The Logic of Hatred and Textualisation of Cohesion: Revisiting Select Early Modern Bangla Sufi Texts

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> Into the bosom of the one great sea
> Flow streams that come from hills on every side.
> Their names are various as their springs,
> And thus in every land do men bow down
> To one great God, though known by many names.
>
> - Gover,ed. The Folk-songs of Southern India, 165

The paper proposes to diagnose the current climate of distrust, animosity and conflict across the globe and argues for an episteme of transcendence and cohesion. Empirically, it builds on the recent cases of majoritarian violence in contemporary India. The paper, however, situates the Indian case in the larger global and human logic of hating and distrusting the Other to look for ways of transcendence, possibilities and pathways for an *ethico-onto-epistemology* of living with difference. The paper, therefore, engages with the following questions: What convinces the perpetrators of violence to commit injury to the

other? What is the legitimising logic that "manufactures" and provides auto-immunity to the "murderous consent" of the majority? How do we transcend these realities and forge a new plank of cohesion? Are there literary-cultural and philosophical possibilities of supplementation with moments/thoughts of cohesion and shared grounds? How do Bengali Sufi texts help us in getting an answer to these questions? The paper would engage with texts like *Gyan Sagar* by Ali Raja, *Gyan Chautisha* by Syed Sultan and the anonymous *Yoga Kalandar* that offer a glimpse of possibilities and differentialities- a possible third space of counter-logic and an episteme of cohesion and conviviality.

The global rise of the right-wing is now common knowledge. The history of the present is marked by *otherisation*, hatred and violence. This is part of the dynamics of historical development. The vortex of socio-political, economic and cultural factors has produced this present crisis. The presence of new media of communication has also worsened the situation. However, if we look carefully at human history, we will notice that the history of cohesion has always been there along with the history of conflict. And this is also true of the present moment in which the cultures of violence are juxtaposed by extraordinary examples of fellowship and bonding. This paper is not another exegesis on right-wing violence, which has been brilliantly done by various scholars. The explanations and arguments of the scholars on majoritarian violence are, however, brought in to give a background to the core argument of the paper, which is to revisit the legacy of cohesion and conviviality as poetised in early modern Bengali Sufi poetry. This paper, therefore, is primarily focused on the textualisation of cohesion through an analysis of early modern Bengali Sufi texts that were marked by an ethos of inter-cultural engagement, dialogue and exchange of ideas. The said texts are selected because postcolonial studies usually do not engage with such vernacular texts, which, the paper contends, can contribute significantly to the larger debate on postcolonial/ decolonial futures.

Majoritarian Reasoning and the Indian Context

There is a global resurgence, with occasional setbacks, of the far-right throughout the first quarter of the twenty-first century. Donald Trump has come back to power in the USA; the Alternative for Germany (AFD) is part of the ruling coalition in Germany; the anti-immigration and nationalist parties have become a mainstream force in Hungary, Poland, France, and Switzerland; the Brexit (2020) in Britain; Netanyahu in Israel has presided over a genocide in Palestine backed by the far-right leaders like Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bazalel Smotrich; Erdogan in Turkiye has become a repeated phenomenon. The situation in the South Asian continent fares no better. While Narendra Modi has secured a third term in India, the situation in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar hardly offers any hope. Such cases make it evidently clear that the far right cuts across the usual epistemic and political divides, such as the Global North/Global South and the colonial/postcolonial, as right-wing political and cultural discourse has become a new global common sense. Although there are different socio-political and ideological contexts to the emergence and mainstreaming of the far-right parties in different countries, this paper contends that there are "typological connections" between different cases of majoritarian politics, and the Indian case can throw light on the global logic of hatred for the Other. The existing analytical tropes, such as *otherisation* or demonisation of a particular socio-cultural group, ideological mobilisation of the majority against a perceived, often imaginary, threat posed by the Other, still offer useful explanations. The genocidal intent fueled by a fear of the stranger works as a psychic and political drive behind the ethnos-oriented social imaginary, creating fertile ground for violence against the Other to contain the perceived threat. Such violence can take on various forms, from extra-judicial killings to discriminatory administrative measures.

The Indian scenario has been analysed from various perspectives, including right-wing populism (Gudavarthy, 2018), ethnic democracy (Jaffrelot, 2021), ethnocracy (Roy, 2021), and majoritarian politics

(Chatterjee, 2019), among others. Narendra Modi, through his Hindu-nationalist image, has established himself as the *Hindu hridaya samrat*. As theorised by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in a different context, the Hindu fanatic mobs in India are often equated with vox populi and ethnocentric views and narratives are engineered to consolidate the political hegemony of the ruling BJP. What we witness, therefore, is an ethnocratic/ majoritarian agenda giving credence to populist measures, which in turn sustains the ethnocratic state, leading to the socio-economic marginalisation, political disenfranchisement and cultural invisibilisation of the Muslims and other minorities in India. Such interplay between ethnocracy and populism is turning India into a postcolony (Mbembe 2001) where the structures of colonial power and regimes of being are reproduced and sustained.

Lynchings, Hate Speeches and Otherisation

The term "lynching" originated in the United States to designate the extrajudicial killing by the crowd of African Americans in the late 19th century. Since Narendra Modi came to power in 2014, there has been a sudden rise in incidents of gruesome killings by cow vigilante groups in India. As reports suggest, an overwhelming 97% of the cow-related lynchings since 2010 occurred after 2014 (India Spend, 2017). The report further suggests that 85% of those killed were Muslims, and in 27% of cases, the police filed cases against the victims themselves or the survivors. There was also a 41% rise in offences of promoting enmity between the religious groups between 2014-2017.

On 28 September 2015, a mob of villagers at Dadri, Uttar Pradesh, attacked the house of Mohammad Akhlaq at midnight on the suspicion that he was storing beef. The mob assembled after an alleged announcement by the priest of the local temple that a cow had been slaughtered, and the mob went on a rampage (The Hindu, 2015). Akhlaq died in the attack, and his son, Danish, was critically injured. In many ways, however, the gory violence that night was only the

beginning of the horror as several politicians seemed to support the lynching. The meat at Akhlaq's fridge was sent for autopsy, and when it was found to be mutton, the state government sent it for testing again to a different lab, where it was declared to be beef and based on that report, a case was filed against Akhlaq. Union Minister Mahesh Sharma characterised the Dardi lynching as a *hadsa* or an accident (Mishra, The New Indian Express, 2015). When Ravi Sisodia, a Dadri accused, passed away, Sharma visited his family and tweeted a picture of him with folded hands in front of the coffin of Sisodia. Sisodia, however, was draped in the Indian national flag, a symbol usually reserved for national heroes (Modi, Scroll, 2016). In spite of the brutal nature of the crime, all the Dadri accused have got bail (Scroll, 2018), and the Government of Uttar Pradesh seeks to withdraw the case against the accused (Kumar, The Hindu, 2025).

We can refer to the lynching of Pehlu Khan, a dairy farmer from Haryana, who was lynched on 1 April 2027 on the Jaipur-Delhi National Highway on suspicion of cow smuggling (Salam, Frontline, 2019), or of Junaid Khan, a 15-year-old, who was lynched on a train on 22 June 2017 while returning home after Eid shopping (The Hindu 2017). We can also mention many other cases of lynching or daily cases of harassment faced by ordinary Muslims on the transport system and in other places (SabrangIndia, 2019, Maktoobmedia, 2025). We would, however, restrict ourselves to the killing of Mohammad Akhlaq as it helps us metonymically understand the mechanism of hatred and *otherisation* of Muslims in India.

Apart from such cases of gruesome killings of ordinary Muslims by those labelled as "cow vigilantes," there have been hate speeches and public calls for genocide and ethnic cleansing of Muslims in India (Al Jazeera, 2021). Minister of State for Finance, Anurag Thakur, led the crowd during an address in 2020 in New Delhi, with the slogan "Desh ke gaddaro ko, goli maaro saalon ko" (Shoot the traitors of the country). He effectively characterised the Muslims of the country who

were protesting against the allegedly discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) as *gaddars* or traitors who need to be shot at. Thakur was later joined by Kapil Mishra, a leader of the BJP who allegedly incited the mobs to attack the protesting Muslims and Dalits. The Delhi police, however, ignored the complaints against Kapil Mishra (Singh, 2020). Prabodhanand Giri, the leader of Hindu Raksha Sena in Haridwar, asked his followers to emulate the military in Myanmar and undertake a *safai abhiyan* (cleanliness drive) of the Muslims in India (Al Jazeera 2021). This same majoritarian reasoning operates behind the popularity of measures, such as the so-called "bulldozer justice" by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath (Pandey 2022), the vilification campaign of the Muslims as responsible for spreading COVID-19 across the country (Apoorvanand, 2020), banning Muslim vendors in Hindu areas (Raj 2023; The Hindu 2023) and calls for a forceful Burqa ban (Khan, 2022).

The incidents of lynching described above seem to provide a classic case of what Agamben (1998) calls *bare life* – when somebody is divested of the protective rights of citizenship, and therefore he can be killed but not murdered as he is reduced to his biological life. Harsh Mander calls the lack of social outrage over the killing of Afrazul, a migrant worker from Malda, West Bengal, in Rajasthan, a famine of compassion and outrage (Mander et al, 2017). Aarti Sethi, while talking about the killing of Junaid, points out that a new social contract is reached in which the Hindus do not deem it necessary to witness the death of a Muslim boy as worthy to be witnessed. Aarti (2017) refers to the article by Kaunain Sheriff M to show how "the public lynching of a Muslim child becomes a social non-event in contemporary India." (Kaunain 2017) Aarti Sethi points at the heart of the issue when she writes-

> The affective alienation by which a gathered crowd of Hindus can lynch, break, stab, tear into pieces a Muslim boy, and then not see what is left, is because these Hindus do not think Muslims belong in the social body (Seth, 2017).

Such distancing of the Muslims from the social fabric and body-politics is what is turning the Muslims into, to use Spivak's idea in a different context, "resident aliens" (Spivak, 2020) who then can be shown the gate.

Logic of Hatred and Murderous Consent

The diagnosis of majoritarian violence on the Other in India demands a combination of multiple approaches, historical, anthropological and psycho-social, etc. The political-economic analysis of riots and other violence in India primarily focuses on the competition between the elites from opposing groups for political and economic dividends. In this analysis, the elites of a social group, religious or political, mobilise their respective group to consolidate their hold on the masses. While such explanations are important, they fail to take into account the psychological and emotional logic that convinces people to hate the Other. Building on the works of Jacob Rogozinski (2024), Hannah Arendt (1973), Sudhir Kakar (1996), Shiv Bishwanathan (2016), and Marc Crépon (2019) we might ask, how does the populist leader become a messiah for the majority? What produces the murderous consent of the masses against someone from the group deemed as the Other? What role does violence play in this?

Although hatred and other affects are considered "irrational" and transitory, a "fundamental affect such as hatred" possesses, writes Jacob Rogozinski, while analysing the *modus operandi* of violence in the European context of the witch hunts in the medieval period and the Reign of Terror after the French Revolution, a "determinate structure and it must be possible to understand its logic" (2024, 5). What, then, is the logic of persecutorial violence? Rogozinski thinks that "exclusionary and stigmatising violence often precedes persecutorial violence" (2024, 5). However, it is the persecutorial impulse that intensifies and radicalises violence, "sending to their death men and women who are considered unworthy of living" (2024, 5) and seeks to

erase "every trace of their existence" and their names and memory. Of the various mechanisms that constitute the logic of hatred, there is the demonisation of the victim, where the victim, both individually and collectively, achieves almost an archetypal image of a threat to society at large, which needs to be neutralised, excluded, and even eliminated. This "obsessive fear of the stranger in our midst" mobilises certain schemes by inserting them into power apparatuses (2024, 7). Rogozinski thinks that it is necessary to understand the *"passage from exclusion to persecution"* (emphasis original, 6) to understand the logic of hatred and the apparatuses of violence.

Sudhir Kakar (1996) analysed the Hindu-Muslim riot of Hyderabad that rocked the city in 1990. He focused on the "subjective experiential aspects of conflicts" to capture "the psychological experience of being a Hindu or a Muslim" when the two communities are in deadly confrontation with each other (Preface ix). Through extensive interviews with the figures associated with the conflict, and analysing the speeches of the group leaders, he points out how group identity is formed and channelised into murder against the Other. In a rapidly modernising world where the traditional group affiliations and ways of being are dismantled, the isolated individual finds anchorage in a newly constructed Hindu or Muslim identity. The individual is alert to the threat- real or imaginary- posed to the group identity, so much so that a threat to the group is perceived as a threat to the self. Kakar writes-

> Communalism as a state of mind, then, is the individual's *assertion* of being part of a religious community, preceded by a full awareness of belonging to such a community. The "We-ness" of the community is here replaced by the "We are" of communalism. This "We are" must inevitably lead to intolerance of all those outside the boundaries of the group. (1996, 191-192)

The meaning the footloose individual finds in the newly constructed group identity has a therapeutic dimension to it, and the individual is

ready to protect the group identity and the security it provides. Kakar, therefore, writes, "Riots do start in the minds of men, minds conditioned by our earliest inner experience of self-affirmation and assertion" (1996, 192).

Building on these insights of Rogozinski and Kakar, we may say that the *otherisation* of the Muslims in contemporary India is nearing a dead-end, and the violence, almost routine, on the Muslims, conceived in physical, verbal, cultural, or emotional terms, may be analysed as an assertion of the Hindu group identity over the enemy within. The gruesome cases of violence mentioned above get analytical valence when viewed from this logic of the construction of the self and the Other. The politically orchestrated fear of persecution of the Hindus and the fear that the Muslims will very soon overcome the population of the Hindus (Salam Frontline, 2021), however fallacious logically that might be in a country where Hindus constitute a whopping 80% of the population, creates a siege mentality and produces the "murderous consent" to violence against the Other. Thus, any political opportunist with a majoritarian Hindu nationalist agenda easily gets transformed into a messiah for the Hindus, as he is perceived as someone who would help them get rid of the Muslim threat and would handle the Muslim menace effectively. Thus, a Narendra Modi, a Yogi Adityanath or a Kapil Mishra becomes a national hero, creating an ecosystem of distrust and animosity. Thus, Akhlaq's home can be invaded on the mere suspicion that he is storing beef; Pehlu Khan can be murdered on the misgiving that he poses threat to Hindu religious identity by being a cattle exporter, and Yogi Aditya Nath can appeal for withdrawal of the cases against the murderers of Akhlaq (Kumar, The Hindu 2025) grossly violating his responsibility as the head of a state. In this climate of animosity and border-building, history becomes the biggest casualty. Thus, the past is often mobilised to suit the majoritarian agenda of the present and instances of consecration of Hindu temples in the past by Muslims rulers are selectively picked up to take revenge against the *Babar ke aulads* (sons of Babar, the Mughal emperor who invaded

India) although majority of Muslims of India are local converts to Islam (Kapur, 2022), and even a call for genocide can be openly made (Al Jazeera, 2021). The cultural invisibilisation of the Muslims has become a new strategy of the Hindu right in India as places bearing Muslim names are being changed (The Hindu 2018), chapters on medieval Muslim rulers are withdrawn from History books (Kaul, Frontline, 2025) and architectural structures, such as the Taj Mahal are being claimed as Hindu structures (Recently a Bollywood movie has been made with similar claim). Thus, the processes of exclusion of Muslims from the social and cultural imaginary of India are creating a fertile ground for persecution.

An analysis of the Muslim response to Hindu majoritarian politics, responses ranging from fear, bafflement and hopelessness, to aggressive identity assertion is beyond the scope of the paper. However, the community logic built on boundary formation and distrust of the Other perhaps marks the Hindu-Muslim relationship in general in contemporary India.

Counter Logic of Cohesion: Temporal Retreat to Early Modern Bengal

What is the way ahead, then? One way can be to look further into the entangled material and psycho-social factors that promote non-cohesion and distancing. The other option is to study the transcendentals, i.e., how, despite the material conditions and psycho-social factors of trigger-happiness and hate mongering, do we transcend these realities and forge a new plank of cohesion? There is no magic and certainty in this. This opposite pull between enmity and cohesion has been the composer of human history. And it would require centuries of efforts to create the psycho-social conditions and ethico-ontological churnings to overcome enmity and forge harmony and fellowship between humans. We might start with the question, has it got anything to do with the very facticity of the community sense? How do we belong to

communities and yet keep alive the necessary transcendental and auto-immunity of unmaking the community logic? Are there literary-cultural and philosophical possibilities of supplementation with moments/ thoughts of cohesion and shared grounds? How do Bangla Sufi sahitya or Sufi poetry traditions help us in getting an answer to these questions? In this context, I would like to bring in the early modern Sufi texts like *Gyan Sagar, Gyan Chautish*a or *Yoga Kalandar*. They can serve as examples or cultural logic of a community identity that is porous and marked by easy border-crossing and epistemic and cultural exchange. Now, these texts are not the be-all and end-all of every problem, but they do offer a glimpse of possibilities and differentialities. They hint at a community of texts that embraces a radically deconstructive auto-immunity and counter-logic of hatred.

Bengal as Cultural Palimpsest: Colonial Erasure and Decolonial Amnesia

Bengal can be viewed as an epistemic and cultural palimpsest. The intellectual history of Bengal harbours multilayered and plurivocal thought-geographies. The Buddhist, Hindu, Tantric, Nath, Sufi and other branches of Islamic thought in the pre-colonial period birthed a unique world of ideas marked by cultural exchange, tolerance and syncretism. The colonial and capitalist modernity created a rupture with the pre-colonial tradition while bringing in fresh ideas from the European traditions. The contestation over political power fueled mistrust and animosity, leading to the partition of Bengal in 1947. The post-partition history of Bengal is marked by a refugee crisis, a sense of loss, and disputes over political ideologies, identity claims, and social and cultural disharmony that sought to undermine the rich tradition of coexistence and mutual learning. We, therefore, need an epistemic digging into its pre-modern traditions to unravel some of its sedimented layers. This paper, therefore, proposes to go back to the medieval/ pre-modern Sufi tradition and focuses particularly on Ali Raja's *Gyan Sagar* and Syed Sultan's *Gyan Choutisha* and the anonymous *Yoga Kalandar* to

show how the epistemic cross-pollination in their works creates a syncretic ethos of pluralism and cohabitation.

Ali Raja and His *Gyan Sagar*

Although unknown beyond the scholars of pre-modern Bengali literature, Ali Raja's *Gyan Sagar* and Syed Sultan's *Nabibansha* or *Gyan Chautisha* are marvels of Bengali literature. *Gyan Sagar* is, as Abdul Karim Sahityabisarad writes, a "dorbeshi grontho" (a sufi text) that unhesitatingly and unceremoniously interweaves Hindu and Muslim religious ideas. Ali Raja or Kanu Wahid or Kanu Fakir, a Muslim fakir, wrote several Vaisnava padas or poems (included in Brajasundar Sanyal's *Musalman Vaisnava Kobi*) and two Shyama sangeet. Although this might puzzle us today, it perhaps harks back to a time when intellectual exchange and cross-pollination of ideas across religious traditions were not uncommon in Bengal. A Sufi text conceived as a dialogue between the Prophet and Ali about the esoteric knowledge, *Gyan Sagar* brings in references to various Hindu and Buddhist figures and ideas. As Abdul Karim Sahityabisarad writes, there has rarely been such a text in Bengali literature. Ali Raja or Wahed Kanu was from Chittagaon. He was a highly revered and wise fakir. The ordinary people knew him as Kanu Fakir. Although he was a fakir, he was, unlike other mendicants, married and had children; neither did he live naked. He was a householder and a renouncer simultaneously. Apart from *Gyan Sagar*, Kanu Fakir also composed two other books of poetry, *Siraj Kulup* and *Dhyan Mala*. Some scholars also assign to him the celebrated anonymous text Yoga Kalandar- the text on yoga manuals combining the Hindu Yogic ideas and practices with Sufi notions of *fana*, *hal* and *mokam manzil*. Abdul Karim also mentions of *Sathachakraveda*, which he might have written. He also wrote several Vaishnabha padas, as we have already mentioned. He also wrote two Shyama Sangeet or songs in praise of Goddess Kali. Ali Raja/ Kanu Fakir was the disciple of Shah Keyamuddin, who he claims inspired him to write his works. Although the currently available text is based on a copy, the exact date of the original text is hard to decide.

Gyan Sagar and the Agama Tatva: Inter-cultural Exchange of Ideas

The poem is written as a dialogue between the prophet and Ali. The prophet is addressing Ali to reveal to him the secret knowledge of spiritual progress.

> The prophet said, "O Ali! Listen to the sacred words."
> The agama tatva of the Lord narrated in a pleasing way.
> (Sharif 2011, 238)

The dialogue/ address form delineating the mystery of spiritual progress reminds us of the samvad between Shiva and Parvati, where Shiva is said to have instructed the agama knowledge to Parvati. Muhammad is said to be the last prophet. The sealing of prophecy has been a point of theological debate among Muslims. Muhammad Iqbal thought that the sealing of prophecy heralded the beginning of a new era, whereas Humayan Kabir talked about the importance of spiritual guides in the absence of the prophet. The poet of Bengal has suggested a beautiful solution to this problem. He accepts that Muhammad is the last prophet, but assigns the tasks of spiritual guidance, after Muhammad, to the poets and sages:

> There would be no messenger after me
> The poets and the sages after me
> Would guide the soul to the secret treasure of the Lord.
> (Sharif 2011, 238)

The non-scriptural approach to faith and spirituality is announced early in the text. The esoteric Sufi knowledge is here characterised as *agam tatva* (a clear reference to Saivite and Buddhist ideas), and the prophet delineates to Ali the path to attain the divine - a path marked by unorthodox ideas that go beyond the scriptural idea of Islam. The poet calls love of the divine the alternative to a ritualistic approach to faith. He asks us to renounce the scriptures and immerse ourselves in love of the divine to seek the divine:

> Discarding all scriptures, immerse yourself in meditation
> Lose yourself in the love of the Lord. (Sharif 2011, 238)

This religion of love, which is emphasised by various Sufi orders and by the Bhakti poets after Chaitanya, calls into question all distinctions of religion, class or caste. The poet declares:

> One creator, one destroyer, one creaturely life:
> The world knows water has different colours.
> One body, one reflection- no division
> One form, one soul united in One God
> The three worlds are the body of the one Master
> All the species worship only that one Lord. (Sharif 2011, 238)

This is an expansive vision of faith in which the creator is identified as one living body with various species constituting its various parts. The creaturely life cutting across all divisions is emphasised through the beautiful metaphor of water taking on the colours of the various containers. The adoption of the address "probhu" to refer to the godhead comes quite naturally to the poet, pointing out the easy border crossing that characterises the poem. In image after image, the poet expresses his cosmological vision with the creator at the centre embracing all the creation. The creator is imagined as the root of a cosmic tree and Muhammad its trunk. The leaves comprise the world, and the human beings are the flowers and the fruits of the tree. The wise gurus are the flowers that mature into the disciples of Muhammad. The tree is sustained through the life-giving water from the earth. In another image, the world is compared to the sea with human beings as the fish in it. The enlightened ones are like the wise elders who know the meaning and reality of the world.

Localising the Message

As a Sufi text, *Gyan Sagar* seems to have built on Sufi ideas from the Arabo-Persian heritage while localising the message with ideas freely borrowing from Hindu Yogic, Buddhist and other traditions. The following lines from the text beautifully capture the syncretic spirit at the heart of the poem:

> The fakir in this empty world chants the Shunya Nam
> The fakir's world derives meaning from this Shunya
> He who is Shunya, acts Shunya and resides in Shunya
> The fakir is in love with that Shunya.
> The Param Hansa is the Shunya; the Brahmagyana is the Shunya
> Yoga thrives with the knowledge of the Parama Hansa.
> The yogi who knows the parama hansa is enlightened
> Those wise yogis depend on the Shunya. (Sharif 2011, 244)

Reading these lines, one would be surprised by the way the Sufi poet intermingles different ideas, such as the concept of the *shunyata* from Buddhism, the *Parama Hansa* and *Brahmagyana* from Hinduism and the yogic ideas of sadhana. *Gyan Sagar* is a text written for those seeking initiation to the Sufi path, and the seeker has to prepare himself by overcoming all sense of divisions, transcending the social and cultural hierarchies between humans and even between humans and non-humans. A major portion of the poem is devoted to the discussion of the preparatory works the true seeker must undertake. The true seeker will know that "vaishnaba sober bondhu" i.e. Vaishnabha is friend to all (2011, 261), that "premananda jogratna", or love is the greatest of all yogic paths (2011, 262). The true seeker will not seek comfort and will serve all the species on earth. He will accept even the sinners:

> He will consider friends, even those who do bad deeds
> Only thus can he proceed in the yogic panth. (275)

In this theosophical understanding, the body is considered as "toner majar" (body as the shrine). Therefore, the Tantric conception of the body and meditation to purify the consciousness through bodily practices is discussed at length in the text.

Theological Reasoning

Critique is often viewed as synonymous with reason. To reason is to critique, and to critique is to reason or argue. Critical reasoning, secular in its conception, is at the heart of the post-Enlightenment European understanding of reform, progress and development. However, this hegemonic thinking of secular reasoning often bypasses the fact that religion can also have its own reasoning. The religious reasoning premised on the ideas of divine injunction to create a just and equal society marked by faith, love and brotherhood can have its own critical implications.

> The creator has said in the agama and the puranas
> The sages must realise that all races are the same
> All races are born in the same bowl
> Will return to the same bowl after death.
> One Mother, one Father, one Master
> The whole world is born from the same One. (Sharif 2011, 242)

The message of universal brotherhood of Islam is here expressed with idioms and lexicons from the local religious traditions. As the whole world and its various races and castes come from and return to the same bowl, the wise fakir must not discriminate between any race or caste or ethnicity:

> Therefore, the fakir does not do otherwise
> He does not discriminate between the best and the worst.
> (Sharif 2011, 244)

The poet does not stop just forbidding discrimination. He provides the reason for the injunction against discrimination. Only he who can create and destroy at his will can boast of criticising the power or position of others. But human beings cannot do violence to others or criticise their fellow beings, as they cannot create a single life. The true fakir not only cannot do violence to other human beings, but he also cannot do violence to non-human beings:

> The humans, fairies, animals, birds and insects
> The dorbesh, if he wants to be one, must deem equal.
> (Sharif 2011, 242)

The text, thus, espouses an ethics of living that eschews violence, promotes love between human beings and gives primacy to fellow feelings.

Gyan Chautisha and Learning from the Other

Syed Sultan's *Gyan Chautisha* is a small text that is viewed as the summary of the ideas contained in his magnum opus *Nabibansha*. Syed Sultan, too, like Ali Raja, makes easy sojourns across the intellectual barriers and divides, bringing in ideas from religious traditions, namely the ideas of yogic body and the control of the senses through meditation, cultivation of non-violence to attain the *tatva purusha* or the formless *Niranjana*, creating a unique Islamic / Sufi marg for the Bengalis. The text begins with these lines:

> First, I bow to the eternal Tatwa Purusha
> Whose mystery even Brahma and Indra could not fathom.
> (Sharif 2011, 61)

The poet, then, goes on invoking the divine figures from Hinduism, Jainism to establish the mysterious nature of the tatva purusha which resides in the body -

> The formless tatwa resides within the body as its core.
> If you can comprehend the body, you will find Him. (Sharif 2011, 61)

The yogic conception of the divine residing within the body forms the core of the argument. The five senses, with all their passions, screen the divine. Therefore, we need to steady the vessel-like body on the tempestuous sea of passions. The poem further builds on the yogic idea of the union of the Siva and Shakta elements as a path for the realisation of the divine within. The Sufi mokam-manjil idea is built on the yogic conception of chakras and the sublimation of energies to purify the body and realise the divine. The poet ends the poem with these words of wisdom-

> Do not disregard the depraved and the sinner.
> The Purusha Purana resides in the sinner as well.
> Nothing is greater in the world than forgiveness
> Practice mercy, meditation and prayer, forgetting self-interest. (Sharif 2011, 63)

The wise and enlightened one would follow the path of mercy and forgiveness and would accept all, even the sinners, with equal respect. He or she must overcome self-interest. The emphasis on loss of self or self-interest as a preparatory practice to realise the divine is a powerful reasoning against material greed, on which capital accumulation and inequity thrive.

Yoga Kalandar and Yogic Islam

Written by an unknown poet, the short text *Yoga Kalandar* is a highly popular Sufi exposition on the processes of spiritual enlightenment. The poem focuses on the Sufi mokam tatva / principle of four stations, where the human body is conceptualised as a four-storied building with separate stations denoting the state of spiritual progress.

Influenced by the yogic concept of *sadhana* (as clear from its title itself), the text talks about the sublimation of human energy through meditation. The "mokam tatva", the methods of meditation "rasa tatva" of the Sufi poet in the text are borrowings from the Tantric and Hindu practices prevalent in Bengal at the time and corroborate a theological and cultural milieu that allowed easy border-crossing. A detailed description of the text, however, is beyond the scope of the paper.

Community of Texts: Textualisation of Cohesion

All these texts are marked by a syncretic worldview, a heterodox and accommodating epistemic gesture, which facilitated a wonderful dialogic tradition of religious polysemy and cosmopolitan diversity. Eminent scholars like Tony K Stewart, Francis Robinson, and Barbara Metcalf have variously talked about the 'principle of localisation' that led to the need for "semiotic equivalence" for Islam in a foreign context like South Asia. Tony Stewart (2001), in particular, has analysed the intercultural tropes and ideas in the early modern Sufi texts from Bengal as grounded in the search for cultural acceptance and conversion. This paper proposes to go beyond his analysis to argue that the "semantic equivalence" he talks about often crossed the disciplinary and sectarian boundaries to such an extent that it no longer remained just an equivalence and became an epistemic disobedience. The unhesitating and unceremonious incorporation of ideas and practices from different traditions prevalent in Bengal, such as Buddhist, Hindu, and Natha traditions, and blending them with the Islamic religious ideas and practices, birthed an Islam that went beyond the scriptural idea of Islam, leading to nomenclatures like *popular or lived Islam*. The epistemic disobedience and dis-bordering characteristic of the texts under discussion, the paper contends, hold immense significance for understanding vernacular cosmopolitanism, conviviality, and inter-faith dialogue and can immensely de-/re-territorialise the field of Indian religious studies. These texts, and one

can add to the list the works by the medieval Bhakti poets, the songs of the Bauls of Bengal, etc, gesture towards a *community* of texts - an assemblage, a new collective, or a network of social beings connected by the accommodating and cross-cultural ethos the texts represent and the social praxis they inspire. This *alter-native* community logic, shaped by the discursive practices around these counter-cultural texts, belies the logos of hatred for the Other that besets the world today.

Theorising the Episteme of Conviviality and Cohesion

Scholars and thinkers like Hannah Arendt, Shiv Vishwanathan, Sudhir Kakar, and Ashis Nandy have brilliantly analysed the conditions and cultures of violence. But we need not just an analysis of violence and majority/minority factoring, but also how to suffuse the world with cohesive practices. The history of acrimony outweighs the history of prema-bhakti across the globe, but the only way out is perhaps to carve out more space for prema and cohesion in the face of murderous consent. Now, how to energise prema and forgiveness in the face of unjust violence and seductive calls for revenge and retribution? Well, that is where lies the history of centuries of literary and cultural practices of a third space of counter-logic. This search for a counter-logic of living together is a global search in which thinkers and philosophers from across the world have participated.

In his later writings, the Algerian-born French philosopher Jacques Derrida takes up the question of "how to live together" (Kumar 2013, 81). His meditations on this important question are expressed in his writings on the concepts of hospitality, friendship, and auto-immunity as well as in writings on law, rights and justice. The question is not just to live together as we are often forced to live together with others because we share the same spatio-temporal domain, but also how to live together well. In a world plagued with differences, this question is very important. As Priya Kumar points out, the key to Derrida's concept of living well together is the related concepts of the ensemble and the *e'tranger*. She draws our attention to the difference between ensemble as

a noun, which connotes a whole, a gathering, a totality, and ensemble as an adverb. Drawing our attention to the threat of ensemble as noun, as a totality, she asks us to be "able to think beyond the totality of any ensemble; moreover, we must ask, how do we relate to those who have been excluded from our (various) ensembles-those who have been designed as strangers, foreigners, and enemies."(Kumar 2013, 81). Here Derrida talks about the "unconditional hospitality" to the "wholly other" (2000, 3). Hospitality and friendship should be thought beyond the economy of exchange, or it should be guided by what Derrida calls "as residing outside the economy of exchange" (Armour 2013, 126), where you invite the other, acknowledging the right of the other to be other and do not try to annihilate or absorb the otherness of the other. Thus, Derrida's notion of hospitality asks us to be hospitable to the other- to other faith, other culture, other colour, other views and discourses. This friendship or hospitality makes living well with others. This ethical philosophy of Derrida is influenced by the Levinasian ethics, which, through his concepts of face, alterity, and responsibility, gives utmost importance to the ethics of how one should relate to the stranger, on the responsibility the face of the other relates to us. Levinas even suggests that the respect given to others is equivalent to the respect shown to God.

India has a rich tradition of thinking, engaging with the question of living with the Other. One may think of Gandhi, Tagore, Nazrul Islam, Kazi Abdul Odud, the Brahmos, especially Bhai Girish Chandra Sen and Raja Rammohan Ray, Ambedkar, Khsitimohan Sen, Dinesh Chandra Sen, Jasim Uddin, Rejaul Karim, etc. Although they had important differences on many issues, they were, however, united in their denunciation of the oppressive systems and the ideologies that were exclusionary and encouraged violence against the Other. Gandhi advocated non-violence because he was aware of the trauma that violence can cause- violence understood in all forms, from physical force to ideological. He talked about "soul force" instead of brute power to win over the opponent, and his Satyagraha also encourages

agraha towards the satya of the other – other opinion, other religion and culture. Ambedkar's critique of the dehumanising and oppressive system of caste makes us aware of the trauma associated with the caste system and caste related social segregation and violence. Tagore, in his various lectures, such as the Hibbert Lecture at Oxford and his writings, calls certain forms of nationalism barbaric and atrocious. His *Gora* and *Ghore Baire* draw our attention towards the dangers and fallacies of idolatrous nationalism, which offers a perfect antidote to the contemporary cultural nationalism of the Hindu right. Even in contemporary India, there is no lack of genuine efforts at building bridges, and despite the mainstreaming of Hindu nationalist politics in India, the BJP has not been able to capture the mind of the majority of the population.

The paper, however, calls for a temporal retreat to the early modern period to unearth the tradition of co-living, intercultural exchange and epistemic dis-bordering as found in the Sufi literary texts. The early modern period in India provides a unique opportunity to understand the encounter between the two different cultures represented by Hinduism and Islam. Although the encounter between the Muslims and the Hindus produced much hostility, this was also an occasion for thinking about an episteme of cohesion and intercultural bonding. The tradition of conviviality poetised by figures like Nazrul, Tagore and others, as mentioned above, has a history that takes it back to the early modern bhakti and sufi poets and religious thinkers like Kabir, Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, Nanak, Dadu, Sri Chaitanya, Ali Raja, the unknown poet of the Yoga Kalandar, and many others (Vaudeville, 1987; Bouillier, 2015; Gottschalk 2001; Rizvi, 1970; Hatley, 2007). One may refer to the path-breaking exercises in religious syncretism and critique of extremism and dis-bordering in the practices and poems of Lalon Shah and the Bauls of Bengal. This paper, however, has focused on the largely ignored texts and figures such as Ali Raja and Syed Sultan, who are usually not known beyond the specialists. Ali Raja makes recognition and acceptance of the Other a central point of his thesis

on spiritual awakening. There is no discrimination under the all-pervading spirit of the divine. The supremacism lurking under religious traditions often mars any possibility for dialogue. The poets under discussion not only talk about a genuine respect for the Other, they engage in an inter-cultural exchange, not marked by the economy of exchange, but of non-exchange, a hospitality to the ideas of the other that changes the self-definition of Islam itself, going far beyond what Tony K Stewart theorised as semiotic equivalence. It is interesting to note that texts like *Yoga Kalandar* talk about the purification of the body. Incorporating the ideas of yoga and tantric conceptions of the body, the Sufi texts under discussion talk about the harmonisation of the different internal coordinates of the body, preparing/ purifying the body for a fleshly encounter with difference outside. The upliftment of consciousness through bodily exercises that calm the mind and purify its base instincts, including hatred and animosity against others, is a spiritual pathway towards enlightenment. This materiality of Sufism, as enunciated in texts like *Gyan Sagar*, or in other Indian philosophical traditions, challenges the prevalent understanding of Indian philosophy as otherworldly, as they are very much embedded in questions not only of purifying the self/ body but also preparing one for a harmonious coexistence with the Other. We need to harness these critical discourses for an effective critique of the contemporary forms of violence that are pushing people towards traumatic life experiences.

Conclusion: From Postcolonial Studies to Interfaith Dialogue Studies

The postcolonial state talked about justice for all, empowerment and enfoldment of all within its agenda. How can we, then, reconcile this with the exclusionary politics of the present? Shiv Vishwanathan draws attention to the persistent hypocrisy of our society that is quick to point out the violence and discrimination of the West to its natives and tribes, while refusing to acknowledge how it submits sections of its own people to equal savagery (The Hindus, 2016). Scholars have, quite

justifiably, mapped the history of colonial violence, structural, cultural and epistemic; and there can be important projects to unearth the continued career of colonial violence in a world marked by various economic and political asymmetries. There is, however, also a need to look within and address the hierarchies, injustices, exclusions and repressions *within* the postcolonial society for envisioning a radical politics for postcolonial justice. The critical voices this paper tried to map offer us a counter-logic of cohesion, conviviality and ways of living together, something necessary for an alternative empathic civilisation (Rifkin, 2009). We are affective beings, and affects like hatred, insecurity, and loss can divide. But we also love, make bonds and cross our socio-cultural boundaries and make friends with others. Therefore, a new project focused on nurturing the counter-examples of dis-bordering, conviviality, and genuine dialogue can be a way ahead. The Sufi and Bhakti traditions of prema, co-living and epistemic and cultural exchange offer something new to the world. Excavating such traditions of counter-cultures in the formerly colonised countries can be a fitting decolonial move that not only critiques Eurocentrism and ends its task there, but also digs up traditions of living together that can work as a counter to the majoritarian reasoning, violence and repressive tolerance that marks the history of the present. This epistemic digging can perhaps offer a new critical horizon today when we are imagining decolonial futures. This paper can be viewed as a preliminary beginning in that direction.

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