy. In conjunction with the theological approach to what constitutes acceptable intimacy,

the Raj was able to successfully shape the narrative regarding same-gender intimacy, with the ruling still active in modern Bangladesh and Pakistan (India having only decriminalised homosexual intimacy in 2018).

Nonetheless, subversive acts against the imperial utopia did begin to take shape and became a strong part of the eventual independence movement. These counter-utopias came from a bottom-up rejection of the top-down imperial value system. Not all such utopian moments were overtly political. Some had to be discreet in order for the oppressed subjects to take part in them and actively practice their own agency, such as in the use of costume and jewellery on stage. Others were less actively involved with gender and sexuality, but still took on those dimensions as the utopian potential of dissent increased – as was the case in clothing as political symbols, the question of suffrage in the *kotha*, and the feminist angle of the Self-Respect Movement.

The interconnectivity of these responses underlines the need to understand solidarity and radical change through an intersectional and cross-community lens. In her work, Ahmed considers how killjoys exist in several groups – whether they are angry feminists, melancholic migrants or unhappy queers. But she also crucially recognises that there could be those whose identities cross over these groups – such as a killjoy who is an angry, melancholic and unhappy queer migrant who is a feminist (Ahmed, 2010). The different types of responses in the historical record to an imposed acceptability of gender and sexuality were not all explicitly gendered or sexualised in their approach. Nonetheless, they all became part of the same goal of being a killjoy against colonial impositions on the body.

Cultural Artefacts

Cultural artefacts and representations of Empire have consistently been spaces of contention and interpretation. Period dramas like *Downton Abbey*, *Indian Summers*, *Viceroy's House* and *The Darkest Hour* continue to add to the debate and often portray colonialism as a benevolent force, whose excesses and flaws are either misguided attempts at saviourism or the actions of a minority of individuals. In the popular consciousness, therefore, Empire remains a sanitised vision of goodness and an idealised manifestation of the utopic good life. But this is hardly a modern phenomenon and is certainly not something that is restricted to post-imperial representations alone.

In this chapter, I look at the ways in which cultural output played a role in the creation of the colonial utopian project as well as in the responses to it. I must note that in my previous chapter (Language), I already spent some time looking at literary output and various texts, including the texts of songs. This chapter will not engage in that aspect of culture as it has not only been covered already but also because those examples fit more neatly into the overall analysis of Language which I already presented earlier. Instead, the cultural output in question will be focused on visual representations like art and exhibitions, festivals, architecture, and the performance aspect of music and theatre.

The Artwork of Britannia and Her Subjects

In the early part of my thesis, I was fortunate to visit the exhibition *Artist and Empire* being displayed at the Tate Britain in early 2016. Its subtitle claimed the exhibition was "Facing Britain's Imperial Past" and encompassed artwork from the 16th century until the present day. The actual imagery displayed in the rooms however was less confrontational and more in line with the lionising of imperialism I mentioned in modern period dramas. The artwork created at the time of the Raj, which is going to be the section I focus on in my thesis, helped to present a very specific narrative of British civilisation that reinforces the idea of imperialism as a utopic good life, even as the curation claimed to be critical. (It should be noted that the destructive realities

of colonialism and imperialism were acknowledged in the introductory texts to each section, but not in the descriptive panels for each individual piece of art.)

This narrative starts off within the very first year of the Raj. The 1858 painting “In Memoriam” by Joseph Noel Patton claims to commemorate the victims of the 1857 rebellion which saw the end of the East India Company (henceforth, EIC) and the official commencement of the Raj. Of course, the victims in question are the ones who were killed by the rebels, who numbered between 1,000 and 1,500 (Llewellyn-Jones, 2007). Patton’s portrait shows a group of British women and children in a locked room, praying and holding hands. Indian sepoys are seen in the background, about to enter the room and, no doubt, kill the subjects of the painting. Although some of the children are clearly fearful – as is the lone Indian woman, a servant by the looks of her attire – the adults look determined to meet their fate with poise and dignity. The message is quite clear: the Indians are willing to commit acts of brutal barbarity, including against their own citizens, while the British are morally superior, even in loss. On a more long-term note, such imagery also acted as justification for the need of a colonial utopian project in the first place.

The British aggression, which resulted in at least 800,000 deaths, of which 350,000 are confirmed to be civilians (Chopra, 2003), received a very different memorialisation. Works displayed include the tellingly named “Justice” by Sir John Tenniel (1858), framing Indian casualties as victims of righteousness, their deaths being morally excusable unlike those of their British counterparts. Of course, this part of the imagery specifically represented imperialism itself as a key player in this narrative. While works like Patton’s showed dramatized but still human scenes, most of the Indian casualties are seen to fall not to British soldiers but the personification of Britannia, thus taking the conflict away from the realms of direct human aggression (as is the case of the Indian rebellion) and more into a sort of ideological conflict. Edward Armitage’s “Retribution” (1858) shows Britannia slaying a tiger, the background showing the spires of an unnamed Indian city, while a British child looks on in admiration. Once again, the message is obvious: imperialism is humane, just, righteous, and, most importantly, civilised. India, by comparison, is wild, inhuman but conquerable, and her subjects will ultimately be grateful for such grace.

When British soldiers are shown in artwork of the era, they are not engaging in acts of violence, unlike the bloodthirsty sepoys. For instance, in Thomas Jones Barker's 1858 painting of "The Relief of Lucknow", Indian rebels are shown to be very much alive while surrendering to the British, a misleading spectacle given the bloody nature of the siege; British losses numbered between 2,000 and 2,500 while over 100,000 Indian casualties were racked up in the counter-attack (Chopra, 2003). The British are either on horseback or standing on higher ground, with several officers in the foreground clasping hands in congratulations. The image also includes Indian auxiliary forces, but they are framed in the background, behind their imperial superiors. The Indian rebels, by contrast, are in disarray, the lone member of the cavalry seeing his mount (a camel) panicking while the others have their heads bowed as they drop their arms.

The later 1880 painting of the same event by Robert Traill Spence Lowell, also titled "The Relief of Lucknow", takes the fiction of benevolent Britain sparing its enemies even further. The rebels are no longer cowering or panicking. Instead, they are calm in their defeat, but their heads are still bowed, a sign of deference rather than defiance. The British troops are still on higher ground here and include scenes of celebration similar to Barker's work, but with one key difference. There are no longer any brown bodies in the sea of white. Indian auxiliaries, who made up a large number of the EIC's forces, have been erased from the narrative. Britain's superiority and victory are down to Britain and her subjects alone.

This move away from associating British success with any type of Indianness is reflected in how officer portraits were commissioned under the Raj versus the styles during the EIC. Pre-1857, British officers were quite comfortable being painted in Indian garb, such as the portrait of Captain Colin Mackenzie by James Sant (1844). However, once the Raj was established, all official portraits see their British subjects in full military regalia, often with the Union Jack draped somewhere within the frame. The existence of mixed-race Anglo-Indians, a staple of art from 1820 to 1850, is conspicuous in its absence (Llewellyn-Jones, 2007). Imperial ideology and ideals

could be applied to Indian subjects, but could no longer be embodied by them. Utopia was to be a gift, not a negotiation.

It was not just artwork that recalled times of conflict in which Britain took over a space of supremacy. William Simpson's 1867 painting of the meeting between "The Viceroy and the Maharaja of Cashmere" portrays a much more diplomatic encounter with clear overtones of familiarity and even camaraderie. In the painting, Viceroy Lord Canning is exchanging pleasantries with Maharaja Ranbir Singh of Jammu and Kashmir, with the latter's entourage showing off silks and shawls to their British guests. There are only three visible British subjects in the frame while the majority of the scene is taken up by the Maharaja's court. But the power dynamics are hard to miss. For starters, all three of the British officers are clearly seated with no obstructions in their immediate foreground. Only four Indians are seen to be seated, with countless faceless others in a subservient position in the background. The Maharaja and a companion to his right are partially obscured. The only two Indians who are seen with a clear view are in coattails, a subtle reminder of the importance of British influence (discussed both in the formation of the political class in the Language chapter and in the association of British clothing with superiority in the Gender and Sexuality chapter).

These images are emblematic of the imagery that Britain wanted to create of itself when artistically depicting the Raj. Another example of this is the spread of photography in British India and the subjects chosen to be photographed. While many Indian cameras would chronicle the eventual anti-colonial struggle, British travellers would train their lenses in a far more tokenistic and exotic gaze. Photography archives at the British Library, the V&A Museum, the Churchill Colonial Archives, and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland see a common theme – British citizens are seen partaking in scenes of civilised culture like lawn parties, afternoon tea, reading, or tennis, all in European clothing, while Indians are either serving them, working in menial labour, or celebrating more chaotic traditions (in the way the images are framed rather than in the actual nature of the festivities themselves) like rooster fighting or religious pilgrimages. When elite Indian figures like princes were in photographs, there was a

key distinction between them and others – they were shown to be better off than other Indians but only because of their privilege and decadent wealth, exaggerated by the princes being made to wear full ceremonial garb in everyday photography. Crucially, they were still less superior to British officers; princes would be made to stand in the background behind the British, who were seated, regardless of their rank.

As Edward Said points out in *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), this is a deliberate strategy that made the imperial powers seem more refined and civilised. The justification of the imperial project was that it was a form of enlightened civilisation that would otherwise have escaped its Indian subjects. Portraiture could be accused of fabrication but there was a false sense of realism with photography that ignored its posed and selective nature. By framing Indians as inferior to the British, including those from a privileged class who were intentionally framed as greedy, it was possible to subtly push through a narrative where the British way of doing things was automatically better and, therefore, to be aspired to. This is doubly true due to the way in which alternative representations of the Raj were not seen in mainstream British circles: “The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them.” (Said, 1993: 11).

Spatial Culture

As an embodiment of *topos*, utopian world building also has to take into consideration the physical impact of creating space. The Raj was a prolific creator of architectural styles and maps, both of which were heavily used to support the notion of civilisation and the good life.

Architecture

One of the most visible aspects of British cultural influence in the Raj is in the physical remnants of its architecture. In all its building projects, the goal was to take something tangible – buildings and their edifices – and use them for the purpose of ideological nation building and conceptualising identity. In 1890, Swinton Jacob, an

English engineer working in the Raj, published six large volumes entitled *The Jeypore Portfolio of Architectural Details*, Jeypore being an archaic Anglicised spelling of Jaipur. These volumes condensed over six hundred drawings of architectural elements and buildings from a vast array of north Indian buildings, ranging from religious spaces (mosques, holy tombs and temples), to fortifications and palaces dating from the 12th to 18th centuries. Crucially, the volumes collected the designs not by chronology, region or religious/ethnic tradition, but by a much more simplistic method of function.

In many ways, this publication signals the birth of the Indo-Saracenic architectural tradition. Much can and has been said about the subjective nature of tastes and preferences for this style, but what cannot be ignored is the very specific historiographical role of these buildings. Britons were not just constructing physical artifices, but directly engaging in the shaping of socio-political narratives in the service of the Raj.

For starters, the Indo-Saracenic style played a direct role in erasing diversity. Although the initial inspiration for the style – Jacob's 1890 collection – made explicit reference to Jaipur and the wider northern geography of the Indian Subcontinent, the Indo-Saracenic style was applied across the entire Raj. Part of this reach came down to the fact that the way in which Indian architecture was understood in Jacob's work and, subsequently, by adherents of his architectural philosophy to simply consider practicality rather than spiritual or aesthetic markers (which also differed by region).

Many famous buildings of the period are located in South India, which used to have its own distinct style of architecture, and especially in Madras (modern-day Chennai). The most notable of these are the Madras High Court buildings, designed under the guidance of British architect Henry Irwin. What this erasure led to was not only an erroneously simplistic understanding of what it meant to be "Indian" in a pre-colonial sense, it also furthered the Raj's utopian argument of civilisation under one rule. The Crown was creating a uniform model of ideal living and this was represented by a uniform model of architecture across the length and breadth of its territories –

especially when such buildings were constructed after demolishing existing facades that were less “British”.

I must also draw attention to the term Indo-Saracenic. The latter half of the adjective stems from the word “Saracen”, which owes its etymological roots to Christian theologians in the Middle Ages. Saracens were, broadly speaking, the Muslim inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula and its surrounding regions (the modern Middle East) and it specifically stems from the Semitic root verb *Saraceni*, which means “to loot or plunder”. Thus, an architectural style that was aimed at bringing a model of civilisation to the inhabitants of the Raj was, at least subconsciously, reinforced through a foreign terminology that had links to European notions of barbarism and religious conflict.

Additionally, the function of the buildings in the Indo-Saracenic tradition also served to explicitly link the role of imperialism with one of civilisation and progress. Alongside judicial buildings like High Courts – themselves the physical space in which an imported form of judiciary could function as introduced under the Crown – all legislative buildings constructed under the auspices of the Raj were designed either by British architects or under their guidance. At the centre of this ambitious project was the new capital of Delhi, designated as such by the Crown in 1911. In order to be worthy of such an honour, the city’s legislative quarter was completely redesigned and some of its most iconic buildings today are remnants of the administrative vision of the Raj.

Foremost among these is the old Viceroy’s House (currently the *Rastrapati Bhavan* or Presidential House in independent India). Built between 1911 and 1916, it was the centre of Crown control as administered by the Viceroy, the highest-ranking official of British authority in the Raj. A colossal project, the building was designed to immediately draw the eye to its massive dome and central façade, which took inspirations from both Indian motifs (such as sculptures of elephants around the pillars) and what was described by its architect Edwin Luytens as “the best and sturdiest of British ingenuity” (Hussey, 1953; Wilhide, 2012).

If the design of the building was not enough to make a connection between the superiority of Britain and the associated improvement of her Indian subjects, there is also the fact that entire villages were relocated “for the greater good” to facilitate the construction under the auspices of the Land and Acquisition Act of 1894 (Nelson, 2011). A similar ideological intent can be seen behind the construction of the Secretariat Building, designed by Herbert Baker and also built on land that was acquired after forced evictions and relocations. It is important to note that the villagers’ legitimate complaints of being made to move for foreign powers was justified on the basis that making way for imperial powers would benefit them in the long run and help to usher in an overall better way of life (Nelson, 2011; Wilhide, 2012).

Less obvious in its political links but equally powerful in the service of selling Empire is the role of railway stations. It is almost a cliché to respond to criticisms of British colonialism with a refrain involving technological benefits vis-à-vis the railways – never mind the purely capitalist and exploitative motivation behind building them. But in order to really sell this vision of forced improvement, the visuals of the railway network needed to exceed the simple mechanics of the trains. Thus, the imperial architects took great pains to construct impressive buildings where the trains would be stopping. One of the most iconic of these is the Victoria Terminus (now known as the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharj Terminus) in the Bombay Presidency (modern-day Mumbai). Built in 1887 to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria – thus, chronologically far earlier than the intentional architectural exploits in Delhi – the terminal and its name served three functions simultaneously. First, its Indo-Saracenic architecture, designed by Frederick William Stevens, reinforced the might of the British and its higher reach (London, 2002). Second, it connected British technological advances (the railway) with a clear artistic vision of grandiosity (the terminus). Third, its name explicitly connected the previous two threads not just with Britain but with its imperial governance under the-then Empress of India, Queen Victoria.

Maps as a Space of Culture

Another physical manifestation of culture was in the design and proliferation of cartography. Just as the architectural projects stemmed from the need to have new buildings for administration and infrastructure, and just as the linguistic unity of English (discussed in the Language chapter) stemmed from a pragmatic necessity, mapmaking did have a justification in terms of consolidating territories, demarcating new political entities (like the boundaries of the Raj) and serving a very basic purpose of direction in travel and trade. However, there was an added undercurrent based on centring the ideology of the utopic Raj within the boom of cartography and the need to make new maps.

The most well-known imperial map is the one created by Walter Crane in 1886, entitled *Imperial Federation Map of the World Showing the Extent of the British Empire in 1886*. Crane's map is fairly accurate and uncontroversial in its geographical dimensions but what draws the most attention are the figures embedded in the decorative borders around it. At the very centre on the bottom line is Britannia, trident in one hand and the Union Jack emblazoned across a shield in the other, sitting on top of a globe (clearly marked with the word WORLD) as if it was a throne. On both sides of her along the bottom line as well as over the two side borders are countless figures representing different parts of the British Empire, all looking at her with admiration and adoration. The entire left-hand wing of the bottom border is dedicated to the Raj; an elephant with an elaborately-dressed rider alongside a British officer in military regalia and an indentured Indian servant walk next to a tamed tiger and a pair of peacocks while an Indian woman, fanning herself with a decorative peacock-feather fan, looks up longingly at Britannia.

Across the length of the top border are three angelic figures, each holding up a banner upholding the ideals and benefits of Empire: FREEDOM, FRATERNITY, and FEDERATION. In Crane's interpretation, the map of the world is not just a basic geographical testament to the locations of the continents and the oceans, but a representation of the reach and benevolence of the imperial project. The angelic figures atop the map are particularly crucial to this narrative of a benevolent force spreading utopic values across its reach. Be connected in the British Empire – with

the areas of Canada, parts of Africa, Australia and the Raj highlighted in red and connected to Britain on the map itself – and be connected in the common experience of brotherhood and freedom.[5]

Other maps are less well-known as individual works but there is a consistent thread of centring Britain within them that is noted by John Darwin in his book *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (2012). In my own archival work at the British Library, the Churchill Colonial Archives and the British Museum, I noticed this same trend. In the first few decades of the Raj, starting in 1857 and going on to around 1895, Britain would consistently be placed towards the centre of the maps. This was not just to do with drawing Britain along the Prime Meridian; the islands would be drawn further south than they actually are to place them in a more noticeable position and, in many cases, they would be highlighted with a different colour or font. From 1895 onwards, there would be more accuracy to do with Britain's geographical position on the maps but the sizes would be distorted; the British Isles would be bigger than they actually are while areas like the Raj would be drawn slightly smaller.

As with Crane's iconic piece, there is an ideological intent behind these geographical inaccuracies. Britain needed to be placed in a position of importance within the narrative of not just its own Empire but the world at large. It was not enough to say it was the administrative centre of its wide territorial reach; it also needed to be noticeably better than its imperial rivals such as the French, the Portuguese and the Russians. Britain was utopia and, therefore, it was at the centre of the world and/or it was bigger than its actual size.

[5] On a side note, there are two parts of the world that are actually missing from the map. Antarctica is nowhere to be seen although this can be attributed to the fact that the continent, while explored nominally by this point, would not be fully charted until 1907. The other notable omission is Russia, not absent as such but obscured by a smaller sub-map showing trade routes superimposed on top of it. There is no clear proof as to why Crane did this, but academic consensus indicates that this tied in with the looming feeling of Russophobia from the geopolitics of the Great Game. Russia had annexed part of Afghanistan in 1885 with the threat of war looming over the neighbouring Raj. Thus, the "barbaric" Russians were potentially deliberately left out of the "civilised" world of Crane's great map.

Culture in British Political Ceremony

Although political spaces were not exclusively, nor even primarily, concerned with the creation of the type of cultural artefacts I am looking at in this chapter, I feel my analysis would be incomplete without considering the role that cultural output played within the sphere of political ceremony.

The prime case study of this is the role of the Delhi Durbar or Imperial Durbar ("durbar" meaning "court") that took place each time there was a new succession to the position of Emperor or Empress of India. There were three such Durbars over the course of the Raj, in 1877, 1903 and 1911. A fourth proposed Durbar upon the ascension of Edward VIII in 1936 was first postponed due to his subsequent abdication and then (under his successor George VI) cancelled due to the growing Indian independence movement and, eventually, the outbreak of World War II.

The first Durbar was a small, symbolic event that was more a formality than a popular celebration like the latter two. It was held to officially proclaim Victoria as Empress of India in the presence of political figures like princes and their courtiers. Groups like the Asiatic Society were also invited.

The 1903 Durbar, held to mark the ascension of Edward VII and Alexandra of Denmark as Emperor and Empress of India, remains the largest and most ambitious of the three events. It was a meticulous display of imperial pageantry and was a massive undertaking. At the end of 1902, an entire deserted plain was made into a detailed city of tents, including the construction of a light railway to usher in crowds in and out of nearby Delhi. A post office with its own stamp was built, as were dedicated infrastructural facilities and many stores. The security and police forces were not only given special dispensation from a jurisdictional perspective, but they were also given a specific new uniform that was designed to highlight the beauty of the Empire, while souvenir books and new maps were printed and distributed in major cities in both Britain and India. Most notably, a unique commemorative Delhi Durbar Medal was struck and there were special firework displays, exhibitions and dance classes that were commissioned to showcase the benefits of imperialism and

the improvements it supposedly brought to the Raj (Hobsbawm and Cohn, 1983 [reprinted 2013]).

Similar to the portrayals of Indians as decadent but inferior people seen in the artwork I discussed earlier in the chapter, Indian princes who attended the Durbar were ordered to attend decked in their most expensive – and often cumbersome – ceremonial clothing and jewellery, but they were consciously seated in an area that was lower down than the more sensibly dressed British officials. This is especially noted in the biography of the daughters of Viceroy Lord Curzon written by Anne De Courcy (2003), whose research into primary materials of the time, including letters and journals, highlights how the Indians were seen as "courteous, ceremonial, but ultimately still in need of our [British] values" (De Courcy, 2003: 85). Ironically, the intended target of such ceremony, the monarch and his queen consort, did not actually attend the Durbar itself.

The next sovereign, George V, did attend the Durbar that was held in his honour in December 1911 along with his wife, Mary of Teck. While the previous Durbar was aimed at showcasing the superiority of Britain, the 1911 edition – fated to be the final one – took a slightly more conciliatory approach. The royal couple's presentation was made in a traditional *shamiana* (ceremonial canopy) and they later held a *darshan* (public audience) at the *jharoka* (public balcony) of the Red Fort, specifically to meet nearly half a million of the general public, harkening back to the traditions of pre-colonial Mughal courts established by Shahjahan (Lawson, 2011; Nayar, 2012).

Nonetheless, there were still clear demarcations of power dynamics and, once again, British superiority was paramount to this narrative. For starters, the design of the *shamiana* had to be approved by colonial authorities in order to display the correct trappings of British royalty, even if it meant rejecting versions that were more traditionally Indian (Singh, 1913). George V not only wore his traditional British coronation robes but specifically displayed the Imperial Crown of India, containing in excess of 6,000 diamonds and especially commissioned for the duration of the Durbar (Mears, Thurley and Murphy (1994). Indian princes were not allowed to be seated within the *shamiana* – a breach of protocol in most Indian courts but the

standard within British regnal courts – and instead had to walk in and out without a retinue to pay homage. There was, in fact, significant controversy when the Gaekwar of Baroda, Maharaja Sayajirao III, did not wear his full ceremonial jewellery, bowed improperly to the royal couple, and walked out after turning his back to them (Lawson, 2011). As written by eyewitness Lilah Wingfield, an Anglo-Irish aristocrat, in her diary:

> "He arrived at the amphitheatre in full dress and covered in the historic Baroda jewels, but removed them all just before the moment came for him to approach the king. On reaching the *shamiana* he made a cursory bow from the waist, stepped backwards and then, wheeling around, turned his back on the royal couple and walked from their presence nonchalantly twirling a gold-topped walking stick." (Wingfield, 1911)

Photographic evidence of the moment suggests a level of exaggeration in this account – there is certainly no visible presence of a nonchalantly-displayed walking stick – but there is a key moment of dissent, or at least tension, captured in this exchange. The terminology and structuring of the Durbar, especially the 1911 edition, was nominally aimed at creating a synergy between British and Indian courtly traditions. But when it came to a moment of divergence between the two, the expected norm was to be that of the colonial ruler, not the ruled. British courtly culture, while wholly foreign to the region and not actively practised in the two previous Durbars, was to be the standard practice and any deviation from it would constitute an affront to imperial authority. There was no greater example of that severity than the fact that the Maharaja was effectively made persona non grata within British circles following the incident and would not regain political favour until the 1930s (Burke and Quraishi, 1996).

Indian Culture as Grassroots and Reactionary

More so than any of the other topics I examine in my thesis, the concept of “culture” from an Indian perspective is almost impossible to pin down. While I defined my interpretation of the theme at the beginning of the chapter by focusing on cultural

artefacts and performances, the diversity of culture from the Indian perspective (compared to the narrower, more elite “high” culture perspective of the British) makes the examples I look at much more disparate and seemingly arbitrary. To counter that, I will take a moment here to consider where native and indigenous cultures come into play from a utopian political perspective.

As noted by Andrekos Varnava in the book *Imperial Expectations and Realities: El Dorados, utopias and dystopias* (2015) and, more generally, by David Bell in *Rethinking Utopia: Place, Power, Affect* (2017), culture from the perspective of the dissenting anti-colonial utopian is much more about reacting to an oppressive narrative than it is necessarily expounding its own vision of utopia. Where the Crown employed an elite high culture, the examples I look at from India are from the grassroots and more inclined towards popular or populist culture.

The People’s Theatre

One of the most widespread forms of cultural entertainment in India was the prevalence of rural theatrical performances. Mostly practised by either religious devotees during festivals or by travelling troupes of artists, theatre was a common form of storytelling and mythologizing across a range of linguistic, religious and regional variations. In the early stages of the Raj, village theatre was still mostly embedded in its roots of local stories, but urban theatre became quickly and heavily politicised as a means of conscientious dissent against colonial rule (Sundar, 1995).

V. J. Keertane’s biographical *Thorle Madhav Rao Peshwe* (1861) revised the figure of Madhav Rao to be much more critical of British encroachment during the time of the EIC than he actually was. A year earlier, in Bengal, the play *Nil Darpan* (*Mirror to Indigo*) by Dinabandhu Mitra popularised the politics of the Indigo Revolts, ostensibly about the labour rights of Bengali indigo farmers, and turned embroiled it into wider anti-colonial rhetoric. Other Bengali plays like *Siraj-ud-Daula* and *Mir Kasem* by playwright Girish Chandra Ghosh looked directly at British colonial exploits as products of capitalist greed, undermining the ideological narrative of civilisation and utopia being expressed by the ruling power.

In 1870, an anti-sedition clause was introduced to the Imperial Penal Code to try and crack down on artistic dissent, and this was later strengthened by the 1898 Code of Criminal Procedure and its ban on seditious material. As a result, plays written after 1870 were cautious about their politics being too explicit. Nonetheless, a continuous vein of anti-colonialism stayed on the stage. The satirical play *Gajadananda O Juboraj* (*Gajadananda and the Prince*) was staged as part of a wider section of plays on Hindu mythology titled *Hanuman Charitra* (*The Character of Hanuman*) and veiled its critiques of the Prince of Wales as critiques of imagined British figures in the stories of Hanuman. When this was called out as being defamatory, the Great National Theatre of Calcutta responded with *The Police of Pig and Sheep*, taking a clear swipe at police commissioner Hogg and superintendent Lamb, who had worked to ban the previous satirical farce (Sundar, 2017).

Farce and mythological allegory became the go-to mode of dissent against the injustices made in the name of imperial utopia. K. P. Khadilkar's 1907 production of *Keechak Vadha* (*The Assassination of Keechak*) re-appropriated one of the stories of the *Mahabharata* to criticise the British. In the original tale, the corrupt Keechak, brother-on-law to King Virat, is finally slain and overthrown by Bheema. In Khadilkar's version, the use of costume and subtle dialogue made it abundantly clear that Keechak was Lord Curzon, Virat and the gentle Yudhishtira was the moderate wing of the Indian National Congress (INC), Bheema was the extremist wing, and the abused damsel Draupadi was India herself. While the weakness of the moderate INC (Virat) allowed Curzon (Keechak) to continue to abuse his position of power and impose his vision of national identity, it was insinuated that the radical and revolutionary side of the INC (Bheema) would finally succeed in undermining British effectiveness (Nagendra, 1989).

Others like Manmatha Ray placed classic Hindu myths directly into the contemporary politics of the Raj. His 1930 play *Karagar* (*Prison*) imagined Lord Krishna being born in prison. Written to coincide with the arrests of nationalists taking part in Mohandas Gandhi's civil disobedience movement, the allegorical potential of the play was so strong that it was actively banned by local authorities (Sundar, 2017).

While urban theatrical dissent came in the form of making both blatant and subtle digs at colonial rule in the script, rural theatre became a completely different ideological battleground for patriotism. Folk forms such as *powada*, *tamasha* and *jatra* (different regional names for "dramatic performance") would have speeches being read out during intervals talking about how the justification of civilisation by colonial rule was not sufficient enough grounds to abuse power and suppress Indian identity. Similarly, *keertan* performances (religious discourse through music and dance) became less theological and more worldly, directly calling out the Raj and its intents (Chattopadhyay, 1975; Sundar, 2017).

A similar impact was had through the Indian People' Theatre Association (henceforth called the IPTA), formed in 1943. Specifically created in order to engage the arts in the Indian independence movement, the group rejected English notions of theatre as arts and culture for the elite and instead returned to the grassroots traditions of Indian street theatre such as *jatra*. Performing plays in multiple, local languages, the various troupes associated with the IPTA focused on highlighting the impact of colonial policy and suppression of anti-colonial dissent, such as the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of 1919, the Bengal Famine of 1942, and the ongoing activities of various nationalist figures (Kennedy 2003). The central ethos of the IPTA was to ensure that the (usually left-wing) politics of anti-colonial art could be made accessible to the grassroots (Sehgal, 1997: 32), making it an important case of utopianism as a bottom-up rather than top-down phenomenon.

The regional and linguistic reach of the IPTA was ambitious and surprisingly successful. It started in Bengal with the play *Nabanna* (*Harvest*) in 1944, criticising the Bengal Famine and the policies that led to it. It relied heavily on witness testimony and pointed out that the success of Britain was dependent on treating its subjects in the Raj as secondary concerns, contrary to the utopic vision of the good life it claimed to embody. *Nava Jiboner Gaan* (*Song of the New Life*), also in Bengali, and the Hindi *Dharti ke Lal* (*Children of the Earth*) were not only performed extensively but also filmed and showcased in villages where the troupes could not travel to. *Deshasathi* (*Friend of the Nation*; Marathi), criticised not only British policy but also the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, discouraging viewers from leaning

towards Fascism as an ally against British colonialism. Meanwhile, *Prarambham* (a name in Telugu) and *Zubeida* (a name in Urdu) both criticised colonial attitudes towards morality and female autonomy (Chattopadhyay, 2005).

The IPTA continued to function until the eventual Partition of 1947 brought an end to its membership and, even then, its Indian artists continued to work well into the first few years of postcolonial independence. If nothing else, its longevity in the face of colonial suppression, wartime challenges, and the evolving dangers of communalism and regionalism shows the power that theatre had in capturing an imagination of dissent.

Baul Music and Lalon

Another popular example of the use of culture in order to challenge colonialism was in the evolution of *Baul* music. The *Bauls* are a group of travelling minstrels who incorporate elements of Tantra, Sufism, Vaishnavism and Buddhism into an amalgamated secular sense of Indian spirituality. Focused on the regions of Bengal, Assam's Barak Valley and parts of the tribal territories in modern-day Tripura, they have had a long-standing impact on the evolution of music, spiritualism and broader culture (Urban, 2001; Skoda and Lettman, 2018).

Lalon, known reverently as Fakir Lalon or Lalon Shah, is venerated as one of the most important figures in *Baul* history. Eschewing the traditional practice of *Bauls* from getting involved in politics, Lalon recognised the need to deal with material reality as well as spiritual and cultural comfort (Hossain, 2009: 38). As such, he was an early proponent of the anti-colonial movement. Crucially, before it became a more coherent call for independence, he warned against the potential for anti-colonialism to be hijacked by religious communalism and overt nationalism (National Archives of Bangladesh).

His impact on rural anti-colonial consciousness cannot be underestimated. While urban consciousness eventually developed along quasi-nationalism and religious divide, its rural counterpart was much more heavily influenced by the likes of the IPTA and Lalon's calls for common solidarity. This largely down to the fact that

cultural forms like theatre and music were much more easily accessible to the general public, especially as they were performed in local vernaculars rather than in English. As such, the overriding function of anti-colonial utopianism was given precedence over the form.

Art, Sculpture and Othering the British

A marker of success in any utopian project is in how effective it is in creating a coherent narrative of who constitutes the Self and who constitutes the Other. Not only is the Self important as the space in which betterment and change are enacted, it is the exact opposite of the undesirability of the Other. In British artwork and sculpture, the Self was the desirable white body of authority. While Indian subjects could not racially embody that role, there was a sense of being able to aspire to it, especially in the likes of the aforementioned William Simpson portrait showing influential Indians in British clothing. The Other, in those cases, was the uncivilised or at least less civilised Indians whose adherence to their own norms doomed them to failure.

In Indian artwork, those roles were completely reversed. A recent 2017 revamp of the British Museum's South Asia exhibits, made to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the Partition of 1947, showcases some artefacts that really drive this point home. A rare find is a scare-devil statue from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, dating to around the 1890s. Part of its indigenous artistic tradition, the scare-devil is supposed to represent the physical being of one who is immoral and unwelcome, and protect the homestead of unwanted malevolent spirits. The statues could be customised to represent specific groups, thus sending a direct message of being unwanted to whomever they were aimed at. The scare-devil on display is intentionally carved from a lighter wood and has a black top-hat on. No doubt a partial response to Britain using the islands as a penal colony for Indian convicts, the narrative of imperialists as the literal devil was certainly not subtle.

There was also an intentional effort to exploit and ridicule colonial anxieties around Indian history. A figurine set from the 1880s shows an exaggerated depiction of *thuggee*, the ritualised practice of banditry by groups of highwaymen and robbers –

giving way, incidentally, to the popular English word “thug”. *Thuggee* was a stereotypical criticism of the immorality of India that the British used to justify their imposition of draconian policies under both the EIC and the Crown, despite the fact that it was by no means considered socially or morally acceptable by the vast majority of Indians themselves. The propaganda around *thuggee* is criticised in this set of figurines by placing them in three rings. The outermost ring, the smallest in number despite being the biggest in diameter, shows the clichéd depiction of the Indian *thuggee*. The middle ring shows British figures, a few of them cowering before their assailants but the vast majority turning their gaze further inwards. The innermost circle, the largest in number, shows Indians being exploited and vandalised by the British. It remains an apt comparison – by exploiting colonial anxieties around uncivilised Indians, the imperial powers were the ones actually abusing their position of strength while claiming to bring about a better life.

A popular use of sculpture and artwork was the use of puppetry. Gandhi was a recurring figure in the production of cheap, simple puppets – some of which would be used in the theatrical productions championed by the IPTA – a way to make him accessible and relatable to Indians. Puppets of British figures like the Viceroy or Winston Churchill were, by comparison, made from more expensive material. The potential for this being taken as a positive reflection of their worth was scuppered by the intentionally shoddy craftsmanship of these pieces. Gandhi and his colleagues were of the people and their ideals; the British were the Others, distant, cruel, and far more imperfect than they would care to admit themselves.

Art as Historical Testament

Other artistic depictions show the material impact of British colonial policy. This was intentionally done to reject the claims that imperialism was a force for good. The Western imagination and its associated political rhetoric tried to frame imperialism as an abstract utopia. Whether it was in the form of fictionalised depictions of the 1857 rebellion, the grandiosity of architecture, the subtle lies of cartography, or the pomp and pageantry of political ceremony, British cultural output placed imperialism on an unimpeachable pedestal. The role of many Indian artists was to challenge that view by showing reality.

Some, like Satish Gujral, did so by painting graphically realistic art showcasing the abuses of Empire, such as his decades-long series on *Mourning*, covering incidents like the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of 1919, the Bengal Famine of 1943 and the Partition violence of 1947. Others made a point of memorialising British artefacts through the lens of oppression rather than greatness, such as an unnamed artist whose 1934-36 output consisted of making wooden replicas of the shackles used to imprison pro-independence nationalists before torture or execution. In these instances, art and culture were not about providing an alternative vision of utopia as I analysed in some of the literary works discussed in the chapter on Language. Instead, it was about breaking the myth of enlightened despotism (Tharoor, 2016) and critiquing the viability of imperialism as utopia in and of itself.

What was perhaps the most striking common thread throughout the narratives of Indian culture as protests against imperialism is the celebration of diversity. Imperialism and its utopia were inherently top-down models of control with a narrow acceptability of what constitutes the good. Countering that with a different narrow view would simply be replacing one oppressive utopia with another. Instead, the citizens of the Raj did not have one culture but a multitude of cultures in opposition to the colonisers. While there may have been homogeneity in the goal of dissent and critique, the routes towards that end goal were intentionally diverse. Not one culture, but a coalition of cultures working in solidarity to dismantle an incompatible vision of what counts as being civilised and ideal (Sen, 2005).

Conclusion – or a Multitude of Conclusions

A goal I would like to achieve in this thesis is to provide a postcolonial and decolonial narrative to the stagnant utopianism of Empire. In order to do so, I firmly believe that negotiations of utopia and its various interpretations are not and cannot be stationary. I make this case throughout the thesis, responding in different ways to my case studies. Cultural dissent and counter-utopias, more than either of the other themes I consider, have the most tangible historical output of pluralism and diversity.

In *Cultures of empire: A reader – Colonizers in Britain and the empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, Catherine Hall makes note of the fact that one of the reasons the imperial project eventually failed is because it could not grapple with the fact that there were alternative forms of understanding the human experience (2000: 10). In its art, Britain continued to present a single ideology, that of imperialism as an unquestionably civilised space without the possibility that its colonial subjects had important contributions to make to the discussion.

In portraiture, the British body was either the heroic and pure Britannia bringing betterment to her colonies through benevolent conquest, or the non-aggressive soldiers and officers committed to fighting the barbarity of Indians with calmness and superiority. Architecture was not simply functional but also clearly biased towards supporting a vision of Britain as a remarkable and almost fantastical spectacle. Cartography defied actual geographical convention and reality to make Britain the literal centre of its vast Empire and not just its administrative capital. And political ceremony reinforced the hierarchy of British values and morals as being automatically better than any Indian counterpart.

The anti-colonial responses showed a more diverse approach. There was the direct critique afforded by urban theatre, which often used allegory, farce or satire, but without any doubt as to the subject of its admonitions. Rural theatre was initially much more focused on mobilising the masses by reclaiming (and, admittedly, distorting on occasion) histories and mythologies of pre-colonial golden ages, although it too shifted towards creating transnational critiques of Empire. Artwork and sculpture, meanwhile, served two purposes. On the one hand, they framed the British as the Other through symbolism and caricature, undermining the utopia of Empire by subverting and undermining its champions. On the other hand, they served as historical record, bearing witness to the tangible legacies of imperialism and testifying to the destructive nature of achieving that vision of utopia.

In the end, British high culture was more about presenting an idea of utopia, but Indian grassroots culture became utopian itself by both challenging the homogeneity of the colonial narrative and by serving the function of critical engagement and

radical solution-making. Where linguistic policy (in Language) and identity politics (in Gender and Sexuality) left behind more coherent legacies of colonial utopia, the focus on trying present rather than create a utopian space ultimately makes the British contributions in this chapter comparatively toothless – especially in the face of the pluralistic killjoys of anti-colonial cultural dissent.

Conclusion

Over the course of this thesis, I provided concluding remarks for each of the themes I explored in conducting my research. In this final section, I wish to draw an amalgamation of the types of killjoy moments I examined, as well as providing a critical reflection on my academic journey so far and the journey yet to come.

A Verdict on the Decolonial Killjoy

At the end of my chapter on Utopian Theory, I explained how I framed my understanding of utopianism in decoloniality and the killjoy mode. Specifically, I drew from the work of Ashis Nandy, Maia Ramnath, Sara Ahmed, and (to a lesser extent) Lynne Segal to build a framework to instil my research in. But, in many ways, the framework came into being before I defined it. The broader question of utopian theory was always on my mind, every step of the way during this thesis – my thanks to my supervisors for advising me to permanently affix a post-it note with my research question at my work station – but vocalising and defining my contribution to the field was more organic. (I like to think of this as a further testament to how useful it is to look at research from below by opening up new possibilities and frameworks.) The concern, however, remains: does the idea of “The Decolonial Killjoy” of my title make sense in light of the research I conducted? To answer this, I must consider each chapter in turn.

The Language chapter arguably has one of the easiest case studies to look at from a utopian perspective, in that I analyse two texts that were specifically written as utopian fiction. Part of the reason I leave that analysis until the end of the chapter is my determination to build up a common theme throughout my other case studies, rather than use Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain’s work as an easy hook. The linguistic policies of the Raj certainly had a powerful impact in shaping notions of acceptability. Idealised in its own literature (vis-à-vis Kipling and the broader tradition of colonial writing), English identity was intrinsically wrapped up in the use of the English language. Policies on education and the creation of the political class helped deliver this top-down utopia. This would, in turn, be challenged by literature of the anti-

colonial movement and its adherence to local vernaculars. Yet, not all killjoys were successful in their final goals. The *Tanka* riots were an important step in indigenous self-determination and protecting oral traditions, but their broader political goals failed in light of the colonial policies of Divide and Rule. Ending the chapter on Hossain's fiction, therefore, added another layer of nuance in that its narratives provide killjoy ideals to strive for while acknowledging that implementing them is not possible with a necessary critical mass.

The Gender and Sexuality chapter has the closest subject matter to what Ahmed initially studied in her own work on killjoys (2010) – the position of queer bodies in a cisheteropatriarchal world. The analysis in my chapter, therefore, was a natural fit for the framework I envisioned. The rhetoric of colonial notions of masculinity and femininity were explicitly aimed to tackling the supposed barbarity of local androgyny and sexual practices. The subsequent case study on clothing show such a concerted effort of rhetoric and propaganda can have a direct impact on the lived experiences of people living with any given space. A more direct legislative approach by the colonial authorities was taken when it came to outlawing practices like *sati* and the *harem*, and diverse sexualities and gender identities – inadvertently creating future spaces of rebellion and solidarity as well. The responses to these top-down utopian attempts once again highlight the importance of plurality and context. The political symbolism of clothing and the performing arts were vital in challenging the impact of trying to normalise colonial gender, while the leadership of women in *kothas* and the Self-Respect Movement reaffirmed the importance of having a critical approach to anti-colonialism as well. In this instance, the killjoy not only challenged the direct oppression of the colonisers but also highlighted the potential for the colonised to fall into the same hierarchies – a true embodiment of decolonisation.

Finally, the Cultural Artefacts chapter has a broad range of examples drawn from practices of cultural history. The visualisation of the Raj as an idealised space through artwork, while more akin to utopianism through form and content, served the clear function of promoting its grand civilising mission. Spatial culture in the form of architecture and cartography further legitimised the *topos* of the utopian Raj, including subtle criticisms of local practice through etymology. Most importantly, the

ceremony and pageantry of the Imperial Durbar took on some trappings of Indian culture but only to co-opt them into a wider narrative of British civilisation. In contrast, the Indian cultural responses were firmly embedded in grassroots practice. The people's theatre, *Baul* music, and Indian artistic representations of the Raj were all critical of British policy, with the specific goal of disrupting the imagery of a benevolent colonial power. Their killjoys were obvious and targeted moments of dissent.

In all three chapters, the broad chronology follows a similar pattern: the Raj implemented policy and/or rhetoric to challenge what it perceives to be the problems of pre-colonial India, followed by anti-colonial responses that challenged these attempts at reshaping norms and practices. Both the top-down and the bottom-up models follow the definition of utopia explained in the Utopian Theory chapter – finding alternative solutions to contemporary problems – but it is only the bottom-up responses that take on an emancipatory role. As such, the failure of colonial utopia was not just in its rigid prescriptiveness, but ultimately in its inability to recognise the importance of communal hope and joy that is central to the utopian dream. Thus, the anti-colonial movements described in these chapters are the killjoys in service of liberation.

Journey to Completion

The path to completing the PhD thesis was neither straightforward nor easy. The current structure of my thesis – split into thematic chapters, each following a framework of top-down then bottom-up utopias – is quite neat and coherent, but there were several false starts on the way to getting to it. My first big problem was starting with too broad a scope. My initial PhD proposal did not demarcate the timeframe as specifically of the Raj. This did mean that I was able to collect a lot of information and sources that helped me define the context in which colonial authorities attempted to build their utopia, but it was also a very real detriment in being able to streamline my work from the outset. The decision to concentrate on the Raj was the result of both following common historiographical practice (which differentiates between Company rule and Crown rule) and wanting to satisfy my own

need for a rational timeframe. The end result is wonderful; the time spent getting to it was not.

Another change I wish I could have made during the course of the process was delineating my chapter themes much earlier. As mentioned in the Approaches chapter, I initially had other headings planned for wealth, technology and religion. The last of these became a recurring thread because of its centrality to the colonial utopian project, but the other two only got scrapped at the beginning of my writing-up phase. Prior to that, I had already committed months of research and notes to trying to build chapters for those themes, including a long trip to the Ahsan Manzil heritage museum in Dhaka, the research from which I still hope to include in future projects and papers. Whereas my final chapters grew organically, the attempts at wealth and technology were much more artificial and ambitious. I should not only have been wiser with my time management, but ultimately, I should have worked in the spirit of the emancipatory utopia – the best responses are bottom-up, not top-down impositions.

On a more personal note, I also wish I had taken more steps to detach myself from the immediacy of my topic. Academia is a difficult prospect. A certain amount of passion is needed in order to commit yourself to several years of a PhD. Yet, too much passion might lead to a burnout. The very real consequences of being a queer scholar from a Commonwealth country where being gay is still criminalised under Section 377 were not something I had stopped to consider at the beginning of my journey. There was a very real cost to discovering stories of oppression and critically analysing the systems which allowed such injustice to occur. It was doubly painful to consider that some of these legacies are alive and well today.

None of these reservations, however, make me regret working on this project. The aspiration of any utopian scholar is to spark hope and new avenues of imagining the future. The goal of a political and cultural historian is to understand the present through a committed study of the past. As a utopian working on history, I am confident in saying that creating “The Decolonial Killjoy” has been a rewarding experience because it has the potential to spark new conversations or add to

existing ones. With that eutopian (not just utopian) outlook in mind, I wish to end this thesis by looking to the future.

The Journey Ahead

One of the most staggering moments of modern decolonisation occurred during the completion of my thesis when India read down Section 377, thus opening the door for millions of individuals to finally be their true selves. Finally free from the shackles of a blueprint created over a century before their (and my own) birth, the outpouring of queer solidarity and celebration was incomparable. While my own body continued to be criminalised, there was an inescapable sense of joy – of utopia, eutopia and euphoria – when the colonial law was deemed unconstitutional. The fact that there was a strong historical argument of reclaiming local narratives of identity only strengthened my appreciation and passion for my project. Indeed, I was and remain intimately involved with the campaign to decriminalise homosexuality in the Commonwealth, including publishing an academic plea for decolonisation in the journal *The Round Table*[6] and an analysis of modern queer liberation in Bangladesh for the book *Sexuality and Translation in World Politics*.[7]

My work in the Gender and Sexuality chapter, therefore, have existing prospects for future research. Projects at Newcastle University are already underway on researching the queer Commonwealth, alongside wider projects on gendered histories and lives at Nottingham Trent University, the University of Leeds and the University of Birmingham. Any one of these projects would be a strong fit for me to continue working on this topic. In particular, my approach to community responses in considering utopia as killjoy would add a much-needed dimension of grounding such research in the communities and intersections they examine. I am also fully aware of the potential to use my findings in the broader push for queer liberation, including in any potential future judicial attempts at repealing Section 377 in Bangladesh. It may

[6] Ahmed, I. (2018) "The Commonwealth Must Decolonise", in *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 107(3). Pp. 369-370.
[7] Ahmed, I (2019) "Decolonising Queer Bangladesh: Neoliberalism Against LGBTQ+ Emancipation", in Manuela L. Picq and Caroline Cottet (eds.), *Sexuality and Translation in World Politics*. Bristol: E-International Relations. Pp. 101-111.

be a lofty ambition, but utopian thinking has taught me not to limit myself in pursuit of hope and joy.

I am equally intrigued at the prospect of continuing other case studies in greater depth. The role of linguistic nationalism in India has been a consistent presence for the past decade, while Bangladesh's relationship with its tribal communities has hinged on cultural and linguistic autonomy since the country gained independence in 1971. The use of theatre and dance have also become integral to the theory of artistic practice and politics, especially in terms of creating projects that are about reclaiming or decolonising South Asian identity. Additionally, though I do not dedicate a full chapter section to it, my religious analysis in the Approaches chapter would be applicable to the analysis of current Hindutva nationalism in India.

In all of these instances, this thesis demonstrates the potential for academic research to be used for impactful work, not just in the abstract pursuit of knowledge but in the real pursuit of change and equality. Expanding the framework of "The Decolonial Killjoy" to include a more detailed analysis of the Raj or simply reapplying it to other case studies remain exciting prospects. It is, therefore, with the goal of continuing this work in some form or another that I end this brief Conclusion, though more as a pause than a full-stop.

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