Cow Protection, Hindu Identity and the Politics of Hurt in India, c.1890–2019

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Recent violence in India towards minority Muslim and Dalit communities in response to their alleged killing of cows is shocking in its brutality. Those responsible maintain the cow is sacred to Hindus and a threat to its life is an attack on Hinduism itself. They claim a deep sense of hurt at what they see to be the historic violation of their religion. In contrast, liberal commentators argue that right-wing forces have become emboldened since Hindu nationalists came to power in 2014. Yet, Hindu nationalism alone cannot explain the widespread belief that people whose livelihoods depend on cattle are beyond the democratic norms of tolerance. Rather, we must consider 'affect' and the role of history to understand the currency of cow protection in the cultural politics of hurt in contemporary India.

Keywords: cow protection; Hindu nationalism; communalism; history of emotion; identity politics

On 28 September 2015, in a small hamlet near Dadri in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, one of the neighbours of Mohammad Akhlaq accused him of stealing and slaughtering his calf, which had gone missing. It was at the time of Eid ul-Fitr, when Muslims customarily slaughter an animal to feed the poor and their family and neighbours. As people gathered outside the house, two young men pressed the priest of the local temple to announce on the loudspeaker that the family of Mohammad Akhlaq had killed a cow and consumed its meat. Later that night a crowd came with sticks, woke the family, and accused them of eating beef. They found meat in the refrigerator. The family claimed it was mutton. But they were all dragged outside: Akhlaq and his son were beaten with sticks and bricks and stabbed. The police came an hour later, by which time Akhlaq was dead and his son seriously wounded. The police sent the meat to two different laboratories to be tested; both concluded

that it was mutton. Yet in July 2016, residents of the village filed a petition with a local magistrate against Mohammad Akhlaq for the offence of cow slaughter. They had gone to a separate laboratory and, on the basis of that report which found the meat was from 'a cow or its progeny', claimed that he had indeed slaughtered a cow. It is unlikely that the meat tested was from the day of the attack and there were strong suspicions that a sample had been brought in to substitute the original. Despite this, fourteen of the eighteen accused in the murder have been granted bail, with one of the accused running for election to parliament. In contrast, six of Akhlaq's family were charged under the 1955 U.P. Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act.[1]

[1] The 'Dadri Mob Lynching' has been widely reported: 'Why India Man Was Lynched over Beef Rumours,' *BBC News*, 1 October 2015, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34409354; 'In Dadri a Year Later, Sadness and Anger but No Justice,' *The Wire*, 28 September 2016, https://thewire.in/communalism/mohammad-akhlaq-dadri-bisara-village; Abhimanyu Kumar, 'The Lynching that Changed India,' *Al-Jazeera*, 5 October 2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/09/lynching-changed-india-170927084018325.html; Betwa Sharma, 'Three Years after Dadri the Man Accused of Lynching Mohammad Akhlaq Is Free and Running for Lok Sabha,' *The Huffington Post*, 28 September 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2018/09/26/three-years-on-accused-in-mohammad-akhlaqs-lynching-is-free-and-ready-to-fight-the-lok-sabha-election_a_23542377/; 'After 43 Court Hearings Akhlaq's Family Banks on Supreme Court Order for Justice,' *Economic Times (India)*, 23 August 2018, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/after-43-court-hearings-akhlaqs-family-banks-on-supreme-court-order-for-justice/articleshow/65509607.cms. See also the Human Rights Watch report 2019, 'Violent Cow Protection in India: Vigilante Groups Attack Minorities,' 18 February 2019, https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/02/18/violent-cow-protection-india/vigilante-groups-attack-minorities.

In July 2016, four Dalit leather tanners were skinning cows in a village near Una in the western Indian state of Gujarat.[2] They were approached by men belonging to the Shiv Sena, an aggressive organisation originating in Bombay aligned with the Sangh Parivar, the 'family' of Hindu nationalist organisations, who accused them of having slaughtered the cows. The men insisted the animals were already dead when they acquired them. Dalits traditionally do the work of clearing away the carcasses of animals, the touch of which upper-caste Hindus deem polluting. They skin them, remove the flesh and bones, and sell the tallow and cartilage. Nevertheless, the four were stripped and beaten with iron rods, then tied up and driven back to their village, where they were beaten again in public. A video of the beatings was widely shared on social media. In March 2017, the Gujarat government passed a new law making cow slaughter punishable with life imprisonment, overturning the previous four-to-seven year sentence.[3]

[2] 'Dalit' is a Marathi and Hindi term meaning 'the oppressed' and refers to people of the lowest social strata in Indian society. It is a self-designated term that rejects the colonial 'untouchable' and Gandhi's patronising 'harijan' (children of god).

[3] '4 Dalits Stripped, Beaten Up for Skinning Dead Cow,' *Times of India*, 13 July 2016, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/rajkot/4-Dalits-stripped-beaten-up-for-skinning-dead-cow/articleshow/53184266.cms. On the 'carcass dumping' protest led by Dalits afterwards, see Aarefa Johari, 'An Assault on Dalits May Have Triggered the Biggest Lower Caste Uprising in Gujarat in 30 Years', *Scroll*, 20 July 2016, https://scroll.in/article/812100/an-assault-on-dalits-may-have-triggered-the-biggest-lower-caste-uprising-in-gujarat-in-30-years. On the new sentencing laws, see Michael Safi, 'Cow Slaughter to Be Punishable by Life Sentence,' *The Guardian*, 14 March 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/14/indian-state-government-life-sentence-cow-slaughter.

The recent violence in India towards Muslims and Dalits by upper-caste Hindus in response to their alleged killing of cows has been shocking in its brutality.[4] Cow protection activists, or *gaurakshakhs*, maintain that they are doing their duty to defend their religion, arguing that cow slaughter represents an attack on Hinduism. Their acts of violence reflect their anger and hurt, the deep sense of injury they claim to feel when a cow's life is threatened.[5] Alongside these vigilante groups exists a range of societies for cow protection which seek to provide refuge for cows that would otherwise have been killed.[6] For such societies, cow protection is an auspicious act. The cow represents life – it gives milk for personal strength, provides labour for agriculture and manure to fertilise the land. Its urine is said to confer untold health benefits: it cleans the liver, prevents cancer, cures migraines and combats a range of other diseases. Fundamentally, the cow represents peace and prosperity, spiritual and material. She is a sacred being and Hindus consider her as a mother – Gau Mata.[7] The killing of cows, these societies maintain, thus offends the deepest-held

[4] IndiaSpend, a data journalism website, recorded sixty-six reported cow-related attacks in India between 2010 and 2017, during which twenty-six people were killed, twenty-two of whom were Muslim, and at least two hundred were injured. See http://archive.indiaspend.com.

[5] See a documentary on the Bhartiya Gauraksha Dal, a federation of cow protection organisations: 'Cow Protection is Our Life's Mission, Says Bharatiya Gau Raksha Dal Member,' *CNN News-18*, 6 June 2017, https://www.news18.com/videos/india/cow-protection-is-our-lifes-mission-says-bharatiya-gau-raksha-dal-member-1424399.html. Also see Ashwaq Masoodi, 'Who Is a Gau Rakshak?,' *Livemint*, 26 July 2016, https://www.livemint.com/Politics/Mi6HZpayTzwJT7G6zy8dTO/Who-is-a-Gau-Rakshak.html.

[6] I examine the history of these societies later in the paper.

[7] It is unclear when exactly the cow comes to be referred to as 'mother.' Cows appear in numerous Hindu texts from the puranic and epic myths onwards and refer to the benefits of the cow but do not describe the animal as mother to humans or Hindus. I suspect this is a more recent designation from the nineteenth century developed by Hindu reformist organisations building on the existing sanctity of the cow. See D. N. Jha, *The Myth of the Holy Cow* (New Delhi: Navayana, [2001] 2009).

sensibilities of Hindus.[8] In contrast, some social commentators have argued that the violence around cow protection, far from being simply a matter of religious offence, is a manifestation of more pernicious forces. Since Narendra Modi led the Bharatiya Janata Party, the electoral arm of the Sangh Parivar in India, to victory in the 2014 national elections, right-wing forces have become emboldened to carry out all manner of atrocities against religious and caste minorities.[9] Liberal academics and news media outlets criticise Modi, a life-long member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a paramilitary Hindu nationalist organisation, for his lukewarm condemnation of the violence. The violence of the gaurakshaks, he has implied, is understandable, as cow slaughter 'is an emotive issue'.[10]

However, adherence to *Hindutva* ideology cannot alone explain the recent violence around cow protection.[11] Most ordinary citizens would not identify with Hindutva's core ideological tenets nor condone such violence. Yet a broad consensus has emerged around cow protection in the cultural politics of India's twenty-first century. The eating of beef and the trade in cattle has become commonly accepted as so deeply offensive to Hindus that those who engage in these activities now find themselves increasingly outside the democratic

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[8] See the site for the International Society for Cow Protection: http://iscowp.org/.

[9] 'Modi's India: The High Cost of Protecting Holy Cows,' *Financial Times*, 22 November 2017, https://www.ft.com/content/63522f50-caf3-11e7-ab18-7a9fb7d6163e; Aftab Alam, 'Holy Cow: As Hindu Nationalism Surges in India, Cows Are Protected but Minorities Not So Much,' *The Conversation*, 28 April 2017, http://theconversation.com/holy-cow-as-hindu-nationalism-surges-in-india-cows-are-protected-but-minorities-not-so-much-76632.

[10] 'Cow Is Mother but No One Should Take Law in Their Hand: PM Modi,' *Indian Express*, 16 July 2017, http://indianexpress.com/article/india/cow-is-mother-but-no-one-should-take-law-in-their-hand-pm-narendra-modi-4753358/.

[11] Hindutva is a term that indicates 'Hindu-ness,' incorporating ideas about land, blood and civilisation. See Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

norms of tolerance and the legal protection of the state. A High Court judge from Hyderabad recently dismissed the plea of a cattle trader from whom sixty-three cows and two bulls were seized illegally by gaurakshakhs ruling that the cow was 'sacred national wealth' which is 'substitute to Mother and God'.[12] In a startling parallel, videos of slaughtered cows and murders of Muslims and Dalits circulate on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, feeding a voyeurism and reinforcing prejudices about minority communities.

How can one explain such institutional failures and such failures of social conscience? To answer this question, this paper suggests, first, that one has to consider the importance of 'affect' in the study of cow protection violence in India and so-called 'religious' violence more broadly. 'Emotions' provide powerful legitimation to individual and collective behaviour because they appeal to something apparently non-rational: deeply felt, instinctive and, by extension, universal. Thus, while not condoning theft or grievous bodily harm, many sympathise with someone gripped by an uncontrollable emotion – anger, fear, hurt – when his or her deepest held ideals are felt to be threatened. Second, I argue that the contemporary politics of religious offence in India must be understood as part of a longer historical trajectory, shaped by the relationship between the colonial state and religious communities. In its transition to crown rule in 1858 and for some time before, the colonial state in India had pledged to uphold longstanding customs of its subjects, regardless of 'religious faith or observances'. It promised 'non-interference' in these customs and the protection of religious

[12] 'Cow Substitute to Mother and God, Says Hyderabad HC Judge,' *Times of India*, 10 June 2017, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/cow-substitute-to-mother-and-god-says-hyderabad-hc-judge/articleshow/59076939.cms.

feelings. The colonial state was thus central to creating a platform for articulating religious offence and enabling what I will call a 'politics of hurt'.[13]

Conflicts around cow protection movements occurred in India first in the 1890s. They took place in towns and cities, largely in British India. Woven through public lectures, posters, boycotts and open violence were narratives of hurt, loss and anger at the perceived humiliation of the historic decline of Hindus and their subjection by foreigners. The colonial state's promise to protect the religious feelings of communities framed and contained such conflicts.[14] In turn, those who claimed their customs had been violated asserted their 'hurt feelings' as proof. Strikingly, the movements, and the accompanying violence, retained a similar form and content through the twentieth century and into the contemporary moment. How do we explain the fact that across changing political, historical and regional contexts, they looked and sounded very much 'the same'? Cow protection activists appeal to a certain primordialism, claiming their hurt today is as it has always been. Common sense understandings and media reportage have bolstered the idea that the 'recurrent' nature of

[13] Scholarship across disciplines has turned to considering emotion in social processes. See, for instance, Brian Massumi, 'The Autonomy of Affect,' *Cultural Critique* 31 (1995): 83–109, Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); and Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). There is a growing literature considering emotion in the Indian context. See Veronique Benei, *Schooling Passions: Nation, History and Language in Contemporary Western India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); and Margrit Pernau et al., *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth-Century Asia and Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015). On hurt, anger and offence, see Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), chap. 7: 'Life after Primordialism'; and Rina Ramdev, Sandhya Devesan Nambiar, and Debaditya Bhattacharya, eds, *Sentiments, Politics and Censorship: The State of Hurt* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 2015).

[14] This was through section 153A of the Indian Penal Code and section 295A, which was introduced after 1927.

ethnic and religious violence speaks to the enduring nature of these identities. However, life in twenty-first century Uttar Pradesh is radically transformed from that in the 1890s. What gives cow protection its currency in a globalised, neo-liberal, media-savvy world? This paper suggests that it is the emotive appeal, one that is both deeply personal and experienced collectively – thus, both psychic and social – that knits very different contexts together and ties them to the 'meta-politics' of Hindu nationalism.

The paper begins by addressing the historiography of cow protection and outlines some methodological considerations in writing histories of emotion. It then examines cow protection movements from the late nineteenth century and looks at two points in the early twentieth century when they were mobilised anew. The final section addresses the question of 'offence' and the politics of identity in multicultural societies. It considers the way that a liberal political framework that seeks to protect communities reifies these identities, reducing them to something personal or cultural, emptying them of political possibility. Yet, the historical relationship between politics and emotion has been crucial to shaping the contours of religious violence, something that has hitherto been little explored in the context of India.[15] This paper suggests that it is through disembedding identity from history that cow protection movements would seem to 'replicate' across time and space. Moreover, the state's promise to

[15] There is a substantial literature on the relationship between religious violence, politics and emotion, particularly since the 'war on terror.' It has largely focused on the contemporary period, from the fields of anthropology and politics rather than history. See, for instance, Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); and Martha Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). On South Asia, see articles collected in *Samaj* 2 (2008), an issue titled 'Outraged Communities'; and Asad Ali Ahmed, 'Specters of Macaulay: Blasphemy, the Indian Penal Code and Pakistan's Postcolonial Predicament,' in *Censorship in South Asia: Cultural Regulation from Sedition to Seduction*, ed. Raminder Kaur and William Mazarella (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009), 172–205.

uphold religious freedom and protect communities' 'feelings' paradoxically facilitates the conditions for violence.

Writing histories of emotion

There is an extensive literature on the history of cow protection in India. This has largely focused on its part in a story of communalism, the peculiarly South Asian term that refers to conflict between religious communities, particularly Hindus and Muslims, first used in the early twentieth century.[16] In the late colonial period, 'communalism' was a pejorative term used by nationalists and colonial officials alike, signifying atavistic passions that were prone to violence. Historians have understood communalism as the result of politicised religious identities forged by colonial knowledge and religious reform through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, they have tended to focus on communalism's more obviously political aspects – the institutional and ideological dimensions of religious identity – rather than emotion.[17]

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[16] See Anand Yang, 'Sacred Symbol and Sacred Space in Rural India: Community Mobilization in the "Anti-Cow Killing" Riot of 1893,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (*CSSH*) 22, no. 4 (1980): 576–96; Gyanendra Pandey, 'Rallying Around the Cow: Sectarian Strife in the Bhojpuri Region, c.1888–1917,' in *Subaltern Studies II*, ed. Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 60–129; C. S. Adcock, 'Sacred Cows and Secular History: Cow Protection Debates in Colonial North India,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 2 (2010): 297–311.

[17] Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, 1885–1930* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991); Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1987). Freitag, in her formulation of 'public arenas,' hints at the possibilities of affective association.

How might one use existing documentary evidence, much of it from colonial sources, to write emotion into the histories of cow protection? Historians are relative newcomers to emotion, notes Joanna Bourke in *Fear: A Cultural History*.[18] This is, in part, because the traditional archive does not immediately lend itself to the study of phenomena that are commonly deemed intimate and unknowable. The study of emotion was, until recently, confined to the fields of psychology and philosophy. Scholars maintained the view that emotions had a biological basis: experienced through the sensory nervous system, like colours, and 'hardwired' into individuals.[19] They produce involuntary changes in the body which, the historian William Reddy notes, have been understood to be 'unconscious' cognitive processes that 'steal upon us when we least expect it'.[20] Anthropologists and historians have challenged this psychobiological orthodoxy. Janet Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz argued that the location of emotions 'inside' a person and their treatment as universal assumed the most reliable way to study them was through personal, 'introspective' accounts. Rather, they maintained, emotions are cultural phenomena, embedded in, and created by, social relationships and social discourse.[21] Similarly, Bourke notes that there is nothing natural or immutable about the way emotions are experienced. There is no inner response to fear that is not shared by other emotions. Moreover, what people feared shifted over time, as

[18] Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2005).

[19] William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3.

[20] Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, 13–15.

[21] Janet Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz, 'Introduction: Discourse, Emotion and the Politics of Everyday Life,' in *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, ed. Abu-Lughod and Lutz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1–24.

did the experience and very meaning of that emotion. Emotional responses are, she maintains, 'constructed discursively by particular interpretive communities'.[22]

The idea that emotions have 'social lives' and, by implication, historical lives, is one that the philosopher Robert Solomon develops and informs my approach here.[23] Solomon argues against the interiorising of emotion, emphasising as it does a Cartesian separation of public and private worlds. Instead, he sees emotions as 'primarily situated in human relationships'. They are 'purposive', that is, they have an intent and are '*in themselves* strategic and political'.[24] Solomon argues that the idea that one is 'struck by' passion or overcome with anger is misleading, for 'emotions do not just happen to us' but 'can be said to be rational'. They have ends and 'seek their own satisfaction' – anger seeks vengeance, love seeks possession, and so on. Emotions thus take place 'in the world, not in the mind, the psyche or the soul'. As such, actions or 'behaviour' are key to understanding them. Emotions, Solomon writes, are 'intimately tied to behaviour'; indeed, the act of the emotion *is* the emotion: 'the emotion and its expression are one thing and not two'.[25]

Understanding emotions as political and strategic in nature provides a useful avenue into thinking about religious and ethnic violence generally, and the potency of Indian cow protection movements specifically. Scholars have understood communalism as localised responses to a specific threat on the one hand, or the result of broad cultural and political change on the other. However, the former approach understands communal violence as

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[22] Bourke, *Fear*, 73–76.

[23] Robert Solomon, 'The Politics of Emotion,' in *Bringing the Passions Back In: The Emotions in Political Philosophy*, ed. Rebecca Kingston and Leonard Ferry (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 189–208.

[24] Solomon, 'Politics of Emotion,' 192–93, emphasis in original.

[25] Solomon, 'Politics of Emotion,' 193–96.

having rational, often economic, motivations, and the latter tends towards seeing these conflicts as teleological in nature.[26] It has proved analytically difficult to connect local, everyday incidents with what Veena Das calls a 'master symbol' – broad cultural and ideological narratives – through which these conflicts are viewed.[27] Arjun Appadurai suggests that a way to understand the interface between localised violence and broader cultural meanings is through a 'politics of affect'.[28] 'Macroevents', he writes, 'work their way into highly localised structures of feeling by being drawn into the discourse and narratives of the locality'. At the same time, 'the local narratives … in terms of which ordinary life and its conflicts are read … become shot through with a subtext of interpretive possibilities that is the direct product of the workings of the local imaginings of broader regional, national and global events'. Once an 'anthology of images' is created, there will be 'fresh episodes of … interpretation and suffering' which can work their way into new structures of feeling.[29] Sara Ahmed similarly argues that emotions circulate through society, almost like currency, in a way that binds individuals and social objects to broader collective ideas. These 'affective economies' produce meanings from the specific relationship between the objects to which emotions attach.[30]

Appadurai and Ahmed are concerned with the contemporary globalised world. Yet their insights can be brought to bear on how we might explain the potency of cow protection movements historically across different contexts without falling into either the materialist or

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[26] Chandra, *Communalism*; Freitag, *Collective Action*.

[27] Veena Das, ed., *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 14.

[28] Appadurai, *Modernity*, 144.

[29] Appadurai, *Modernity*, 153.

[30] Sara Ahmed, 'Affective Economies,' *Social Text* 79, no. 2 (2004): 117–39.

teleological frames. I suggest that emotions signify, contain and mobilise social and political discourses to purposeful ends. These discourses can be understood through legal structures, individual declamation, political language and public acts, all of which enable conventional documentary sources to tell a different kind of story than we have hitherto heard about the histories of communal violence and communal identities in India.

Cow protection

Cow protection movements in India began in the 1880s and were associated with a Hindu reform association, the Arya Samaj. It was founded in Punjab, in the northwest of the subcontinent, by a Gujarati Brahmin, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, who had, since the 1870s, been preaching a radically reformed Hinduism.[31] Like many nineteenth-century reformers, Dayanand maintained that Hindus and Hinduism had undergone a long decline. Over thousands of years, through the wars of the *Mahabharata* and invasions by foreigners – Huns, Turks, Bactrians, Scythians and then Muslims and Christians – Hindus had become spiritually weakened. Consequently, they had fallen, politically and economically, and were now subject to foreign (British) rule. The practices of Hinduism had, Dayanand maintained, become corrupted over time. False practices – caste hierarchy, pilgrimage, horoscopes, child marriage and temple devotion – had grown around Hinduism as barnacles attach themselves to a sunken vessel. This story of internal weakness and fragmentation, as well as external aggression and conversion, was central to a sense of shared historical pain. In place of the accepted rites, the reformed Arya religion created new rituals including shuddhi, the 'purification' or reconversion ceremony that sought to 'return' Muslims and Christians to the

[31] See Kenneth Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); C. S. Adcock, *The Limits of Tolerance: Indian Secularism and the Politics of Religious Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Hindu fold, and cow protection. The Muslims and Christians who had conquered India were beef eaters, Dayanand pointed out. The wanton slaughter of cows had resulted in their declining population, creating a scarcity of milk – important in a society of vegetarians – and widespread malnutrition. If India was to rise again in the scale of nations, he preached, she needed to regain her strength, both physical and spiritual. For this, cow protection was key.[32]

Colonial officials had monitored cow protection societies in different parts of India since they first came to their attention.[33] The activities of the societies included petitioning officials to protect cattle, taking processions of cows through the streets and holding public meetings. The president of the Society for the Preservation of Horned Cattle in Bombay claimed the society's concern, 'in an essentially agricultural country like India', was 'to acquaint people … with the difficulties attendant on the diminution of cattle'.[34] Societies organised lectures in different regions to raise subscriptions for the movement.[35] Sriman Swami, an itinerant Hindu sage from Allahabad in northern India, established societies wherever he went and collected money for a 'Cow Memorial Fund'.[36] In 1889, he spoke at meetings where he complained that the country was 'being reduced to poverty by the drain of wealth to England'. Moreover, he said, '"John Bull's" excessive appetite for beef' had brought 'ruin to the agriculturalist and to the natives in … general'.[37] Cow protection advocates maintained that the large number of cattle being slaughtered meant that there was

[32] Jones, *Arya Dharm*, 168–69.

[33] 'Note on the Agitation Against Cow Killing,' British Library (BL), India Office Records (IOR), R/2/28/257.

[34] Dinshaw Petit to Secretary of the Judicial Department, Government of Bombay, 26 May 1894, BL, IOR, L/PJ/6/379 File 1460.

[35] 'Note,' 10.

[36] 'Note,' 4.

[37] Memoranda about Sriman Swami, Secretary of 'Cow Memorial Fund' Society, Allahabad, 1890, BL, IOR, L/PJ/6/269 File 149.

not sufficient milk and ghee (clarified butter) and Hindus had become physically weak. Cow dung was scarce and crops were not what they once were for want of manure.[38] The president of the Gaorakshini Sabha in Poona, Maharashtra, noted that the 'promiscuous slaughter of the cow' meant that prices of crops had risen, 'the nation is underfed and the health of the people is greatly affected'.[39] Everywhere, speakers urged people to stop cows from going to slaughter. Hindus were told they 'should offer a rupee extra and thereby prevent its falling into the hands of the butcher'.[40]

However, while societies emphasised their work was 'purely philanthropical and in no way political', their rules explicitly prohibited Hindus from selling cows to Muslims and untouchables.[41] Their activities therefore had a clear and detrimental impact on occupations dominated by these communities:

> Rule 6: Nats, Banjaras, Chamars [untouchable castes] and others buy cows and sell them to butchers; and Musulmans and others are the very cause of the slaughter of cows. Cows shall not be sold into the hands of any such persons and if any kind of cow die the owner shall sell its skin to a proper person and apply the money to cow protection. …
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> Rule 20: As a Chamar is a cow-killer it is most reprehensible that he should be employed to attend cows, or that cows … shall be left to his mercy: … therefore no Chamar shall … be employed as a cowherd.[42]

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[38] Satara, 16 August 1893, Secret Abstracts of Police Intelligence (SAPI), CID Office, Mumbai.

[39] Poona, 28 September 1893, SAPI.

[40] Satara, 16 August 1893, SAPI.

[41] Dharwar, 16 October 1893, SAPI.

[42] 'Note on the Cow Protection Agitation in the Gorakhpur District,' BL, IOR, L/PJ/6/365 File 84 1894.

Moreover, there were numerous reports of hostility. Patras, or anonymous leaflets, circulated across regions, forbidding Hindus from selling cows to butchers and encouraging them to shun Muslims altogether.[43] At the Behrampur cattle fair in Bengal, where in 1888 butchers complained they could not obtain cattle on account of the cow protection movement, in 1891 there was violence when 'a crowd of Hindus armed with lathis (quarter staves often shod with iron) attacked the butchers taking cattle for the commissariat at Dinapore', driving off 150 head of cattle.[44]

The activities of the cow protection societies had become more openly intimidating by 1893, prompting serious riots in Bombay in the west, Rangoon in the east and Azamgarh in the north. Cow protection activists threatened anyone who sold cattle. In June 1893, an official report from Ghazipur, in northern India, noted that before Bakri-Id, a Muslim landlord had sent a number of cows to a neighbouring town to be sacrificed, accompanied by a Muslim butcher and a Chamar leather worker. On the way, they were attacked by three or four hundred Hindus armed with lathis, shouting 'Gao gohar!' (Save the cow!). The cattle were taken to a cow protection society and, the report continued, if a local Hindu landlord had not warned the crowd to stop, the Muslims would have been killed. Elsewhere, not far from Ghazipur, on the morning of Id, a crowd of seven hundred Hindus armed with lathis converged on the village of Khatripur shouting 'Mahabir ki jai!' and 'Gao gohar!' They

[43] 'Note,' 7. In Karnataka, Hindus boycotted Muslims during Muharram in 1890 while patras encouraging the boycott of Muslims circulated in large numbers in districts in Bengal in 1891, BL, IOR, L/PJ/6/365 file 84.

[44] 'Note,' 4, 7.

proceeded to Muslim residences and threatened them with all kinds of violence 'unless they promised never again to sacrifice cows'.[45]

Such punishment was also meted out to Hindus who sold cows for slaughter. The case of the farmer Rachhman Paure was one of many. He had sold a bullock to a local butcher. Some days later three men came to question him as to why he had sold the animal to a Muslim. They threatened to cut off his water source and break his pots. Others said he should be prevented from working. Paure's testimony continued: 'they pulled down the tiles of my roof and smashed my earthen vessels. [They] then went and stopped the irrigation of my sugarcane field'. One of the men prevented sweetmeats for his daughter's marriage from being delivered to her father-in-law's home. Paure was told in no uncertain terms that 'if I did not get the bullock back they would loot my house and kill me'.[46] The aggression of gaurakshaks, their rules of conduct and public processions, sought to discipline the behaviour of those who traded in cows, live and dead, and create a climate of fear among them.

Moreover, pamphlets, poems and posters distributed by cow protection societies reflected a particular understanding of Muslims as marauders and defilers of Hindu values. One poster showed a cow with a calf at its udder, the god Krishna above with a sign 'Dharmaraj' (kingdom of righteousness), a woman at its side holding a bowl labelled 'Hindu' and a Muslim man with a sword ready to slay the innocent cow, labelled 'Kaliyug' (age of darkness).[47] The cartoon depicted in a snapshot the condition of India. In an age of truth ('Satyug'), people would wait for the calf to feed before taking milk from the cow. But this

[45] H. B. Finlay, Officiating Commissioner Benares Division to Chief Secretary to the Government of the North Western Provinces and Oudh, 16 October 1893, BL, IOR, L/PJ/6/365 File 53 1894.

[46] Rachhman Paure's testimony, H. E. L. P. Dupernex, officiating magistrate Azamgarh to Commissioner, Gorakhpur Division, 7 July 1893, BL, IOR, L/PJ/6/365 File 55 1894.

[47] 'Note on the Cow Protection Agitation in the Gorakhpur District.'

was a time of broken morals where men slaughtered cows. The cow fed humans with milk, as she feeds her own calf, and should thus be regarded as the universal mother, or Gau-mata. To kill a cow was like killing one's own mother, but more so as all the gods dwell in the cow. To kill a cow was to attack every Hindu.[48] Poems also appealed to Hindus to take courage and fight to save cows from slaughter: 'Rush amongst the waves of the battle field … [and] rout … the stupid Mlenchas' who 'kill the best of animals, while you Arya brothers are sitting … What, are you wearing bodices (i.e. are you women)? ... For once, rise, oh, why do you fear?'[49] The circulating posters and pamphlets, the public lectures and aggressive crowds preventing butchers from buying cattle, fed a discourse imbued with emotive qualities: pride in the community's righteous past, hurt at the decline of that civilisation at the hands of outsiders, anger at the attack on the Hindu religion. Central to this emotive landscape was a profound sense of moral injury – the sense of psychic hurt intertwined with the physical injury to the cow.

The wave of cow protection riots in 1893 generated a powerful response from Muslim imams and others who appealed to their co-religionists to mobilise against what they saw as their persecution by Hindus. A pamphlet circulating in Muslim neighbourhoods of small-town western India stated that Muslims were being 'forbidden at the point of the sword from observing their religious duties': 'Hindus have … become enemies of our life and property … Muhammadans are … forced to [watch] while our honour and religion are levelled to the

[48] 'Note on the Cow Protection Agitation in the Gorakhpur District.'

[49] R. H. Vincent, Acting Commissioner of Police, Bombay to Under Secretary to Government, Judicial Department, Bombay, 26 June 1894, BL, IOR, L/PJ/6/379 file 1460. *Mlench*, also spelled *mleccha*, is a derogatory term referring to Muslims. It is originally a Sanskrit word meaning 'outsider,' 'barbarian' and someone who is non-Vedic and unclean.

dust'.[50] Pamphlets warned of the interference in the freedom to practise Islam. Hindus, they said, 'wanted to stop the cow from being slaughtered at all', which wounded the 'religious … sensibilities of Muslims'.[51] Articles blamed the colonial government for not remaining neutral in their dealings with religious communities, for violating the promise of non-interference. The government had departed from this position and 'taken a side, pandering to the cry of Hindus against the exercise of their religious rites by the Musalmans'.[52]

The riots prompted officials to reflect on how to balance the competing claims of Hindu and Muslim communities, each insisting their right to practise longstanding customs had been violated. As one letter from the Home Department noted in 1893, 'impartiality' was the 'guiding principle' of the administration; it 'does not permit one party to impose its will upon another'. But reconciling 'the impartial administration of justice and the equal treatment of all creeds' with 'repressing demonstrations intended or likely to give offence to religious opponents' was a complex task as there was a 'tendency towards assertion of religious privileges on both sides since the country passed under the British Government'.[53] The administration had promised to uphold the custom of all religions equally where custom provided the basis for law. What custom was, however, proved often difficult to ascertain.[54] Moreover, where such customs had been 'violently interrupted' or where 'circumstances [had entirely] changed since it was established', a group's claim that their freedom to practise

[50] Bengal, 23 September 1893, SAPI.

[51] 26 June 1893, SAPI.

[52] 26 June 1893, SAPI.

[53] Home Department, Government of India to Earl of Kimberley, 27 December 1893, BL, IOR, L/PJ/6/365 file 84, 2.

[54] On law and custom, see Neeladri Bhattacharya, 'Remaking Custom: The Discourse and Practice of Colonial Codification,' in *Tradition, Dissent and Ideology: Essays in Honour of Romila Thapar*, ed. R. Champakalakshmi and S. Gopal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 20–51.

longstanding customs was being obstructed required adjudication. This was done through the Indian Penal Code (sections 295–298), which 'allots severe punishment to acts done with the intention of insulting the religion of any class of persons or wounding the religious feelings of any person'.[55] The difficulties officials were to face in accurately determining what custom was in the face of competing claims of religious offence became quickly apparent.

Soon after the riots in Bombay, local officials noticed that in different parts of the Presidency Muslims had begun raising money to rebuild derelict mosques and were petitioning officials to prevent Hindu processional music from being played in front of mosques during the hours of prayer. Conflicts took place across western India during the September and October festival seasons of 1893 and 1894. Petitions maintained that Hindus had taken to playing their instruments in an aggressive way, disturbing Muslims' prayer time with cymbals and drums and violating longstanding custom. Hindus countered that it was a religious custom 'from ancient times' for the festival processions to be made up of people playing a variety of instruments.[56] The district magistrates in towns where this came up sought to determine what the customary practice had been in each place. Conflicting accounts made a conclusive answer impossible, as each side claimed their customs had been interfered with. Ultimately, officials urged that music be stopped in front of public buildings as well as mosques, and this would be a policy born out of 'courtesy and not any religious grounds'.[57]

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[55] Home Department to Kimberley, 27 December 1893, BL, IOR, L/PJ/6/365 File 84, 2.

[56] See for instance a petition from Yeola, a small weaving town in Maharashtra, signed by 'the Hindoos of Yeola', 20 September 1893 to J. F. Fleet, Commissioner, Poona: 'Riots at Nasik between Hindus and Mahomedans', Maharashtra State Archives (MSA). Judicial Department (JD), vol. 282, Compilation No. 545, pt. I, 1894.

[57] Commissioner's letter, Satara, 14 March 1894, MSA, JD, vol. 284, Compil. No. 545, pt. III, 1894.

The state's promise of non-interference provided an avenue for the articulation of local grievances. Petitioners mobilised the promise of non-interference, an idiom which framed their engagement with the state as self-styled 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' communities. Indeed, 'cow protection' and 'music before mosques' became the prisms through which a number of local conflicts were refracted through the early twentieth century.[58] It was in this way that a language of religious offence shaped a politics of identity in colonial India. These would have had a variety of local initiatives, but it was through the promise of the state to protect communities from hurt that these various narratives of communal difference were established.

The tension between communities in different parts of India died down after 1894 as the initial agitation around cow protection gave way to reconciliation. Significantly for our story, however, the movements came to life at different points subsequently. In the Bombay Presidency, for instance, cow protection activists mobilised once again during the Swadeshi movement in 1905. The Swadeshi movement was, in the standard narrative of Indian nationalism, the first extra-constitutional mobilisation that articulated a broad-based anti-colonialism. It called on Indians to boycott foreign goods and reflected a positive idea of patriotism.[59] In December 1905, police records reported that the speaker at a swadeshi meeting in Maharashtra called on people to boycott imported sugar. He alleged that 'the

[58] See G. R. Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India: A Study of Controversy, Conflict and Communal Movements in Northern India, 1923–1928* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 76–102; Shabnum Tejani, 'Music, Mosques and Custom: Local Conflict and "Communalism" in a Maharashtrian Weaving Town, 1893–1894,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (2007): 223–40.

[59] On the Swadeshi movement, see Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903–1908* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973); C. A. Bayly, 'The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700–1930', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 285–321.

blood of cows and bulls, and the bones of swine formed essential ingredients in all imported sugar which was therefore unfit … for the consumption of Hindu and Moslem alike'.[60]

This cross-communal appeal to oppose colonial rule, however, saw the re-emergence of cow protection and its associated hostility towards Muslims. A letter to the superintendent in Bombay reported in January 1906 that gaurakshaks had mobilised once again:

> Yakub the beef butcher was here yesterday … and he says that B. G. Tilak [a young militant nationalist of the Indian National Congress] … is very busy again. He has got all the Brahmans in Wai to join together, form a fund and have collected some Rs 20,000 to buy up cows in every bazaar round about and prevent them being sold to butchers. … Not a single cow has been sold to the butchers in Wai for the last six weeks. They began operations in Wai, now they are beginning in Poona … Yakub is frightened out of his life every day he goes to Wai. All the Brahmans are armed with big bamboos, walking about the cattle market.[61]

Cow protection was revived as part of Swadeshi nationalism. It provided the means to articulate a patriotism that historians acknowledge was inflected with upper-caste idioms and contained anti-Muslim elements. Cow protection 'reappeared' after this in different regional contexts and at different points in time. Significantly, the activities and ideas associated with the movements were consistent and familiar: the claims that cow slaughter had brought about a decline in the milk industry, created 'misery and suffering' and was impoverishing India,

[60] Nasik, 17 December 1905, SAPI.

[61] Bombay, 2 January 1906, SAPI. This seemed to be common elsewhere as well: see Sarkar, *Swadeshi*, chap. 7.

continued.[62] Pictorial representations of Muslims as defiling Hindu culture were accompanied with intimidating behaviour. Economic arguments worked together with physical threats and a cultural vocabulary that spoke to a collective wrong – the violation of a Hindu community through the killing of the cow. In a parallel reply, Muslim communities sought to shore up their position, rebuilding mosques and claiming that Hindu customs interfered with their own. In line with Solomon's analysis, the acts were continuous with the emotions they sought to create, reflecting and embodying fear, anger and hurt. By the mid-1920s, cow slaughter and music before mosques provided the narrative anchors through which the articulation of individual and collective offence, framed by the promise of protection by the colonial state, circulated. The fact that accusations of hurt were 'traded' between Hindu and Muslim communities, to use Ahmed's economic metaphor, and were given sanction by the state, enabled them to be mobilised across regions at different points in time.

In 1933, in the princely state of Mangrol, a small backwater in south Gujarat, Hindu groups began protesting when the dewan (prime minister) passed an order that permitted cow slaughter. The dewan also ruled that Hindus be permitted to play music before mosques at any time. Mangrol had been ruled by a Muslim prince in the nineteenth century. As the story goes, in 1851 an animal was killed on the outskirts of the state which prompted an exodus of Hindus in protest. The then ruler persuaded them to return with a promise to Hindu elders that the 'slaughter of any big animal within the state territory of Mangrol was forever prohibited'.[63] Cow slaughter continued, but it was done quietly and officials, as well as local

[62] Petition to Lord Hardinge, Viceroy and Governor General of India from Bawa Bhagwan Dass, Manager, Sarva Desi Go Hitkari Office, 30 October 1911, BL, IOR, L/PJ/6/1130 File 4786 (1911) .

[63] 'What Has Happened at Mangrol?,' BL, IOR, File: C/620-33-II, 'Mangrol: Cow Slaughter and Music Before Mosques' 1933, 32.

Hindus, turned a blind eye. The prohibition went unchallenged until 1926, when the ruler passed an order that granted permission to butcher cows prompting protest from the Hindu Mahajan, a group of prominent men in Mangrol, that it was 'provocative' and 'intolerable' to Hindus.[64]

A meeting of young Jains in Bombay at the Pushtimarga Youth Conference in July 1933 noted that 'the recent orders of the Mangrol Darbar [court] about cow-killing … have highly injured the religious feeling of the Vaishnavite Hindus'.[65] They demanded that the current ruler revert to the promise of 1851 to prohibit cow slaughter. An article in the *Times of India* opined that this was an unreasonable demand. Times had changed, it observed, and it was no longer possible simply to rule against the interests of an entire community: 'this world today is thinking in terms of broadminded tolerance of the rights of each other'. An approach that denied these rights and liberties, 'to satisfy its own intolerance', had 'no place in their scheme of modern social and economic life'.[66] Yet, just as the order allowing cow slaughter prompted the Jains to plead that this hurt their religious feelings, so too did Muslims protest the order. A public meeting organised by the Mangrol Young Muslim Association in July 1933 thanked the Darbar of Mangrol for 'restoring to the Mussalmans … their religious Right of Cow Slaughter'. But they objected to the ruling that allowed Hindus 'to play Music before Mosques without any restrictions'. The Young Muslims requested that the Durbar consider imposing 'such restrictions that may satisfy the religious susceptibilities of the Muslim Public' and devise a way for Hindus to proceed 'without any untoward incident or interference in the Muslim prayers'.[67]

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[64] 'What Has Happened at Mangrol?,', 35.

[65] Excerpts from the *Kathiawar Times*, 23 July 1933, in 'What Has Happened at Mangrol?,' 51–52.

[66] *Times of India*, 20 July 1933, in 'What Has Happened at Mangrol?,' 24.

[67] 'What Has Happened at Mangrol?,' copy of resolutions passed, 22 July 1933, 21.

The office of the Darbar noted in 1926 that that there were conflicts between Hindus and Muslims elsewhere centring on cow slaughter and music before mosques. Muslims and Hindus in Mangrol, concerned at these developments, wanted to have their practices regularised. The dewan sought to balance the rights of the two communities: 'a legal right of one community should not be snatched away for the sake of the other. Moreover, where there is a statutory liberty to everyone in these days to follow one's own religious reasonable rights, it is not at all advisable for the state to interfere in it'.[68] To prevent the problems from coming to Mangrol and 'taking into account the changes which the march of time had brought about and given birth to a spirit of toleration', the dewan 'thought fit to issue the orders of 1927'.[69] Significantly, the ruler of this small princely state, steeped in local tradition, sought to reflect what he believed was a 'sign of the times' – to retain an impartial distance between Hindu and Muslim communities.

How had cow slaughter and music before mosques become points of conflict in a place like Mangrol, so politically and culturally removed from British India, deep in the throes of the anti-colonial movement? What meaning did these issues hold with local people? That the protests around cow slaughter and music before mosques in Mangrol took a similar form and used a similar language as those elsewhere would seem to imply a continuity with such conflicts and reflect what, by 1933, was in nationalist and official discourse termed 'communalism' – the inevitable primordial difference between Hindus and Muslims. We will never know what the particular narratives and structures of feeling were in Mangrol into which the cow–music conflict fit. What is striking, however, is how far the language of non-interference and religious offence had travelled: the dewan used the language of tolerance to show himself as a ruler moving with the times; equally, residents of Mangrol were adept in

[68] 'What Has Happened at Mangrol?,' 48.

[69] 'What Has Happened at Mangrol?,' 86.

appealing to the promise to protect their feelings. Rather than reflecting immutable religious identity, however, the propensity to offence and the assertion of hurt – and the appeal to the state to rectify that hurt – can be seen as a political act. Conflict around cow protection occurred regularly through the decades after independence and it remained a subject of public concern, particularly around state legislation to ban cow slaughter.[70] Yet the frequency and intensity of violence directed at communities whose livelihoods are tied to the cattle trade increased dramatically after Modi came to power.[71] The next section considers this with regard to the contemporary resurgence of the 'politics of hurt' in India.

Hurt feelings and the liberal state

In February 2014, as part of an out-of-court settlement, Penguin India agreed to cease publication of Wendy Doniger's *The Hindus: An Alternative History*, published in 2009, and pulp all the remaining copies.[72] The suit had been filed by D. N. Batra, a retired school teacher and Hindutva activist, under section 295A of the Indian Penal Code. Section 295A criminalises any 'deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of citizens of India'.[73] Batra alleged that Doniger's book argued that low castes had

[70] See, for instance, 'Cow Protection at Any Cost to Maintain Our Culture: Mr Tandon's Call to Build Up Strong Public Opinion', *Times of India*, 19 September 1950; and '"Vigorous Steps" Will Be Taken to Ban Cow Slaughter: Chavan Calls for End to Agitation on Issue', *Times of India*, 6 December 1966.

[71] The campaign for cow protection reached its peak in 1966, after which it died out for some decades. It was revived as part of the aggressive Hindu nationalist campaigns in the early twenty-first century. IndiaSpend reports that of the sixty-six reported bovine-related attacks between 2010 and 2017, sixty-four occurred after 2014.

[72] The book has again been available in India since 2015 through Speaking Tiger Books.

[73] Ratanlal Ranchhoddas and Dhirajlal Keshavlal Thakore, *The Indian Penal Code* (Bombay: Bombay Law Reporter, 1972), 226.

significantly contributed to Hindu traditions, it showed tantra's sexually explicit practices and described Hindu texts such as the *Ramayana* as fictional. In so doing, he said, Doniger had 'hurt the religious feelings of millions of Hindus'.[74] Penguin India's decision to settle the suit came after protesters threatened their employees and attacked its offices. Liberal audiences responded largely with dismay that the publisher had buckled under right-wing pressure.[75] However, a roundtable session on the controversy at the American Association of Religion asked us to think about this differently. The focus on censorship, they argued, missed the longer life of colonial law. C. S. Adcock argued that section 295A gave 'strategic value to invoking or mobilizing wounded feelings': it both incites the display of hurt feelings and 'actively shapes them'.[76] Moreover, a law that was introduced to manage the violence that religious offence was seen to provoke facilitated that very violence.[77]

How do we explain the contemporary currency of a colonial promise to protect religious feelings from offence? What allows for the expressions of hurt and their meaning to be apparently unchanging in different contexts? The philosopher Wendy Brown argues that

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[74] Wendy Doniger, 'India: Censorship by the Batra Brigade,' *New York Review of Books*, 8 May 2014, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/05/08/india-censorship-batra-brigade/.

[75] Vijay Prasad, 'Wendy Doniger's Book is a Tribute to Hinduism's Complexity, Not an Insult,' *The Guardian*, 12 February 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/feb/12/wendy-doniger-book-hinduism-penguin-hindus; Salil Tripati, 'Penguin's Disappointing Surrender,' *LiveMint*, 13 February 2014 https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/RLUniviVnnPREw0wkK3NLI/Penguins-disappointing-surrender.html.

[76] C. S. Adcock, 'Violence, Passion and the Law: A Brief History of Section 295A and its Antecedents,' Roundtable on 'Outrage, Scholarship and the Law in India', *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 84, no. 2 (2016): 341–42. In this issue see also Brian K. Pennington, 'The Unseen Hand of an Underappreciated Law: The Doniger Affair and its Aftermath,' 323–36; and Rupa Viswanath, 'Economies of Offense: Hatred, Speech and Violence in India,' 352–63.

[77] This point is also well made by Ahmed, 'Specters of Macaulay.'

the liberal promise of tolerance is central to shaping a politics of offence. 'Tolerance', she maintains, works as a discourse of justice, citizenship and community in liberal democracies.[78] Writing largely about North America and western Europe, Brown notes that in multicultural and multi-faith societies, the identification of the objects of tolerance – race, ethnicity, gender and so on – 'abets in the production of identity' as it is presumed 'to produce a consciousness that requires protection'.[79] India was not a liberal state under British rule, but 'non-interference' represented an assurance of equality between religious communities in the practice of their customs, one that continued as 'freedom of religion' as independent India made the transition to a liberal democracy. The act of recognition, Brown argues, naturalises identities, rendering them individual and personal, and reduces social conflicts to essentialised religious, ethnic or cultural difference. It depoliticises deeply historical and political processes. Social conflicts then become part of a moralising discourse around identity whose 'politics' comprises an individual or collective expression of hurt.[80] In the context of colonial India, the state identified communities that required protection and, through the law, sought to manage what officials believed would be the inevitable conflict between them. 'Tolerance' does not cause conflict. However, in reifying identities and dispossessing contemporary problems of their constitutive histories, in understanding such conflicts as emotional rather than political, it facilitates such violence.[81]

For Brown, the naturalising of identity explains the personalising of social conflict through emotion. Yet she does not explain how social conflict 'travels', how it seems to

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[78] Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 16.

[79] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 14, 43.

[80] Wendy Brown, *Politics Out of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 21–24, 35–38.

[81] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 15–16.

'reappear' at different points. Sara Ahmed, in a discussion of hate among white nationalists in Britain and the US, suggests that the relationship between emotions and objects (people, symbols, ideas) is key. Emotions 'involve a process of movement or association … *across different levels of signification*'.[82] Emotions have what she calls a 'rippling' effect: 'they move sideways … as well as forwards and backwards'.[83] Emotions are not solely psychic, they are social and material and are 'not contained within the contours of a subject'.[84] They pass between subjects through signs and bodies, across space and time. The circulation of emotions through 'affective economies' involves this movement of signs: the way that large social bodies come to hate comprises both 'movement and fixity; some bodies move precisely by sealing others as objects of hate'. Thus, hate requires a fixity of certain signs – and their repetition – as contexts change.[85]

Let us reflect on cow protection in India. Cow protection movements began as part of the Hindu reform society, the Arya Samaj, in the 1880s. They comprised petitions and public demonstrations, the circulation of posters and open violence towards Muslim and Dalit populations in particular. Each element of the movements contained narratives of hurt, anger and loss at what they saw as the decline of Hindus in the face of foreign assault – both Muslim and British. However, even as the particular contexts changed through the twentieth century, the movements and their constitutive parts appeared to remain the same. Contemporary cow protection activists mobilise a rhetoric identical to those more than a century ago to justify often murderous violence, all with the claim that their feelings as Hindus have been wounded. Yet rather than reflect an unchanging religious identity, such

[82] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 44–45, emphasis in original.

[83] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 45.

[84] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 46.

[85] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 60.

expressions of hurt do a kind of political work. Emotions transport ideas across contexts and over time. The contemporary political context in India is one where the ruling party advocates an ideology of Hindu nationalism and where its muted response to the murders of minorities has emboldened perpetrators to continue their campaigns. This has less to do with ideological cohesion around a religion than with the reification of feelings and the universalising of identity within a liberal political framework. The promise to protect communities against hurt is enshrined in and upheld by the law. It is, in part, the abstraction of the law that allows 'religious offence' to transmute into different contexts. The gaurakshak's appeal to a primordial hurt, through familiar cultural tropes and the legal sanction of the state, shaped a politics of Hindu identity through the twentieth century and continues to do so today.

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