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Aryas Unbound: Print Hinduism and the Cultural Regulation of Religious Offense

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes a controversial book ban from the 1940s to trace the mutual determinations of print media, the legal regulation of communal sentiment, and the discourse of religious tolerance in late colonial India. Claimed as the Bible of the Arya Samaj, the *Satyarth Prakash* (*The Light of Truth*) was banned in the Muslim-majority province of Sindh due to its defamatory remarks about the Prophet Muhammad. The result was a controversy of national proportions. Through theoretically informed close readings of texts from the controversy, I show how the legal regulation of religious offense altered the economy of textual circulation in South Asia. Colonial law fueled a thriving extra-legal legal culture that bureaucratized religious affect. It also reorganized the “unbounded” social imaginary associated with mass publicity. This allowed controversialists to exploit previously unrealized potentialities of the print medium in order to politicize the Hindu public.

KEYWORDS

Arya Samaj, colonial India, Hinduism, secularism, print culture

As piles of paper crinkled and blackened, the Lahore summer night got a little hotter: the incendiary words of Swami Dayanand Saraswati were finally ablaze. Since its initial publication seventy years previously, Dayanand’s *Satyarth Prakash* (*The Light of Truth*) had been recognized as an eminently controversial text, brimming over with polemical attacks on Hinduism, Jainism, Christianity, and Islam. In the charged climate of the 1940s, its aspersions against the Qur’an and the Prophet Muhammad proved particularly troubling—sparking, among other things, this May 1944 fire. When a Hindu bookbinder sent the loose pages of the book to his Muslim employees, they returned them, still unbound, protesting that the text was “objectionable to their religious feelings.” That night, as the carts of paper were being unloaded, someone set them on fire, stabbing the bookbinder’s brother when he tried to arrest the flames.¹ Six months later, the *Satyarth Prakash* was banned in the Muslim-majority province of Sindh, Punjab’s neighbor to the south. A controversy of national proportions quickly ensued.

¹ IOR/L/P&J/5/247/78; Vidyālaṅkāra, *Ārya samāj kā itihās*, 155

As a quintessentially “communalist” event, the Sindh *Satyarth Prakash* affair of 1943–1947 demonstrates the contingency of religious identity in late colonial India. During the early twentieth century, the line separating “Hindu” from “Muslim” was performed and consolidated through carefully scripted dramas much like this one, as a generation of scholars has shown.² Even seemingly spontaneous expressions of subaltern emotion, like that of these Muslim laborers, found voice from *within* the terms offered by colonial law—evident here in the invocation of legally protected “religious feelings.” Likewise, although the form of the above narrative works to displace religious conflict onto a fetishized object (the burning book, which appears to spark controversy of its own accord), that object’s powers clearly derive from its social location.

One might assume that to burn a book, or to refuse to bind it, is to deny that book a public. If the book does not exist physically, it cannot circulate; if it cannot circulate, it has no power. As this late colonial controversy demonstrates all too well, however, sometimes it is precisely when printed texts *fail* to circulate that they hail publics most effectively. This is not just because a “book” can circulate orally; after all, even in oral recitation, the *Satyarth Prakash* was understood primarily as a printed text. To understand this affair, we have to consider the place of the book in within it. In this article, I will suggest that the legal regulation of religious offense fundamentally altered the economy of textual circulation in late colonial India. By bureaucratizing devotional affect and formalizing print’s implicit potential for unbounded circulation, colonial law not only pushed the figure of the offended reader to newfound public prominence; it also situated the *potential* reader as the figure through which the “public” would be defined.

A word on method is in order. This article is meant as an exercise in historicist cultural studies. I provide a thick description of certain aspects of the Sindh affair by interpreting period documents in a manner perhaps more closely associated with literary analysis. While I do pull back periodically to provide a broader view of the controversy, the heart of the article is a series of theoretically informed close readings of texts. There are, relatedly, several important questions that this article does not ask. It does not provide a comprehensive account of the Sindh *Satyarth Prakash* affair.³ Nor does it attempt to situate the affair amid the escalating political tensions leading up to Partition—a task already well underway in the existing literature.⁴ The fraught electoral politics of the 1940s undoubtedly shaped the controversy, and may well have provoked it: although the *Satyarth Prakash* was translated into Sindhi in 1935, it was not banned until after the formation of Sindh’s first Muslim League government in 1942.⁵ The institutions that fanned this controversy clearly did so with electoral outcomes very much in mind. Here, however, I pursue a different line of inquiry that is distinct from and complementary to political history of this type. Instead of reading the Sindh affair through the lens of electoral politics, I take it as a chapter in the larger history of print culture and administrative textuality in modern South Asia.⁶ Although my focus is on texts from the Hindu “side” of the controversy (itself comprised of varied institutions with competing aims), I interpret these texts with an eye toward broader cultural and political concerns.

2 See, for example, Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*; Freitag, *Collective Action*

3 See the slanted but thorough account in Chandra, *Case of the Satyarth Prakash*

4 Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 425, 440; Daechsel, *Politics of Self-Expression*, 70–71

5 I am indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for this point.

6 See, for example, Raman, *Document Raj*; Hofmeyr, *Gandhi’s Printing Press*; Ghosh, *Power in Print*

In what follows, I first offer a brief account of the controversy— more to provide contextual background than to stake any claim about the causes or outcomes of these events. I then turn to a series of readings of texts from the affair. Throughout, my aim is to provide one possible account of what it is for a text to become constitutively unbound, such that the idea of it circulates in the absence of the physical object. Once bureaucratically organized, the lines of affective and legal force that converged on the *Satyarth Prakash* came to comprise a virtual text that was partly detachable from the book as material object. When the physical book was banned, this virtual book came into clearer view.

BANNED: THE *SATYARTH PRAKASH* IN (AND OUT) OF SINDH

Svāmī Dayānand Sarasvati (1824-1883) was among the most iconic Hindu reformers of the nineteenth century, famed for the acerbic style with which he advocated a “return” to the Vedic religion of ancient India. In 1875, he founded a religious society, the Ārya Samāj, which later propagated his reform agenda across the subcontinent, particularly in Punjab. In the same year, he published the first edition of the *Satyarth Prakāś*, his magnum opus, which he later heavily revised. The first ten chapters of the *Satyarth Prakash* describe the ideal Vedic polity, detailing its religious rituals, educational institutions, class norms, and political structures. The final four chapters criticize the principal “anti-Vedic religions” (*vedvirrudh mat*) that had, purportedly, obscured the light of truth: (*Paurāṇik*) Hinduism, Jainism, Christianity, and Islam respectively. The critique of Islam was the last of these, comprising the book’s fourteenth and final chapter.

Unsurprisingly, Dayanand’s polemics met with quick resistance. His critique of Hinduism was by far the book’s lengthiest, and it earned him the ardent opposition of traditional Hindus *paṇḍits*, who defended the authority of the texts (*śāstras*, *Purāṇas*, epics) that the reformer denounced as spurious. Jains also contested his characterization of their religion, partly by holding his claims up to the textual norms of Orientalist scholarship.⁷ Eventually, however, his opponents changed strategy. In addition to challenging his arguments, they also tried to regulate where his words could go. By the Arya Samāj’s own account, the Sindh ban was the fifth major effort to regulate the *Satyarth Prakash* since 1909, whether on grounds of sedition or inflammation of communal feeling, with the latter charge becoming more prominent during the 1920s.⁸

Controversy, however, did not slow publication. By 1900, there were five editions of the *Satyarth Prakash* in print (with runs of 1000-1500 each); by the mid-1920s, Ajmer’s Vedic Press was publishing 20,000 copies almost annually. And that was just Hindi. Translations into Panjabi-Gurmukhi (1898), Urdu (1899), Marathi (1904), English (1906), Bengali (1911), Telugu (1915), Tamil (1925), Gujarati (1926), and Malayalam (1933) further boosted the numbers. By 1947, if one counts all editions and translations, there were some 633,500 copies of the book in print.⁹

The Sindhi translation was a relative latecomer. In 1935, Sindh became an autonomous province, separated from the Bombay Presidency. In 1937, the *Satyarth Prakash* was translated into Sindhi. Uproar around the text would not, however, begin until after the Muslim League

7 Cort, “Indology as Authoritative Knowledge”

8 Vidyālaṅkāra, Ārya samāj kā itihās, 148-161; Alāvalpurī, *Satyarth prakāś āndolan kā itihās*, 65-67

9 Chandra, *Case*, 10-16

took control of the Sindh government in the 1942 elections.¹⁰ The ensuing drama, which involved diverse institutional players (the Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Muslim League, the Government of India, the Sind Government), can be said to have unfolded in three principle acts.

In July 1943, the Government of Sind “received a large number of representations from Muslims against” the *Satyarth Prakash*, including statements from groups like the Ferozepore District Muslim League, the Nankana Sahib Anjuman-Islamia, and the Hyderabad (Sindh) Jamait Juma Masjid.¹¹ Numerous telegrams in defense of the text quickly followed, sent by local chapters of the Arya Samaj, from Punjab to Patna.¹² Already that July, it seemed to Sindh governor Hugh Dow that the controversy had been “mainly worked up by fanatical Hindus from outside the province, who hoped that [his] Muslim ministers might be provoked to act foolishly in the matter and so cause an all-India agitation.”¹³ To prevent such escalation, his government “decided not to take any action.”¹⁴

By August 1943, the controversy had settled into what one bureaucrat termed a “smouldering fire.”¹⁵ That month, a Lahore meeting of the Muslim League called for an outright ban on the *Satyarth Prakash*.¹⁶ A similar resolution passed at a November meeting in Delhi was condemned by the All India Hindu Mahasabha as “intentionally provocative.”¹⁷ In December, the Muslim League met again in Karachi, Sindh’s largest city, where it passed a resolution censuring those portions of the text containing “objectionable, insulting, and provocative remarks against the Holy Prophet Muhammad and other founders of religions” and demanding that the Central Government proscribe implicated chapters “under the relevant section of the Indian Penal Code.”¹⁸ In February 1944, the All India Aryan Congress issued a counter-resolution.¹⁹

Soon the controversy broadened. Punjabi Sikhs filed their own complaints against the book, which included swipes at Nanak and other Sikh gurus.²⁰ Sindhi Christians did the same.²¹ In both Punjab and Bombay, meanwhile, “the Muslim press” clamored to have the book censored either entirely or in part. Apparently in defiance of such demands, the Marathi weekly *Dhanurdhari*

10 Lari, *History of Sindh*, 190-92

11 IOR/L/P&J/5/259/69; NAI (Home Political)/37/9/43/83-85

12 NAI (Home Political)/37/9/43/68-80; Chandra, *Case*, 19-20

13 IOR/L/P&J/5/259/80

14 IOR/L/P&J/5/259/52, 69

15 NAI (Home Political)/37/9/43/3

16 NAI (Home Political)/37/9/43/3

17 NAI (Home Political)/37/9/43/107-113

18 Kumar, *Book on Trial*, 68

19 NAI (Home Political)/37/9/43/15

20 IOR/L/P&J/5/246/8

21 IOR/L/P&J/5/259/44

published extracts from Chapter Fourteen, so as (in the words of one intelligence report) to “nullify the effects of the Sind Ban.”²² As late as July 1944, the Hindu Mahasabha believed that an outright ban on the *Satyarth Prakash* had been averted.²³

Events soon proved otherwise. That October, the Government of Sind proscribed Chapter Fourteen under Rule 41 of the 1939 Defence of India Act (discussed below), thus inaugurating the second phase of the controversy.²⁴ Henceforth, it would be illegal to print a full copy of the book in the province. The response was immediate and effusive. As one government memo laconically observed, “[c]ommunal feelings have not been improved” by the statute. The “Hindu press... reacted violently,” presenting the ban as a “foretaste of Pakistan” and calling for a *satyāgraha* campaign against the Sindh government.²⁵ Conferences, publications, telegrams, and letters (including one to Jinnah himself) proliferated—although, importantly, some Hindu groups, including the Sanatan Dharma Sabha, refused to lend their support to the effort.²⁶

The furor subsided by late December. In April 1945, Dow declared the controversy “moribund.”²⁷ In August, the Sindh government modified the ban so that it applied only to copies in Arabic, Sindhi, Urdu, and English, but not to “editions printed in scripts not used by Muslims.” This compromise position (which reifies the very religious and linguistic fault-lines that it purports to manage) apparently “pleased neither party.”²⁸

Our third act begins over a year later, when, in September 1946, the Defence of India Act lapsed. With it went the ban. A fracas ensued. On October 10, the Sind government renewed the ban—this time under Section 99-A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which, thanks to a 1920s amendment, allowed the forfeiture of texts promoting enmity between different classes of citizens.²⁹ Now government could confiscate copies of the book “wherever found,” including “all other documents containing copies, reprints or translations of, or extracts from, Chapter XIV.”³⁰ Not surprisingly, this measure proved unpopular, prompting public statements not only from Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha leaders, including V. D. Savarkar and Madan Mohan Malaviya, but also from prominent Congress figures like M. K. Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. The following January, Narayan Swamiji Maharaj (the octogenarian President of the International Aryan League) traveled from Delhi to Karachi to execute the long-threatened *satyāgraha* campaign, with the help of other Arya Samaj leaders from U.P., Rajputana and Malwa, and Punjab. Lasting for one week, the *satyāgraha* opened with an announcement that the protestors

22 IOR/L/P&J/5/246/9; NAI (Home Political)/37/9/43/38

23 NMML/HMS/C-43/1943-44/221

24 Chandra, *Case*, 30, 50-51

25 IOR/L/P&J/5/247/20-21

26 Chandra, *Case*, 54-62; Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 440

27 IOR/L/P&J/5/261/106-107

28 IOR/L/P&J/5/261/58-63

29 Chandra, *Case*, 82; Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations*, 62-64

30 Kumar, *Book on Trial*, 69

were illegally in possession of the Sindhi *Satyarth Prakash* and continued with public recitations (*kathās*) from Chapter Fourteen in Karachi bazaars. When the Sindh government declined to take action against either offense, the Arya Samaj declared itself victorious.³¹

If this was a victory, it was a fleeting one. This was January 1947. Soon, the calculus of communalism would change decisively. As Partition approached, the *Satyarth Prakash* controversy faded quickly from view. The general mood the next August, as the Sindh Hindu Sabha scrambled to protect Hindu pilgrimage sites now in Pakistan, was one of “despondency.”³² Arya Samajis, who were losing some of their most valuable Lahore property (including the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College), likely felt the same.³³

This late colonial controversy is a part of a complex social history specific to Sindh, a peripheral province that had never been fully integrated into the imperial economy. Its persistent class conflict between urban merchants and rural laborers was religiously coded: the former, often Gujarati, were Hindu; the latter, increasingly aware of their Sindhi identity, were Muslim.³⁴ Here, however, my interest is not in how regional social conflicts were used to consolidate national religious identities, nor in how the provincial and central governments decided which of them was ultimately responsible for regulating religious offense. Rather, I want to focus on the material object ostensibly at the center of this affair. What is it about *the book* as a medium that lent this controversy its particular texture?

UNBINDING THE PUBLIC

Print publics have a strange relationship to their own physicality. Convened by fragile, flammable paper, they have classically understood themselves as serenely immaterial, a realm of purely discursive reason that necessarily excludes the embodied particularity of everyday life. Even so, and from the eighteenth century forward, print objects were central to how publics were imagined. Print was impersonal and, even with a name or pseudonym attached to it, constitutively anonymous: it scrubbed its public of the social details that comprised personal relationships, traditional or otherwise. Consequently, print collectivity was founded on an impersonal principle of *circulation* rather than a personal principle of *affiliation*. If you sauntered into an Enlightenment coffee house and picked up the copy of the *Spectator* from the table, you were suddenly a part of its public—at least until you set it down again. No need even to tell it your name.³⁵

Print publics are also necessarily *unbounded*. The reader of a given book never knows where it has been, where it might go, or who has been thumbing its pages. Because the precise limits of a book’s circulation can never be known, the public that it convenes can seem limitless—it being the constitutive indeterminacy of the print public that lends it its aura of universalism. But if “the public” seems infinite, the print objects that undergird it do not. They decay and burn. They are limited by the language of their publication, the speed of their distribution, and the quality of their binding. Pretending otherwise is futile. When S. Chandra catalogued all extant editions of the

31 Chandra, *Case*, 94-95, 150-155

32 NMML/HMS/P-110/1947/15-17

33 Jones, “Arya Samaj,” 51

34 Ansari, *Life After Partition*, 17-40

35 Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*

Satyarth Prakash in his 1947 account of the Sindh “case,” he calculated that there were well over a half million copies of the book in print. This number is misleading. Many or even most of these books, some of which dated to the previous century, would have been lost, worm-eaten, or falling to pieces. If crumbling paper is what founds the community of Aryas— a community implicitly defined by Chandra via its affective relationship to the text of the *Satyarth Prakash*— it is a fragile community indeed.

A book ban offers one possible solution to this problem. By eliminating the book as a physical object, it alters the relationship between the book’s actual and its potential circulation. Books, as literary theorist Michael Warner tells us, circulate limitlessly only in principle. Nonetheless, their always-unrealized potential for unbounded circulation constitutes their social field and the political imaginaries that arise from it. By disencumbering the book of its materiality, the ban brings the book’s circulatory potential into clearer view. Partisans of a banned book love nothing more than to discuss all the places their beloved text *would* go if only it were legal. Hovering ghostlike over the scene of its own exclusion, the banned book can travel as far as human fantasy will take it.

Throughout the *Satyarth Prakash* affair, phantom books seemed to have wielded more power than their physical counterparts, beginning with the rumor that prompted the initial ban. The Arya Samaj, it was said, had arranged to publish thousands of copies of the *Satyarth Prakash* in Sindh, with the “obvious intent of popularizing the book and offending Muslims.”³⁶ To avert this scenario, the government proscribed the book. Although the threatened textual deluge seems never to have materialized, it was, arguably, beside the point. What mattered more was the fantasy of rampant textual circulation contained within the rumor itself. Copies of the *Satyarth Prakash* continued to appear and disappear throughout the affair. When the Karachi Jail Library conscientiously removed the book from its collection, for example, the Hindu Mahasabha protested and dutifully mailed several more copies to the prison for the “daily reading” of jailed Arya Samajis. These seem to have vanished as well.³⁷ Here, hydra-like, several copies of the *Satyarth Prakash* sprout to replace a single missing book. Textual absence incites the production of new textual objects, as well as novel textual practices like the “daily reading” prescribed to these Arya prisoners.

Print may not, as is sometimes alleged, have marked a point of radical rupture with the pre-colonial past. Nonetheless, precisely because colonial writers rhetorically positioned print as having produced such a rupture, it became an important means for reimagining earlier social and cultural forms. One result, as many scholars have argued, was the significantly flattened sense of religious identity associated with modern “enumerated” communities.³⁸ In addition to contrasting these communities to pre-colonial forms of collectivity, however, we should also differentiate among the assorted social imaginaries internal to the colonial period itself. After all, as William Mazzarella has recently argued, the “bounded symbolic order” promulgated by the ethnographic state was sharply at odds with the “open edge of mass publicity” associated with modern media. Where the state sought to map India in terms of distinct and carefully circumscribed communities, mass publicity tended to unbind the social, tipping it outward into the open space of the circulating textual object. One version of the resulting tension is apparent in every cinema hall, which necessarily holds both a “public” (the set of abstracted viewers of *Rājā Hariścandra*, formally interchangeable with all other

36 IOR/L/P&J/5/260/23

37 NMML/ HMS/P-33/1944/58, 71, 148

38 Kaviraj, *Imaginary Institution*; Gilmartin and Lawrence, *Beyond Turk and Hindu*

such viewers) and a “crowd” (several hundred human bodies gathered in the dark).³⁹

Another, I would argue, is embedded in the notion of “the Hindu public”—a phrase that simultaneously suggests a bounded group of Hindus, who can be identified as such regardless of what they are reading or viewing, and the anonymously open-edged audience of “Hindu” texts and images in their unpredictable circulation. The “Hindu public” does not denote an empirical object so much it raises a set of unresolvable questions about how religious identities are made and unmade in the era of mass media: Is a Muslim reader of the *Satyarth Prakash* part of the Hindu public? If any given reader picks up a text addressed to Hindus, is she rhetorically positioned as a “Hindu” for as long as she continues to read?

Arya Samajis were undoubtedly obsessed with numbers, expending a great deal of effort in “reconverting” Muslims and claiming Dalits and tribals for the Hindu fold. In the demographically driven world of separate electorates, the political implications of such efforts were clear. Even so, many Arya Samajis remained ambivalent about the bounded symbolic order that numbers seemed to imply. For example, in a 1945 tract one C. Parameswaran reiterated the by-then commonplace claim that Hinduism was a “universal” and Islam an “ethnic” faith.⁴⁰ Mere “tribal and sectarian ideas of God,” he explains, are different in kind from “Religion” proper, which is necessarily universal in scope. This taxonomic device is transparently polemical, allowing Parameswaran to disqualify Islam from inclusion in the category “Religion.” What is interesting is how he configures his taxa. To distinguish between tribal faiths and universal religions, Parameswaran suggests, we should assess how a faith’s scripture hails its public. When a Muslim denies the “non-Musalman’s right to interpret the Qoranic teachings,” he “forgets that he thereby forfeits his other claim that the Qoran is a world-scripture or that it is meant for all mankind.”⁴¹ Scripture, that is, cannot have it both ways. It is either universalizable, hailing all readers in identical fashion, or it is identitarian, a circumscribed text of merely local significance. According to Parameswaran, the *Satyarth Prakash* hails an undifferentiated public in precisely this way. Dayanand was a “world teacher” who conceived of humanity as a “single whole” in which the “almost countless distinctions and differences which are very important to the common man... disappear and cease to exist.”⁴²

This claim, of course, is misleading. Although in principle anybody *could* pick up a copy of the *Satyarth Prakash*, in actuality only certain kinds of readers *would* be inclined to do so. Arya Samajis liked to insist that the book was available in the markets for even Muslims to buy, but actual Muslims (for obvious reasons) tended to refrain. Despite their open edge, print publics remain embedded in and constrained by their social fields, bounded by other forms of collectivity. Parameswaran elides the distinction between print’s formal generality and its social locatedness and does so to good rhetorical effect. In positioning Hinduism as a “universal” religion, after all, his aim is to assert its difference from and superiority to Islam. No matter how strenuously he might

39 Mazzarella, *Censorium*, 37-38; Dirks, *Castes of Mind*

40 For an extended discussion of how Arya Samaji deployment of this Victorian taxonomic device shifted during the first half of the twentieth century, see Adcock, *The Limits of Tolerance*, 61-112

41 C. Parameswaran, *Sind Ban on Satyarth Prakash: A Rational Demand for its Removal*, 39. The pamphlet is contained in NAI (Home Political): 37/9/43/114-160. For a review of it, see Ārya, 27 May 1945, p. 3. There were, in fact, groups in early 1940s Punjab that petitioned the state to prevent non-Muslims from publishing or selling the Qur’an. See IOR/L/P&J/5/246/23, 49

42 Paramesvara, *Sind Ban*, 4.

insist on the universality of the Vedas, they remain inextricably tied to a particular community's identity—and this is precisely the point.

The unbounded public to which Parameswaran appeals here was not, however, simply illusory. Rather, it was a structural feature of mass publicity as cultural form. Although always unrealized, it was implicit in the imaginary of print circulation. What is more, thanks to legal regulations introduced by the British state, this unbounded imaginary was assuming a new sort of reality during this period.

FEELING LEGAL

Between the 1780s and the 1940s, the British colonial state enacted a series of statutes that regulated print according to several distinct, if sometimes overlapping, principles. These included sedition, obscenity, libel, blasphemy, and religious offense.⁴³ Two main laws governed the last of these. Section 298 of the Indian Penal Code (1860), criminalized “uttering words, &c., with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of any person.”⁴⁴ Section 295-A, meanwhile, was added to the Code in 1927, after the *Rangilā Rasūl* affair, to correct for the fact that 298 only criminalized spoken offense. The new law prohibited *any* representation—written, spoken, or visual—designed to “outrage” religious feelings.⁴⁵

Notably, neither of these laws was applied during the *Satyarth Prakash* affair. Instead, the Sindh government invoked the 1939 Defence of India Act. Modeled on Britain's Emergency Powers Defence Act, this legislation granted the state special wartime powers “to ensure the public safety,” including the power to censor any publication deemed “prejudicial” or “likely... to promote feelings of enmity and hatred between different classes of His Majesty's subjects.”⁴⁶ During the early 1940s, the Act was used to suppress communist anti-war publications.⁴⁷ It was also, apparently, a convenient means of reducing the burden of proof demanded by the statutes regarding religious offense, in that it granted the state executive power to decide unilaterally whether a given text endangered the peace.

Just because Sections 298 and 295A were not in force during the Sindh affair, however, does not mean that they were not in play. Indeed, this controversy indicates the extent to which a thriving *extra-legal legal culture* shaped the regulation of religious criticism in late colonial India.⁴⁸ In his 1946 statement, for example, M. K. Gandhi held that the Sindh ban was “calculated to wound the susceptibilities of Arya Samajists all the world over.” The immediate reference here is to the 1946 ban renewal, which charged the book with having “hurt the religious susceptibilities of Muslims.”

43 Barrier, *Banned*, 4; Mazzarella and Kaur, *Censorship in South Asia*, 14

44 Morgan and Macpherson, *The Indian Penal Code*, 220-221

45 Barrier, *Banned*, 99-102; Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations*, 62-71; Nair, “Beyond the Communal 1920s”

46 Ayyar, ed., *Defence of India Act*, 1, 86. The language here echoes that of I.P.C. Section 153A, which was used during the 1920s to censure religiously offensive publications.

47 Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency*; Bhattacharya, “India: 1900-1947,” 1163

48 I want to thank Cassie Adcock, who offered this formulation in a response to an earlier version of this paper.

Gandhi's choice of verb ("to wound"), meanwhile, recalls Section 298. Such legal allusions were not only commonplace during the controversy; they were essential to how it unfolded.

Thomas Macaulay had penned the first draft of Section 298 in the 1830s. His hope was that the law would have a pedagogic effect, eventually training the colonized to discipline their religious sensitivities so as to become "manly," agentive subjects.⁴⁹ Such laws, however, did not disseminate the liberal norm of the self-possessed individual, as Macaulay might have anticipated. Instead, they introduced slippages between individual and collective affect, as well as between "private" emotion and the legal apparatus of the state. While Section 298 is worded to protect the religious feelings of "any person," in the singular, its clear intent is to offer protection to groups. The religious person posited by the Code thus stands in for religious collectivity. Religious feelings, no longer properly interior or even interiorizable, become dispersed throughout a community defined in terms of religion. Affect imbricates the solitary believer with the feeling community (and vice versa) and cements the link binding both believer and community to the legal structures of the colonial state.

The legislation that granted religion its legal immunity from certain kinds of criticism thus did so by inscribing affect into the very grain of the law. But affect, of course, could not be contained there. Rather, these statutes seem to have established affect as a key link among law, politics, and religion—a link that would be deployed by the many controversialists who sought to inflame the public over the *Satyarth Prakash* issue. During the affair, Hindu and Muslim voluntary organizations like the Muslim League, the Arya Samaj, and the Hindu Mahasabha worked hard to disseminate legal language among their respective constituencies. They thus produced a structure of feeling in which religious affect would be narrated in terms that were politically legible. Here we see how *affect* as pre-linguistic, pre-personal intensity is captured by cultural codes and channeled toward particular ends in being narrated as *emotion*.⁵⁰

One could have observed this process at work in the chapter meetings of the Hindu Mahasabha. Overwhelmingly these groups resolved (to quote from a Nagpur meeting) that the *Satyarth Prakash* had "injured their feelings grievously."⁵¹ After collating these resolutions, the national Mahasabha could with some justification claim to represent the "high feelings of the 30 crores [300 million] of Hindus" on the topic.⁵² Of course, in representing Hindus' "feelings," the Mahasabha also necessarily shaped those feelings. When a group of men gathers together to legislate collective emotion via the ritualized, bureaucratic genre of the parliamentary resolution, they do so at considerable remove from the messy affective terrain of everyday devotional life.

The "injured feelings" thus produced exhibit a distinctive blend of the affective and the administrative. Within the Hindu Mahasabha papers, expressions of emotional injury slide with remarkable ease into discussions of mundane bureaucratic matters, such as the shipment of paperwork to branch offices or the regularity with which members need to fill out pledge forms.⁵³ As scholars have noted, religious organizations in colonial India tended to replicate the administrative structure of the colonial state in their geographic divisions, their use of paperwork, and their appeals

49 Ahmed, "Specters," 178-80

50 Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual*, 26-28

51 NMML/ HMS/C-57/1944/174

52 NMML/ HMS/C-43/1943-44/165

53 NMML/ HMS/P-33/1944/13

to the logic of “representation.”⁵⁴ Here, we see how these civil bureaucracies mediated between the state and the social body by extending the legal idiom of “wounded feelings” as means of organizing collective affect and rendering it as bureaucratized emotion. This bureaucratization was, of course, politically expedient. The Hindu Mahasabha used the *Satyarth Prakash* ban to mobilize its desired electoral base, incorporating its protests against the ban into a well-calibrated arsenal of complaints that relied on technologies of publicity to produce outrage in the public—and indeed to constitute its public around outrage as political affect.

That the Hindu Mahasabha should use the law of tolerance to excite more religiously offensive speech is not surprising. Rather, it is a predictable effect of the law itself. As Asad Ali Ahmed explains, by demanding that the religiously aggrieved prove their emotional injury to the state, colonial law creates “an unstable dynamic of incitement and containment” in which the very regulation of “wounded attachments and religious passion can conversely constitute them.”⁵⁵ Much the same has been said for censorship more generally: all too often, it just excites more speech. Colonial controversialists knew this all too well. As Karachi’s *Sind Observer* observed in 1944, “thousands... who had not known the existence of the 14th chapter are now voraciously clamoring to read the contents.”⁵⁶ Far from a purely repressive mechanism, then, censorship should be understood as a “generative technology of truth” that works in tandem with, rather than in opposition to, publicity. Together, these mutually constitutive tactics constitute the field of what William Mazzarella and Raminder Kaur term “cultural regulation.”⁵⁷

What this controversy helps us to see is the way in which this regulatory function was distributed across a wide range of institutional sites in late colonial India. The state remained symbolically primary, as suggested by the prominence of the legal language of emotional injury; but the ready availability of this language also meant that other institutions could lay claim to legalistic regulatory power. The Hindu Mahasabha, with its bureaucratic claim to emotional injury, was one such entity. M. K. Gandhi positioned the self-regulating subject of religious “toleration” as another. As he reflected, via an allusion to Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*,

The virtue of toleration is never strained, especially in matters of religion. Differences of religious opinion will persist to the end of time; toleration is the only thing that will enable persons belonging to different religions to live as good neighbours and friends. Religion never suffers by reason of the criticism—fair or foul—of critics; it always suffers from the laxity or indifference of its followers.⁵⁸

Gandhi’s “Tolerance ideal,” as C. S. Adcock has shown, took shape in opposition to the allegedly intolerant proselytizing activities of the Arya Samaj; that he uses this ideal here to protect

54 Zavos, *Emergence of Hindu Nationalism*; Viswanathan, “Ordinary Business”

55 Ahmed, “Specters of Macaulay,” 173

56 Chandra, *Case*, 121

57 Mazzarella and Kaur, *Censorship in South Asia*, 5-9

58 Gandhi’s allusion to *The Merchant of Venice* is telling. Just as Shylock’s refusal to forgive Antonio his debt of a pound of flesh allows the implicitly Christian virtue of “mercy” to assert its hegemony over Jewish “legalism” within Shakespeare’s play, so does “tolerance,” positioned as an implicitly Hindu virtue, lay claim to Indian Muslims, who are situated as the occasion for the cultivation of virtue in the normatively Hindu subject. For a further exploration of how the figure of “the Jew,” as paradigmatic religious minority, inflected the politics of tolerance in South Asia, see Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*.

the Arya Samaj *from* intolerance is thus a notable reversal.⁵⁹ Just as important, however, is the way in which Gandhi promotes a politics of ascetic self-rule that disrupts the totalizing power of the modern state. Rather than imposing laws that regulate religion, he suggests, the state should allow religion to regulate itself. As he explained in an earlier letter, he hoped that the Arya Samaj would publish a revised *Satyarth Prakash*, voluntarily expunging it of all its “ungenerous criticism of other religions.” State censorship, he insisted, is “a violation of the religious freedom of the citizen.” Self-censorship, he implied, is not.⁶⁰

As Wendy Brown has stressed, tolerance, is a “technology of domestic governmentality” that is never merely an individual virtue or practice. Tolerance “brings into being” a particular kind of subject and particular type of social order, and it work in tandem with state and non-state institutions in doing so.⁶¹ By proposing tolerance as a means of resolving religious controversy, Gandhi positions the tolerant subject as an agent of cultural regulation, set within a regulatory arena that both includes and exceeds her. The tolerant person stoically ignores religious insults and thus blocks the circulation of inflamed feeling. Her assiduous attention to her own religious virtue, far from privatizing religion, situates “practice” as a tactic within a socio-political field that her localized “conduct” helps to manage.

In a 1945 letter to the Viceroy, Hugh Dow refuted arguments for the unrestrained “free expression of opinion” by quoting Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (“the last word on this subject”): “For the actions of men proceed from their opinions, and in the well-governing of their opinions consisteth the well-governing of men’s actions in order to their peace and concord.” Glossing this passage as justifying state suppression of public opinion, Dow conjectures that “the Nazis would approve” of Hobbes’ sentiment. Even so, he insists, state regulation of public opinion is necessary in “undeveloped” India, where people do not regulate themselves.⁶² Dow clearly failed to see the extent to which the modern state’s governance of “opinions” had altered the cultural field within which those opinions emerged. People in late colonial India not only governed themselves; they did so in a way that blurred the line between sovereign law and social practice in a quintessentially modern manner. Neither public nor private, “governed” or bureaucratized emotions interlinked assorted agents of cultural regulation, ranging from Gandhi’s ascetic subject to the colonial state itself. Articulated in terms of colonial law, these emotions also coalesced around a particular object: the printed book. It is to that object that we now turn.

SECULARISM AND SCRIPTURE

Players from virtually all sides of the affair glossed it as a crisis of secularism. It is not surprising that Jawaharlal Nehru should diagnose the controversy as having “raised larger issues of civil liberty and religious freedom” (“as a firm believer in civil liberties,” Nehru was “inevitably

59 Adcock, *Limits of Tolerance*, 8

60 NAI (Home Political)/37/9/43/45

61 Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 87

62 IOR/L/P&J/5/261/33-34

opposed to it”).⁶³ More remarkable is that the Arya Samaj, routinely depicted as a forbearer of the theocratic Hindu right, should do so.

Throughout the early twentieth century, Arya Samajis regularly invoked the principle of “non-interference” in religion that had, in theory, guided British rule in the subcontinent since its proclamation by Queen Victoria in 1858.⁶⁴ The Sindh *Satyarth Prakash* affair was no exception. As early as June 1943, the Mahasabha telegraphed the Sindh premier to dissuade him from “interference [in] religious matters.”⁶⁵ After the ban was imposed, the Ārya cited the non-interference principle to rouse its readership, complaining in 1945 that “the Sindh provincial Muslim League government has not yet taken back the ban on the fourteenth chapter of the *Satyarth Prakash*, nor has the Indian government taken special action to retract the order in accordance with the British government’s ‘principle of religious neutrality’” (*dharmik taṭasthatā kī nīti*).⁶⁶

The question of translation is key here. During the colonial period, the word *dharma* shifted meaning to more closely approximate the English *religion*, increasingly ceding its hold over the “laws” and “duties” that governed economics, politics, and other “secular” domains.⁶⁷ Equating *dharma* to *religion* had clear strategic use for Hindu groups keen to claim the protections afforded the latter. But claiming “religious” status also entailed certain contradictions for institutions intent on critiquing colonial rule. Take, for example, the Patiala’s Hindu Sabha’s condemnation of the *Satyarth Prakash* ban as a “major obstacle to the religious freedom (*dhārmik svatantratā*) of the Hindus.”⁶⁸ The key phrase (“religious freedom”) is an obvious English-Hindi calque, which appeals simultaneously to the nationalist desire for “self-rule” (*svatantratā*) and to the secularist lexicon of the colonial state. The Patiala Sabha thus predicates its freedoms on the authority of the very state that it is claiming freedom from.

Indeed, religion in colonial India was arguably never more tethered to the state than when it professed its independence from it. As a growing scholarship has demonstrated, legal secularism consistently falters in its effort to protect religion because before it can do so it must first define the object of its protection, differentiating (for example) between “religious” traditions and “cultural” customs. Secular law thus *has* to intervene in religion by circumscribing and defining the properly “religious” as that which the law, by definition, excludes.⁶⁹ In colonial India, of course, the state intervened in religion routinely and quite directly, as through the reconstitution of Hindu and Muslim law. But it also exerted an indirect influence on religion precisely by cordoning it off from state interference.

Voluntary societies like the Arya Samaj, which echoed and extended the state’s bureaucratic logic, helped to reorganize Hindu devotional culture from the ground up so that it would be more readily legible as “religious.” They did this via a set of interrelated terms through which

63 13 October 1945, in Bright, ed., *Before and After Independence*, 251-252

64 Adcock, *Limits of Tolerance*

65 NMML/HMS/C-43/1943-44/231

66 Ārya, 4 February 1945, p. 3

67 Adcock, “Sacred Cows”

68 NAI (Home Political)/37/9/43/175

69 Sullivan, *Impossibility of Religious Freedom*

religion, as an object of polythetic classification, was defined.⁷⁰ Most pertinent here is the category “scripture.” In his 1946 statement, Gandhi expressed a common sentiment: because the *Satyarth Prakash* “enjoys the same status” as the Bible and Qur’an, it cannot be banned by a secular state. A “ban on contemporaneous controversial literature” might be justifiable; but it is always, Gandhi contended, “mischievous to ban a scriptural book.”⁷¹

Had he lived to hear it, this claim would surely have surprised Swami Dayanand Saraswati. After all, Dayanand spent the final years of his life translating the Vedas into Hindi and publishing them in book form so that they would be as accessible to readers as the Bibles and Qur’ans plied by his Muslim and Christian adversaries. By the 1940s, apparently, the rhetorical position of the Vedas had changed. While the *Ārya* does extol them as the “the best of all books” (*sarvasreṣṭh pustak*), it is the *Satyarth Prakash* that it repeatedly refers to as a “religious scripture” (*dharmik granth*).⁷² The legal implications of this shift are clear. To claim the *Satyarth Prakash* as the “the holy Bible of the Aryas” (as the principal of the Karachi Dayanand Anglo-Vedic High School put it) was to protect it from state interference.⁷³ Early on in the affair, Sindh bureaucrats questioned whether they could legally proscribe the text if it was deemed scriptural.⁷⁴ Ultimately, they issued the ban anyway, but in leaving this question unresolved, they also left it available for appropriation in the controversy that ensued.

Ambiguity around the precise legal status of scripture suggested the possibility of banning more sacred books. In a comment on the Sindh affair, V. D. Savarkar threatened to have the Qur’an proscribed in Bombay because its denunciation of non-Muslims as “Kaffirs” hurt Hindus’ religious feelings.⁷⁵ Other commentators fretted that the list of banned books could expand exponentially. “Today it is the *Satyarth Prakash*, tomorrow the Gita’s turn could come, and then the day after tomorrow there will be fear for the Bible.”⁷⁶ Paranoid as it is, this scenario is also more than mere fear mongering. It points to a fundamental problem that scripture poses for secularism. Scriptural books make all kinds of statements that could be taken as religiously offensive (or seditious, or obscene), but these statements cannot be prosecuted because scripture, by definition, falls outside the law.

By this reading, the *Satyarth Prakash*’s insults to Islam are actually less problematic than its ambiguous genre. Having defined scripture in opposition to “contemporaneous” literature, Gandhi is at pains to stress the venerability of Dayanand’s book, which was just seventy years old in the

70 Smith, *Imagining Religion*

71 Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 86, 36-37.

72 *Ārya*, 3 June 1945, p. 2; 4 February 1945, p. 7. The *Ārya* seems to have used “*dharmik granth*” and “*dharm granth*” more or less interchangeably to refer to religious scripture, even though “*dharmgranth*” is now the standard usage. In the article quoted here, the phrase “*dharmik granth*” is grammatically parallel to the “religious rights” (*dharmik adhikāraṃ*) claimed by the Aryas; it thus works rhetorically to emphasize the connection between scripture and the secularist protection afforded to religion.

73 Chandra, *Case*, 90-91

74 Chandra, *Case*, 22; NAI (Home Political)/37/9/43/3

75 10 December 1944, in Savarkar, *Historic Statements*, 147-149

76 *Ārya*, 15 April 1945, p. 2

1940s. His argument is less than persuasive. But the real problem is that he has to make it at all. Once the contingency of “scripture” becomes visible, the category threatens to unravel. Scripture’s exceptionality does not inhere in the text; it derives from the sovereign authority of the secular state, which can in principle decide at any time to revoke a given text’s exceptional status.

One solution to this problem is to insist on the importance of non-state agents of cultural regulation in defining scripture, as through particular reading practices. Savarkar provided one model for this in a 1943 letter. “Every gospel or religious book,” he argues, must inevitably “controvert” those religions that “run counter to it” insofar as it asserts the “absolutely fundamental” truth of its own “body of opinion.” The *Satyarth Prakash* does this, he says. So does the Qur’an, which annuls “all other religious books” in claiming that it “alone is the last word of God.” Religious texts, it seems, are those that refuse dialogue, thus entering uneasily into a liberal public defined by its predilection for debate. This does not mean that scriptures must remain private, only that how they become public must be carefully managed. According to Savarkar, “all these holy or religious books should be read with *mutual tolerance*.... Every person should be quite free to accept that part of the book which appeals to his reason or satisfies his spiritual longings and to reject what stands contrary to his beliefs” (emphasis mine).⁷⁷ Scripture, in short, requires a special reading strategy. To read tolerantly is to place the discursive content of a text in brackets. The reader can take what she likes and respectfully ignore the rest. If scripture, in its polemical refusal to recognize other “opinions,” precludes public dialogue, one can nonetheless find a place for it in public by eliminating its communicative function.

Savarkar’s model of *tolerant reading*, arguably, resonates with Gandhi’s distinction between scripture and “contemporaneous controversial literature,” as outlined above. Where the latter falls within the regulatory purview of the state, the former does not—its sacred status demarcates it as precisely the sort of object that refuses state interference. In the context of the legal regulation of religious offense, notable implications follow. Scriptural books, Gandhi’s comments imply, cannot *offend* the public in the same way that contemporary controversial literature can. If scriptural words sting, they have been read wrongly, which is to say without the protective envelope afforded the reader by her posture of “tolerance” toward the text.

Secularism, in short, mandates that scripture remain a closed book. Such closure could moreover be convenient, especially for a text like the *Satyarth Prakash*. As Dow remarked, “the majority of Hindus have never read the offending chapter,” and those who have are “just as disgusted as any Muslim” at its contents.⁷⁸ In fact, it is striking that Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha documents almost never refer to any of the book’s actual contents. Even when Aryas are enjoined to memorize it, their ritual recitation of the text serves more of a performative than a communicative function. This secularist closure of scripture was, of course, precisely what Parameswaran decried in his 1945 tract, when he insisted that a truly religious text must address all readers in identical fashion. But even in their disagreement, Parameswaran, Savarkar, and Gandhi suggest the extent to which reading was positioned during this period as a practice of cultural regulation closely related to the proscription of offensive books by the state.

One could say that the *Satyarth Prakash* was placed under a double ban in the 1940s. On the one hand, the state forbade the circulation of the physical text; on the other, advocates of the text’s scriptural status defended its right to circulate physically while foreclosing the circulation

77 NAI (Home Political)/37/9/43/101; cf. NMML/HMS/C-43/1943-44/225

78 IOR/L/P&J/5/260/16

of its discursive contents. The first ban inclusively excluded the book from the colonial public, in that it convened a public around the controversial absence of the offending text. The second ban exclusively included it, ensuring that, even when available, the book could never be totally present.⁷⁹ It was through the doubled operation of these two bans that the *Satyarth Prakash* was catapulted to notoriety. Always at least partially absented from the public, it was in need of perpetual defense.

What, then, is the precise status of this strangely spectral text, reduced to a pure potentiality, a text that could be, but is not? As suggested above, a book ban highlights a text's potential for unlimited circulation. Unlike actual books, banned books seem able to go anywhere. They thus make explicit what we might, adapting a formulation from Brian Massumi, term a book's "implicit form"—that is, the "sum total of a thing's [potential] interactions minus the thing," its "relationality autonomized as a dimension of the real."⁸⁰ It was this implicit form that worried colonial law: Where *could* this book go? Whom *might* it offend? Under the law, such hypothetical scenarios acquired a kind of juridical reality. The result, I would suggest, was a subtle shift in the ontology of the book. Legal and extra-legal institutions worked to identify and explicitly define books' otherwise nebulous potential for circulation; in the process, they reified this potential, making the sum total of a book's potential interactions partly "autonomized" from the book as physical object. Consequently, a second or virtual book, comprised of organized lines of legal and affective force, came to double the *Satyarth Prakash*. When the actual book was banned, this double, as bureaucratically organized potentiality, stepped out from behind it to convene a public.

BANNING BOOKS, BURNING HEARTS

If this virtual book was a sort of fiction, so was the public that it hailed. After all, as Walter Ong once remarked, "the writer's audience is always a fiction." When we write, we project an imagined reader, creating a fictional role that actual readers come to inhabit. To read, then, is to "fictionalize" the self, to occupy the generality of a textual address that never "coincides with... actual life."⁸¹ For Ong, this fictively impersonal address is what defines text-publics and differentiates them from an orator's "audience." Print publics are more specific still, I would suggest, in their persistent association with the *mass* as a modern political form.

Consider the "pledge sheet" (*pratigya patra*) published in the *Ārya* in 1945. Apparently designed to circulate independently of the journal, it asks Arya Samajis to sign their names to the following statement: "Taking the Supreme Being, the Lord of Vows, as my witness, I declare that I accept Maharishi Dayanand's immortal *Satyarth Prakash* my holy religious scripture (*pavitra dharm granth*). To protect it, I will act in accordance with the orders of the *Satyarth Prakash* Protection Committee immediately on receiving them. I enter my name on the list of *satyāgrahis*." This pledge is followed by spaces for the respondent's name, age, father's name, current address, and other information.⁸² This is bureaucratic religion, *par excellence*. God as "Lord of Vows" (*vratpati*) is a sort of supreme notary who demands that his devotees offer up their personal data as a holy sacrifice.

79 This is an adaptation of Agamben, *Homo Sacer*

80 Massumi, *Parables*, 35

81 Ong, "Writer's Audience," 11-12

82 *Ārya*, 18 March 1945, p. 5

The pledge statement itself is simultaneously intimate and impersonal, hailing an addressee who necessarily sets aside his particularity in joining a public constituted by the anonymity of the printed journal. Here, the Ārya serves as a proxy for the banned *Satyarth Prakash*, which (were it not banned) would constitute its public similarly. The pledge sheet literalizes the collectivity constituted by textual circulation by demanding that each of its readers enter his name on the text itself. The presumed result, as we shall see, is an Ārya army.

What this pledge accomplishes formally and in a thoroughly bureaucratic idiom, other Ārya articles describe as emerging more spontaneously. As one article opines, “Today, in all of India, if you talk to any Ārya brother (*bandhu*), he will immediately turn the conversation to the ban placed on the fourteenth chapter of the *Satyarth Prakash* by the Sindh government.” Although he can keep polite conversation up for a time, patiently listening to you, suddenly “the fire in his heart starts to erupt (*apne hṛday kī āg ugalne lagtā hai*).... Sometimes he will insult Muslims and their leader Jinnah, sometimes he will curse the weak and cowardly rule of Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress.” Other times he will rage against the Ārya Samaji itself. But if you ask him what he has done—whether he has entered his name on the roll of *satyāgrahis*, whether “he has trained himself for the fight, whether he has practiced living with military discipline to withstand the trips to jail and practiced following his leader’s orders without talking back, the air will go out of his face. He will glance from side to side, and make up some excuse to hide his idleness and evade his responsibility.”⁸³

This is a striking scene. The conversation it describes is at once personal and anonymous. Addressing its reader in the second person, with the immediacy of the present tense, the article positions him as the attentive audience for its outraged Ārya everyman. This rhetorical strategy presents the latter’s anger at the *Satyarth Prakash* ban as an established empirical fact, when this anger is precisely what the article is trying to stoke: its everyman is a prescriptive, not a descriptive figure. It is all too clear that the person who should be glancing anxiously from side to side after realizing that he has failed to live up to his responsibilities as an Ārya is the reader—or, at least, the ideal reader (clearly male) that the article constructs for itself and projects onto whomever its actual readers might be.

The reader’s rhetorical position is thus fragmented. He is made to imagine himself sequentially in the position of each of the two Ārya “brothers,” thus enacting the implied formal equivalence of the two men: insofar as they are “brothers,” they are the same. In fact, *brother* seems inadequate to the sense that *bandhu* acquires in this passage. These friends are not “bound” to each other alone. Nor is their bond intimate and familial. Derived from the totality of possible Āryas, this bond depersonalizes friendship by rerouting it through political collectivity.

I would argue that the figure of the reader is decisive here, with the relationship reader-text providing the pattern for this strangely impersonal Ārya friendship. The first Ārya hails his newfound comrade in the same way that the article has just hailed its reader: through the depersonalizing logic of the second person pronoun “you.” Prior to being asked what *he* personally has done, our fictive Ārya seems to have mistaken how texts address their readers, thinking that they are purely impersonal, hailing “anyone” but not him. During the conversation, he comes to realize that he himself *is* “anyone”; that is, that he must fit himself to the position of generality marked out by the text. The unease that results from this gap in identity writes itself onto his body as shame. He looks around him to see if there is anyone else nearby who might occupy the “you”

83 Ārya, 25 March 1945, p. 5

in his place. There is not. This text, however impersonal, addresses him alone.

Not incidentally, it is a missing book that occasions this conversation. Wherever two Aryas meet, the article implies, is a place where the banned book *should* be able to go. An Arya becomes an Arya insofar as he can occupy the subject position of a potential reader of the *Satyarth Prakash*, his particularity effaced by this printed text's necessarily impersonal mode of address. To be an Arya is to inhabit the generality of the textual "you." Structured by the circulatory logic of print publics, this Arya comradeship metastasizes easily. To facilitate the process of remaking other relationships on this textualized model, the article instructs the reader to send "a list of his friends" to the nearest Arya Samaj office immediately.

The same article goes on to predict that "hundreds of thousands of Aryan warriors eager to make every kind of sacrifice" will rally to the cause, organized into troupes by their local Arya Samaj chapters. Explicitly comparing the impending battle to the Mahābhārata, with the Muslim League cast as the Kauravas, the article reminds its reader how "the unjust ones were totally destroyed by the Aryan warriors the Pāṇḍavas."⁸⁴ As scripture (interlaced here with just the sort of *smṛiti* text that Dayanand had tried to desanctify), the *Satyarth Prakash* demands intense affective attachment. In the standard Arya formula, a scriptural text should be an object of "faith, love, and protection" (*śraddhā, prem, aur rakṣā*).⁸⁵ As circulating print object, its devotees are potentially legion. The book's would-be warrior is told to practice an ascetic discipline. "You" are to eat bland food, practice sleeping on the ground, and make arrangements for your family. You are also to begin learning the fourteenth chapter of the *Satyarth Prakash* "by rote" so that when the time comes "you can also propagate it orally."⁸⁶ In the standard Hindi idiom for rote learning (*kañṭhasṭh karnā*), the *Satyarth Prakash* has been placed in the Aryan warrior's throat. He cannot swallow it; he cannot expel it.

Lodged at the periphery of the public, the printed *Satyarth Prakash* functioned as an especially dense transfer point for the transmission of political affect. Scriptures, of course, routinely assume iconic as well as discursive functions, demanding adoring attention to their physical form as much as their theological content.⁸⁷ As we see during this controversy, even absent texts can demand adoration of this kind. Indeed, banned books invite an especially absolute form of loyalty from their readers, demanding that the devotee embody the book or become its proxy. The temperature at which a book burns matters less, it would seem, than the temperature at which it writes itself on the human heart.

In conclusion, we can see how the legal apparatus of the "ban" allowed controversialists to make good on previously unrealized potentialities of the print medium: only in virtual form could the *Satyarth Prakash* hail this army, defined by the banned book's field of potential circulation. Late colonial print Hinduism both courted and disavowed publicity's open edge, exploiting the conceptual gap between the enumerable community of Hindus and the unbounded print public to its own political advantage. The Aryan public was thus doubly bound, the product of an irresolvable tension between the structural generality of the text and the historical particularity of its readers.

84 Ārya, 25 March 1945, p. 5

85 NAI (Home Political)/37/9/43/97

86 Ārya, 25 March 1945, p. 5

87 James W. Watts, ed., *Iconic Books and Texts*

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