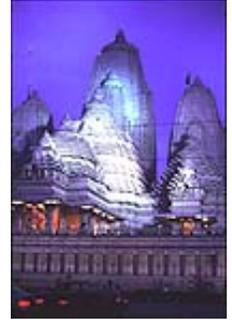


2. Mapping Community in Rajasthan and Calcutta

1

During my research in Calcutta, I was frequently puzzled when both Marwaris and Bengalis would explain to me that the Marwaris came from Marwar. I would become even more puzzled when people, usually Bengalis, would ask me why I was not doing my research in Rajasthan. The "real Marwaris" are there, they often said. These comments at first exasperated me because I knew that there was no exact Marwari homeland of "Marwar" corresponding to a particular geographic region of that name, at least in the modern sense of "region," which implies currently meaningful political or geographical boundaries. For, despite what their name suggests, Marwaris do not literally come from "Marwar" A multivalent term that (among other things) generally refers to a historically important district in central Rajasthan, "Marwar" is an erstwhile princely state that is now the district of Jodhpur. According to the numerous family histories and other resources I have consulted, however, most Marwari families originally came from the districts of Jhunjhunu and Shekhawati, far to the east of what has been mapped in historical atlases as the (now) territorially bounded region of Marwar. Shekhawati is part of the former Jaipur state, encompassing Jhunjhunu and Sikar in northeast Rajasthan. Thomas Timberg writes that, "the most prominent group of 'Marwaris' in Calcutta are members of the Maheshwari and Aggarwal trading castes from the Shekhawati region, north of Jaipur. Almost all the largest contemporary industrial connections belong to this group: Birla (Pilani near Chirawa), Dalmia (Chirawa), Singhania (Bisau), Jatia (Bisau), Surajmal-Nagarwmal (Ratangarh) and Goenka (Ramdutt Ramkissendas—Dundlod)." ¹



In responding to such stern directives that I should be doing my fieldwork in Rajasthan, it became tedious for me to explain time and again that there are no resident "Marwaris" in Rajasthan that can be identified in the way that this business community is identified in Calcutta. I finally just gave up trying to explain myself and would nod in false agreement, assuring people I would soon book my ticket with the nearest travel agent. I could only pretend to understand what they meant. It was only long after my research ended that I realized that, for many Indians, there exists a "subjective region" of Marwar, to borrow Bernard Cohn's term. ² Cohn's study of the uses of regional identity in India shows that regions have been thought of as embodying coherence, through alliances that are historical, linguistic, cultural, or based on social structure. His argument shows that the criteria that help define a region are subjective qualities that depend on varying individual and group interests and related power differentials. The popular use of "Marwar" is subjective in the way it invokes older meanings of a broad region of linguistic influence as a homeland of Marwaris without directly referring to the much smaller Marwar district (now Jodhpur), which is not

where most Marwaris actually came from. There seemed to be at least two referents to Marwar: first, as the subjective extent of the older Marwar kingdom (thus synonymous with Rajasthan itself), and second, as an objective place name interchangeable with Jodhpur district, which is a modern administrative unit. ³ The district of Jodhpur was the former capital of the kingdom of Marwar, and the two names remain somewhat interchangeable.

My own imagination of geographical regions and identity formation had been limited by these colonial and nationalist ideas about territory and boundaries, central to both modern forms of geography and cartographic production. I needed to examine what was accomplished by certain practices and performances of naming. By deploying the name "Marwari" for the last century, Marwaris and Bengalis alike have been able to ascribe an identity to a group of people in order to make distinctions between various upcountrymen and so-called non-Bengalis in Calcutta. For reasons that will become apparent, Marwari became that designated name. It did not matter that the term "Marwar" has no exact territorial referent in the modern Indian nation-state. This is contrary to the objectifying logics of colonial, nationalist, and anthropological thought.

Locating Marwari, Marwar, and Rajasthan

Books on Indian economic or business history as a rule include discussions of the migrant Marwari traders. In such contexts the term "Marwari" has been used quite loosely, and often pejoratively, to describe a Vaishya trading community associated with Rajasthan, Gujarat, or North India generally. The general stereotype of the Marwari businessman is a Hindu or Jain *baniya* (Vaishya trader or moneylender), carrying nothing but *lota* (water pot) and *kambal* (blanket), who has migrated thousands of miles from poor villages in the dry deserts of Rajasthan to cities and towns all over South Asia. The more general term *baniya* is interchangeable with Marwari, and includes all traders, regardless of regional origin. ⁴ The majority of Marwari migrant traders settled in colonial trading centers, first in Bombay and later especially in Calcutta and eastern India, where many of them became fabulously rich through business and speculation. ⁵ During the nineteenth century, these groups were also referred to in Bengal as "upcountrymen." ⁶ The Calcutta Marwaris are popularly associated with small business, banking, moneylending, and local trade. They have been subjects of jealousy and ridicule by the local majority population of Bengalis. Bengalis have expressed fears of the Marwaris' social clout, as well as contempt toward the so-called "northern Indian" rough and tumble business culture epitomized by Marwari traders.

These business and economic histories tend to take "Marwari" as an unproblematic category, without acknowledging the ways in which the

composition of the Marwari community is a recent historical development, emerging well after the collapse of the Marwar kingdom. Many of the moneylenders and traders in the second half of the eighteenth century, mainly Jains, were said to have come from a place called Marwar. *Hobson-Jobson*, for instance, notes that the word "Marwaree" describes "properly a man of the Marwar [Sanskrit *maru*, 'desert'], or Jodhpur country in Rajputana." ⁷ But ironically, it is only since the last decades of the nineteenth century that this emergent migrant community of traders has been readily identified by the term "Marwari" in India, despite its occasional uses elsewhere, such as in Central Asia and in the Deccan Riots. Equally puzzling is the way that business and economic histories make confident claims that Marwaris come from the barren deserts of Marwar.

The "brave and enterprising" Marwaris were supposedly named after Marwar, the rugged desert region from which they reputedly came, a name referring to an imaginary geographical origin that enables them to share a common culture despite their dispersion. The place name "Marwar" is usually translated into English as "the region of death," to refer to the harsh desert climate that characterizes this region of Rajasthan. The harshness of the desert homelands of the Marwaris is frequently cited as the primary factor behind Marwari migration and prosperity. D. K. Taknet, historian and biographer of B. M. Birla and manager of his charitable trust, provides a good illustration of the theory of the environmental origins of the Marwari work ethic. Taknet writes: "Nature taught them to follow its rhythm, dust storms and famines inspired them to tolerate pain and suffering. Lack of resources motivated them to work assiduously, hot winds and burning sun strengthened their vigour, and scarcity of water urged them to adopt a frugal way of life. Had they not learnt these lessons from adversity, they would not have turned out to be nationally reputed warriors and top industrialists." ⁸ The Marwaris, many such historians say, have an almost "genetic destiny" to make money; even in the arid desert, they are able to produce money out of nothing. ⁹ Though many historians and anthropologists might dispute these purely environmental or genetic causal factors, recognizing the circulation of such "truths" helps to illuminate the continuing presence of Orientalism both in scholarship and among the people we study.

While the subjective region of "Marwar" as an imaginary homeland of the Marwaris can hardly be found on a map, my research indicates that Calcutta Marwaris have actively engaged in mapping their identities, oriented to a sense of Marwar and Rajasthan. Their very name "Marwari," of course, suggests an origin in "Marwar." The historical importance of the Marwar kingdom and its continuing presence as an enduring place name may partially account for the fact that this diasporic and expatriate business group has been called Marwari instead of Shekhawati, the name of the district that most Marwaris have come from. The production of a social identity in this case has also contributed to the rise of an imaginary region:

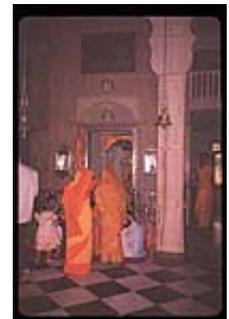
Marwar, the mythic place of Marwari origin. The history of the Marwaris aptly illustrates Arjun Appadurai's recent proposition that localities—such as the elusive Marwar—are themselves produced by the migratory flows of people. [10](#)

What remains to be explained in this chapter, therefore, are the historical and cultural factors that have contributed to the mutual production of *both* community, the Marwaris, and their more or less imaginary homeland, Marwar. I contend that there was no preexisting "Marwari" community in Rajasthan before the migrations. It was the fact of the traders' departure itself—and their diasporic location *outside* of Rajasthan—that transforms this migrant community into Marwaris. The example of Marwar and Marwari as a socially constructed region and community is not unique. [11](#) In taking up the issues of regions and naming, I propose to examine the relationship between mapping and community definition in colonial India in two different ways, which for the convenience of conceptualization, I distinguish as *maps* and *mapping*.

By *maps*, I refer to the conventional definition of maps being objectifying representations of social space, and by *mapping* I refer to the overlapping networks of orientation through which people make subjective sense of objective spaces. Another term for this is mental mapping. (The fact that maps are also subjective forms, made objective by relations of knowledge and power, is not at issue here.) Both maps and mapping are spatial practices tied to practices of power in naming (and claiming) a sense of territorial affiliation. They both make particular and competing claims on space, albeit using different conceptions of space. The former claims more specifically bounded and bordered lands, whereas the latter may be satisfied with boundaries that are more "fuzzy," to borrow Kaviraj's term. [12](#) The field of cartography itself has struggled over the question of whether or not mapmaking is a universal cultural practice. Dennis Wood reminds us that mapmaking, as opposed to mapping, is not "a universal expression of individual experience," and that we need to consider practices of mapping along with the actual maps that the practice of mapmaking produces. [13](#)

10

The Marwari process of mapping themselves onto landmarks in a so-called ancestral homeland has been a crucial element in their identity formation. Tracing their ancestry to Marwar, Rajputana, and Rajasthan is itself a form of mapping, in the sense of mapping their identity in relation to other communities in a nation called India. Returning to Rajasthan to celebrate various rites of life passage—such as marriage, tonsure (first haircut) of boys, building "ancestral" *haveli* (mansions), pursuing philanthropic ventures, and constructing temples in home villages—has created a



geographical orientation in Marwari identity that connects the *kul*(lineage) with Rajasthan. This linkage is rather different from invented tradition. Their way of being Marwari within a history of migration and mobility is one in which a geographical orientation to the past in Rajasthan has become embodied in a performance of what they have thought they owed their ancestors.

Maps of Language, Maps of Region: Colonial Ethnography and Rajasthan

There is no part of India called 'Marwar,' but there must be some historical evidence of the particular culture of the Marwaris. Historian James Tod says that, in the past, the dry area between the river Sutlej and the sea was called Marwar. But today it is supposed to be between Sindh, Gujarat, Mewar, Ajmer and Jaipur. Other historical evidence is found from the reign of Shershah, when the territory ruled by King Maldev was called Marwar. It was the only kingdom, besides Mewar, that could not be conquered by Shershah.

— Golden Jubilee history of the All India Marwari Federation [14](#)

European ethnographic mapping of languages and regions produced the two different but related meanings for the term "Marwari"—as language and as occupational identity—that were ultimately used interchangeably by colonial officials. Territorial mapping (thus asserting boundaries and creating borders) both in India and Europe was a distinctly European practice, greatly altering notions of nationality and modern statehood. In the case of early modern France, Peter Sahlins has argued that the fixing into boundaries of the frontiers of disputed state jurisdictions "formed part of a constitutive myth of the state." [15](#)

A formidable power against the Mughals (1500—1700s), Marwar (like all principalities of its time) did not refer to a fixed bounded area. The historical kingdom of Marwar remained until the late 1800s a powerful but somewhat elusive geographical entity spanning a cultural area across nearly all of Rajputana. As Susan Gole and Irfan Habib have demonstrated, Mughal maps of Rajputana did not delineate territorial boundaries in the modern sense. Instead, Mughal maps reflected the names of important places, signifying a sphere of influence, without indicating precise territorial correspondences. [16](#) It has been observed that the colonial conglomeration of Rajputana depended on Rajput kinship lineages, which constituted political unity, more than on Western notions of territory. [17](#) In short, Marwar, long a dominant kingdom of Rajasthan, became subjectively interchangeable with the geographical extent of Rajasthan.

Early attempts at making maps of peoples and languages were the outcome

of the European quest to find India's place in a global framework of ethnology and ethnological groups. In the maps of language (standing in as "maps of peoples") during the early nineteenth century there was a rather literal convergence of ethnography and cartography. ¹⁸ While medieval maps, which divided the world's population according to the descendants of Noah's sons Japheth, Shem, and Ham, show an early interest in 'race' and language, later mapping of human geography came in tandem with the development of cartographic techniques necessary to map features of the population. ¹⁹ Unlike the divergence of comparative ethnology and philology in the 1870s, as Trautmann has described, ²⁰ the identification of language and region became strong enough to form the basis of the linguistic reorganization of Indian states. ²¹

15

The early colonial ethnography of Rajasthan helped construct the region as the site of a potent romantic imaginary of princely India and the Rajput rulers who governed there. ²² One of the hallmarks of Rajasthan is the claim that, for the last thousand years, the land has never been directly ruled by foreign conquerors. From the thirteenth century to the seventeenth, Rajputs managed to defend their rule against the Muslim rulers in Delhi. The princely states of Mewar and Marwar even posed a viable threat to the central power in Delhi itself. This history has given rise to a construct of a "martial Rajput," who draws on ancestral connections in legitimizing his sovereignty as ruler and as warrior. ²³ One effect of the European fascination with Rajasthan was a romanticization of historical ruins that imbued such physical landmarks as the remains of forts and palaces with a historic sense of heroism and bravery. Although the focus was ostensibly on Rajput rulers, the romanticization of Rajasthan as a place is important because of the way it is later appropriated by the diasporic Marwaris.

The textualization of memories and oral epic into colonial ethnography served to popularize and canonize the Rajput ethos of Rajasthan during colonial times. Colonel Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829–32) was especially influenced by Rajput tales of heroism, which became enshrined in the text, and had a lasting impact on both British and Indian views of Rajputs and Rajasthan. ²⁴ Tod's text was in turn a tremendous influence on the nineteenth-century literary creations of Bengal. ²⁵ In fact, the term "Rajasthan" to describe a territorially defined region was coined by Col. Tod, and the state of Rajasthan was formed in 1948 out of former princely territories collectively known as "Rajputana." During the colonial period these princely states entered into alliances with the British colonial power but were never part of British India. Interestingly, Tod was not as concerned with delineating territorial boundaries as he was in collecting other types of historical and ethnological information. In addition to his interest in the feudal regimes of the Rajputs, Tod recorded 128 merchant castes with their family members in Rajasthan. The largest of these

merchant castes were Agarwals, Maheshwaris, Oswals, Khandelwals, and Porwals, providing the organizing framework of the modern Marwari community. [26](#)

Colonel Tod referred specifically to the ambiguity of "Marwar" when he addressed the problems of maps and mapping that arose in his attempt to define the extent of the Rajasthan region. Tod notes that "the limits of Marwar are, however, so very irregular, and present so many salient angles and abutments into other States, that without a trigonometrical process we cannot arrive at a correct estimate of its superficial extent: a nicety not, indeed, required." [27](#) Although Tod acknowledged the importance of the trigonometric survey that was being concurrently executed in British India as an instrument to produce exactness, he was not convinced that such technique would be appropriate in defining Marwar. In short, this is a refusal of mapmaking. Tod's accounts of his travels and historical research instead produced route descriptions of Rajputana—surely a form of early map, perhaps, but without territorial claims.

Because Tod, like many other Europeans at the time, believed that the feudal regimes he observed in India were actually vestiges of Europe's own past, he took great interest in describing Rajput history. Tod noted: "I have been so hardy as to affirm and endeavor to prove the common origin of the martial tribes of Rajasthan and those of ancient Europe." [28](#) Tod's *Annals and Antiquities* emerged in the middle of the Orientalist and Anglicist controversy about the relative merits of Eastern and Western learning. It is in this context that Tod wrote of the prevailing need to write what he called a "national" history of India. His book might be read, as Inden notes, as a pointed response to James Mill's Anglicist *History of India*, which explores at length the despotism of India's native rulers in order to justify British sovereignty. [29](#) Tod's study implicitly attacks the theory of Oriental Despotism, one of Mill's fundamental assumptions. Tod, by contrast, was consciously trying to forge ethnological links of sameness between British and Indian. [30](#) Tod introduced *Annals and Antiquities* with an argument that his text ultimately challenges: "Much disappointment has been felt in Europe at the sterility of the historic muse of Hindustan. When Sir William Jones first began to explore the vast mines of Sanskrit literature, great hopes were entertained that the history of the world would acquire considerable accessions from this source. ... It is now generally regarded as an axiom, that India possesses no national history." [31](#)

Unlike Mill, who never went to India, Tod reiterated the importance of his being in India firsthand and of using Hindu and Jain sources that had survived the "Muslim invasion." Tod credited the decade-long work of his Jain research assistant, who he never named, as being invaluable for the creation of a meaningful history. Yet in assessing Tod, we must recognize

that the Orientalists contributed to justifications for British rule. By writing a colonial text that identified and differentiated between groups of people, Tod enabled the British project of dividing and ruling India. His text fostered a sense of romantic nationalism that was adopted by Rajputs in their own self-representations. This nationalism found its genesis in the Orientalist discourse of human unity which underlay Tod's ethnological models, but this same romantic nationalism itself provided the logic of dividing populations into separate, supposedly governable ethnic groups. [32](#)

20

After the publication of Tod in 1829—32, there was little written in English on the states of Rajputana until the late 1870s, when other colonial ethnographies were written. [33](#) This second stage of colonial ethnography in the 1870s was accompanied by a greater interest in land surveys. The triangulation survey of Rajputana was begun in 1876—77 by R. Todd (the similarity in names is a coincidence), who attempted a detailed survey of the desert areas of Marwar, Shekhawati, and Bikaner States, as well as of Jodhpur city. [34](#) Some of the surveying team met with staunch resistance from villagers, who physically attacked the surveyors. Though the colonial government claimed that the villagers mistook the surveyors for excise officials, the leaders of the revolt were sentenced to two years' imprisonment and fined the massive sum of Rs. 1000 each. [35](#) Though we cannot say whether the villagers knew what the surveyors were doing, this incident bore much in common with other forms of violent resistance against colonial mapping. [36](#) Further surveying of Rajputana was later attempted in 1881—82.

Starting in the late nineteenth century, ethnography focused on language groups that helped to form the coherent cultural region of "Rajasthan." At first, however, Kellogg's *Grammar of the Hindi Language* (1875) classified dialectal variations in Rajasthan as part of a larger Hindi belt stretching to the east. [37](#) But it was George Grierson's twelve-volume *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903—28) that recognized the uniqueness of Rajasthani as a language distinct from Hindi. This survey marked the first time that the colonial state had made a systematic effort to map languages (in all of their grammatical complexity) within territories of northern India, giving the publication the scientific authority granted by the state. [38](#) Grierson used the term "Rajasthani" to refer to the language of the place, including its five major dialects. [39](#)

Grierson, to a large extent relying on census data, was well aware of the way that he was actively involved in the creation of "Rajasthani" as a somewhat artificial linguistic construct. Grierson wrote that the term "Rajasthani" literally referred to the language of Rajasthan, the place of the Rajputs. He noted that Rajasthani, "as connoting a language, has been invented for the

purposes of this Survey, in order to distinguish it from Western Hindi on the one hand, and from Gujarati on the other." ⁴⁰ To a certain extent, Grierson's mapping of language variation reflected the historical changes that had led to the emergence of distinct languages. Early written forms of Rajasthani and Gujarati are identical (scholars now refer to the language as Old Gujarati). The establishment of the formidable Rathor kingdom in Marwar in the middle of the fifteenth century prompted the use of written languages closer to the spoken vernaculars. After this time, the two language groups diverged. By the end of the sixteenth century, Old Gujarati was effectively replaced in Rajasthan by this so-called "Middle Marwari," which was used for all correspondence, tales, stories, and prose chronicles. Middle Marwari drew mostly on Western Rajasthani rather than Eastern, not exactly corresponding to any of Grierson's dialects. As Smith notes, this Middle Marwari "does not answer to any single geographically definable form of speech, but is rather a compilation of features drawn from several distinct dialect areas." ⁴¹ Middle Marwari remained in use until the second half of the nineteenth century, when, in the heyday of nationalist language politics, it was abandoned for Urdu, standard Hindi, and English. ⁴²

Grierson charted roughly twenty different dialects of "Rajasthani" language, of which "Marwari" had the greatest number of speakers. ⁴³ Marwari had the oldest and most cultivated literary tradition, dating back nearly five hundred years, and was spoken across the largest geographical area of Rajasthan, albeit with variations in Jodhpur, Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Sirohi, Shekhawati, Kishangarh, Ajmer-Merwara, and also in parts of Punjab and Haryana. Though not all "Marwari" speakers necessarily spoke the same language, Marwar became a distinct language region, home to the modern "Marwari" dialect, even though, according to Grierson's own classification, the boundaries of the subdialects were rather murky. This modern Marwari actually had more in common with Eastern rather than Western Rajasthani. Grierson noted that "standard Marwari varies but little from Jaipuri ... standard Marwari is spoken in the centre of the Marwar State in Shekhawati of Jaipur, in which we again find Marwari merging into Jaipur." ⁴⁴ Grierson gave these statistics enumerating the number of Marwari speakers in the area where it was a vernacular:

Standard Marwari	1,591,160
Eastern Marwari	1,974,864
Southern Marwari	477,570
Western Marwari	685,649
<u>Northern Marwari</u>	<u>1,359,146</u>
TOTAL	6,088,389

Marwari as a language encompassed a far greater tract than just the princely state of Marwar. "Standard" Marwari refers to the languages spoken in the eastern part of Rajputana (Jaipur), where most Marwaris originated. If

Grierson relied on the names that Indians themselves supplied for the languages they spoke, then it is not surprising that so many would have claimed to speak "Marwari." This term referred to the very broad spectrum of languages spoken in the vicinity of the great power, Marwar, even though its grammars and lexicons were more influenced by Eastern Rajasthani.

Grierson made special reference to the Marwaris as a prominent mercantile community, noting that, "there are few parts of India where some of them may not be found carrying on the banking business of the country." ⁴⁵

Though Grierson conceded that there were no complete materials from which to enumerate the number of speakers of Marwari away from home, he drew on statistics compiled from the 1891 census, observing that probably many were speakers of other dialects of Rajasthani, including Jaipuri or Malvi, yet enumerated in the general category of Marwari, as follows:

<u>Marwari Speakers in Other Provinces</u>	
Assam	5,475
Bengal	6,591
Berar	36,614
Bombay and Feudatories	241,094
Central Provinces	22,566
Madras and Agencies	1,108
United Provinces & Native States	2,228
Punjab and Feudatories	130,000
TOTAL MARWARI SPEAKERS ABROAD	451,115
MARWARI SPEAKERS AT HOME	6,088,389
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>6,539,504</u>

The relatively high number of speakers of Marwari in the Central Provinces may be partly due to emigrant Rajasthani people's distinguishing themselves from local Hindi speakers. It is noteworthy that Grierson took the trouble to research the numbers of speakers of Marwari in British India because it hints at the convergence of the two colonial meanings of "Marwari," first as Marwari speakers and second as migrant *baniya* traders. At one point, Grierson pointed out that the Mahesri and Oswali languages in the Central Provinces were correctly identified as Marwari, both being languages of two Marwari-speaking mercantile castes. Both Bikaneri and Shekhawati, Grierson contended, were also the same as Marwari. He wrote: "They are simply Marwari with an infusion of Jaipuri, which naturally increases as we go eastwards." ⁴⁶

From colonial reports on language such as Grierson's, we might be tempted to see the emergence of the term "Marwari" as a nineteenth-century neologism, encompassing the real and imagined demographic changes that resulted from the period of British trade and rule. In Calcutta, after all, the identity "Marwari" came into official usage only in the last decade of the nineteenth century, with the foundation of Marwari associations and chambers of commerce in civil society. It was at this time that the term "Marwari" became part of common parlance. Throughout the nineteenth century, colonial records show frequent conflation between the terms "upcountry" and "Marwari" to describe non-Bengali immigrants. This identity was for the most part assigned (other-ascribed) rather than chosen (self-ascribed). The eighteenth-century Oswal Jain migrants and their descendants, who formed the famous banking concern known as "Jagat Seth," did not refer to themselves as Marwaris. It is only in the twentieth century, continuing into the present, that these Murshidabad communities in hindsight have been claimed as, or labeled as, the first wave of "Marwari" migration.

30

Other historical evidence suggests that the use of "Marwari" to mean migrant trader occurred much earlier, arising in the seventeenth century in a quite surprising geographical context far away from either Rajasthan or Calcutta. In a study of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century economic trade routes that existed between Mughal India, Iran, Turan, and Russia Stephen Dale documents the involvement of Indian merchants in Middle Eastern and Central Asian trade. Using Philip Curtin's idea of a trade diaspora, Dale claims that Indian traders formed their own diaspora through links of alliances and credit networks. Dale writes that most of the Indian traders in Central Asia were Punjabi Khatris, Pushtuns, Afghans, Marwaris, and "Multanis," named after the region of Multan. Many of these so-called Multani Hindus were probably Punjabi Khatris, though many European traders in the area mistakenly called them *baniyas*. Dale writes that despite this misidentification, there were other Hindu and Jain merchants who "were in fact genuine banias in the Indian sense of the term. ... These were Marwaris, who were always clearly identified in Russian records by this particular nisba as natives or residents of the Marwar areas of Rajasthan. They are first mentioned in Astrakhan customs and judicial documents of the 1720s and 1730s." [47](#)

As Dale's research indicates, the genealogies of migrant merchant groups go back much further than the period covered in my own study, and are evidence of a much greater heterogeneity than the modern ethnic tag "Marwari" suggests. Marwaris formed a trade diaspora within India, and their preexisting lineage and trade networks gave them the solidarity required to produce an affective community. Examples of these kinds of ties can be seen in Banarasi's 1641 autobiography, *Ardhakathanaka* (Half-a-Tale). [48](#)

Banarasi was born into the Srimal clan of the Oswal Jains and was the son of a jewelry merchant who traded in precious stones. In the text, all of

Banarasi's friends, business partners, and even enemies are from the same Oswal Jain community. As Banarasi's translator Mukund Lath writes, "the social world beyond was, in comparison, shadowy, uncertain, even uncanny." ⁴⁹ When Banarasi traveled to new towns to develop his business, and later in life on a spiritual quest, he sought out other Srimals with whom to make initial contacts. Like most trading groups, whose very economic viability relies on the extendibility of ties across expanses of territory, Jains generally settled separately in order to maximize trade. This does not mean that they necessarily assimilated into the local environment. Lath notes about Banarasi's world that these "geographically separated groups thus continued to live in the same cultural space." ⁵⁰ What tied them together was a subjective awareness of a shared and clannish sense of being a trading community despite the disjunction of identity and native place. This shared cultural space is one kind of public culture.

Colonial Knowledge about Migration

To be Marwari in modern-day Calcutta (or any major city or provincial town) is to be an migrant. But in considering how the colonial state created knowledge about the relationship between community and locality in identity formation, we should take care not to celebrate or assume that migration by itself is an act of resistance against the state. After all, it was colonial capitalism that prompted traders from Rajasthan, some of whom already were already trading on Mughal routes, to go to the colonial metropolis. With their identity formed in diasporic trade, Marwaris have been marked as outsiders, even in Rajasthan. Despite their residence in Bengal for several generations—as far back as the seventeenth century for the descendants of the Murshidabadi *saharwalis*—the Marwaris were viewed as outsiders by both Bengalis and the colonial state. While colonial ethnography arguably "fixed" the locations of many supposedly static groups, this same colonial logic also attempted to essentialize certain trading communities as migrants. *Baniyas*, wrote one colonial ethnographer, were "not as wedded to their native place as most of the Indian communities," settling in villages where they were "strangers both in caste and language." ⁵¹

The 1901 census established five categories of migration, including casual (moving short distances or women marrying out), temporary (journeys for business or pilgrimage), periodic (for labor associated with changing seasons), semipermanent (earning a livelihood in one place but maintaining a connection with old homes), and permanent (settling elsewhere with one's family). According to the census, the Marwari settlement in Bengal fell into the semipermanent category, and was therefore comparable with English settlement in India. Both groups were similar in having left families behind, returning to homelands "at more or less regular intervals, and look[ing] forward to the time when they may again live there permanently." ⁵² While plenty of scholarly attention has been focused on how communities have

been tied to regions, much more research remains to be done on how the colonial state created knowledge about migration and migrant groups.

This identification of the Marwari migrant with the British in India is peculiar. On the one hand, Marwari economic activities helped consolidate British economic power. On the other hand, Marwaris were considered backward in social and educational matters, quite unlike the Parsis, who have been described by Luhrman as the quintessential colonial subjects. The Parsis were a group that adopted and identified with the colonizer's Western education, culture, and colonial authority much more than any other Indian community; they represented themselves as rational, progressive, and masculine. ⁵³ Though the Marwaris ultimately became as economically successful as the Parsis and have now even surpassed them, they never fashioned a self-identity that used the British colonizer as a model. Compared with Parsis, Marwaris appear to other Indians to be antimodern; they have been relatively "late" to get English education, and they appear clannish and conservatively old-fashioned. Even though the Parsis had an identity as immigrants from Persia, they were considered cosmopolitan and were never quite seen as outsiders in the same way as the Marwaris. Rather, like the British, Marwaris were portrayed as capitalist and exploitative outsiders, only away from home to make money, and whose notion of home remained elsewhere, if anywhere at all. This sentiment later emerged in nationalist debates over language, when Marwaris did not choose to promote a local dialect (even if, because of their geographical dispersion, they actually shared one) but became major financial supporters of the nationalist Hindi movement.

Financing the Hindi Movement

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One of the most important ways that Marwari leaders made claims on being a transregional community was through their promotion of Hindi as a national language beginning in the 1920s. There is irony in the fact that, though their identity as Marwaris derived partly from language enumeration in Rajasthan, Marwaris have historically been such important players in the promotion of Hindi as a national language. Whatever happened to Marwari? We might expect, after all, that Marwaris would want to speak Marwari as a political way of marking symbolic boundaries of community. As Ramaswamy has written, "the proliferation of multiple languages, whether in the family or in the nation, allows for the strategic deployment of linguistic resources to practice 'intimate' politics in one's own tongue that shuts out the unfamiliar, the foreigner." ⁵⁴ So how do we explain the fact that the language and print culture of Marwari business was overwhelmingly in Hindi and not Marwari? The 1891 census for Calcutta's Ward 7 (the Marwari area of Burabazar) enumerated only nine men and three women who claimed to speak Marwari as their mother tongue. ⁵⁵ From the beginning of their arrival in Calcutta, Marwaris were involved in promoting Hindi print culture. The oldest Hindi newspaper in India, *Udanda Martand*, began publication in Calcutta in 1826. At the end of the nineteenth century, there were over twenty Hindi papers

in India financed by Marwari traders, including *Marwari Bapari*, *Burra Bazar Gazette*, *Marwari*, and *Bharat Mitra*, that were prominent sources of local news, especially about economic matters in the law courts. [56](#)

There are a couple of ways to make sense of this curiosity. On the one hand, by the late nineteenth century the national language controversy in northern India had become dichotomized into a split between Hindi and Urdu, with little space for other regional languages, although for a long time "Hindi" was not precisely defined. Until the 1930s, the nationalist promotion of Hindi did not specify exactly what "Hindi" referred to. At the 1935 Hindi Sahitya Sammelan (Literature Conference) session at Indore, Gandhi and his supporters pushed for the colloquial and mixed Hindustani, while others supported a more Sankritized dialect. [57](#) As such, "Hindi" might have not differed so much from what people thought they spoke. In Calcutta, one of the primary markers of being an outsider is to not speak in Bengali, the language of the local bourgeois classes, so in terms of relativity it would not matter if this difference were marked by Marwari or Hindi. However, using Hindi would have been a marker of a claim to a broader transregional and increasingly national political and social identity, in opposition to a more parochial Bengali identity. Social reformer Sitaram Seksaria, who was acclaimed for his pioneering efforts to start Hindi-speaking schools in order to meet the pressing need for the education of Marwari girls, donated the money in 1931 to inaugurate the annual Hindi Sahitya Sammelan's prize, the Sekseriya Puraskar, for women writers. [58](#) The formation of Hindi library institutions such as the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad in 1974 and Pratibha Agarwal's important work establishing a theater archive that includes Hindi and Bengali productions have helped to establish Hindi as a language suitable for high culture in Calcutta. [59](#)

On the other hand, we need to question the assumption that Marwari migrants in Calcutta all spoke the same language, carried with them by original migrating ancestors from their home villages. I have already described how "Marwaris" actually come from a wide geographical region of northeastern Rajasthan, which does not really overlap with the historical "Marwar" kingdom of the Rathors. The naming of their languages as "Marwari" probably has more to do with the historical importance of the kingdom of Marwar than with linguistic features of the language itself. Since Marwaris were not traditionally scribes in their homelands, there is little reason to believe that many of them would have been fluent in the "high" written literary language of the day; they probably relied instead on their less-standardized spoken vernaculars. In my extensive search for texts written by Marwaris, I did not find any that were written in the Marwari dialect. [60](#) All of the writings by Marwaris for public consumption have been done in Hindi and, to a lesser extent, in English. Despite Grierson's point that modern Marwari is more influenced by Eastern than Western Rajasthani, it is doubtful that there was a standardized mother tongue

among those who eventually traveled outside Rajasthan. ⁶¹ In the 1891 Calcutta Census, for instance, ward 7 (Burabazar) enumerates 109 Marwaris, 1370 Agarwalas, and 98 Maheswaris, yet with only 12 persons returning "Marwari" as their mother tongue. ⁶²

There are also gender differences in language use dating back to the early part of the century. The 1901 Census counted 115 persons in the town and suburbs of Calcutta as Marwari speakers, 39 men and 76 women. ⁶³ Of 6,651 enumerated Maheswaris, Agarwalas, and Oswals in Calcutta, ninety-five per cent of the 1,941 women were returned as illiterate. Those women who were literate knew Hindi predominantly, with a few knowing Bengali, Oriya, or other languages; none listed English. Of the 4,710 men, two per cent each were literate in English and Bengali, fifty-five per cent knew Hindi, and thirty-nine per cent were illiterate. ⁶⁴ In my fieldwork I found that Marwari men were far more fluent in Bengali than were Marwari women, particularly those who are housewives. This became especially apparent when I attended a philanthropic ceremony of Mahavir International to commemorate the work done by a Marwari social service society to provide a prosthesis, or "Jaipur foot," to poor accident victims. ⁶⁵ The Marwari women granting the awards had a great deal of trouble communicating in Bengali with the mostly Bangladeshi recipients, who did not understand Hindi. Some of the women used their limited Bengali (with major lapses into Hindi) to try to get the Bangladeshi prosthesis wearers to promise that they would not eat beef, in an attempt to encourage vegetarianism, albeit with not-so-subtle communal overtones. The Bangladeshis, after all, probably could not afford to eat much meat to begin with, regardless of their religious beliefs. For the predominately Muslim Bangladeshis, eating meat might be a special treat on a festival day; vegetarianism would be a sign of poverty, not auspiciousness.

The Marwari use of Hindi as a primary language in cities where the regional language has been figured as the mother tongue signifies a geographical orientation both to a northern Indian linguistic group as well as to a North Indian nationalist sensibility, which adopted Hindi as the representative language of the nation. Promoting Hindi went hand in hand with promoting a nationalistic awareness. Using Hindi differentiated Marwaris and other upcountrymen from the Bengalis, while also making a statement about nationalist politics. Of course, Hindi speakers in Calcutta are divided along class lines, one group in commerce and business and others who are working class and mostly from Bihar. In modern-day Assam, where a Marwari youth group has made efforts to integrate more into the local community, public conventions have been organized to encourage Marwaris to use the regional language. ⁶⁶

Locating Marwar in the 1990s

What do you say about a man who dreams about making money?
Or one who takes up a hobby to get away from the arduous task of
making money, and makes money out of that as well? Only that,
he must be a Marwari.

— *Marwar*, 70.

After being told repeatedly that I must go to Rajasthan if I wanted to understand the Calcutta Marwaris, I decided to heed this advice and made a number of short visits there. In the villages and towns of Shekhawati, I became fascinated by the wide variety of Marwari-identified material culture that I came across—public artifacts, including enormous painted houses (discussed in chapter three) and philanthropic ventures, that make purposeful connections between Marwaris and their ancestral homelands. I saw numerous Marwari-funded schools, hospitals, wells, cow sheds, and busts commemorating the homes of migrant businessmen. These sites provided some of my first clues in understanding the geographical relationship and forms of lineage-mapping that the Marwaris practice in Rajasthan.



Traditional Marwari names provide many examples of the relationship between lineage and geographical aspects of identity, as well as connections to trade and occupation. Many prominent Marwari family names, such as Jaipuria, Dalmia, Kanoria and Jhunjhunwala, are the name of the native village combined with the suffix -ia or -wala. Some names follow caste occupations: Kotharis looked after the *kothal* (treasure), Ruias handled and traded in *rui* (cotton), and Poddars managed the *potedar* (Persian for holder [*dar*] of the treasure [*pot*]). Other Marwari names are formed from the suffix -ka being added to a nickname: Himmatsingka (courage of a lion), or Loyalka, which derives from English. A few names derive from prominent geographical features in the native place; Tibrewal, for example, comes from *tibba*, a prominent sand dune in Lakshmangarh. [67](#)

Recent publications seek to reinforce the connection of modern Marwari families to their ancestral homelands in Rajasthan. A glossy and expensively produced English-language picture book, full of large color photographs and artwork, entitled *Marwar: A Chronicle of Marwari History and Achievement* (1996) appeared on Calcutta newsstands during the middle of my fieldwork. Published in Bombay, printed at the Emirates Printing Press in Dubai, *Marwar* can be read as evidence of the production of subjective forms of region through a geographical imagination informed by the migratory flows of people. Since the title, *Marwar*, suggests a geographic connectedness of the families who identify themselves as Marwari, we might expect to see a map showing where the families originated. From a

cartographic perspective, it is fascinating but not surprising that this subjective "Marwar" contains not a single map denoting its relative location. The high quality of the production, and correspondingly high cover price, preclude economic considerations as the reason for not including a map.

The text is framed at the beginning and end by articles on Rajasthan, symbolically anchoring a Marwari "modernity of tradition" through a regional imagination of Rajasthan. *Marwar* begins with an article by Ilan Cooper, a pioneering European authority on the Shekhawati *havelis*, with the text and photographs printed on yellowish-brown pages colored to look like expensive but old and faded parchment. The article features photographs of British-influenced art, including officers, foreign ships, Christ, and a hot-air balloon. The choice of pictures suggests that even "traditional" *haveli* art reflected both a sophisticated consciousness and anticipation of modern technological innovation. ⁶⁸ *Marwar* ends with several pages devoted to "ethnic chic" fashion and an article entitled "Rajasthan Rainbow," showing colorfully-clad women and children in empty-looking domestic spaces in rural Rajasthan, perhaps reminiscent of the lonely *haveli* life after Marwari migrant men had left home. Interspersed in the pages of *Marwar* are a few comic articles about the uncontrollable Marwari penchant for making money, sordid relationships between Marwaris and Bengalis, and a somber look at the restrictions of women's freedom in the "traditional urban Marwari marriage." ⁶⁹

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The middle sections, making up the bulk of *Marwar*, include short excerpts and biographical sketches about highly prominent Marwari individuals, including bankers, industrialists, movie directors, advocates, actors, restaurateurs, and artists, showing how well members of the community have fared in business and industry as well as in culture. In the summer of 2000, when I returned to India to do follow-up research for this book, I was interviewed by the journal *Marwar* about my research, and this interview was published on *Marwar*'s website, albeit with considerable modification by the person who conducted the interview. ⁷⁰ The rationale for featuring certain families and not others is left unstated, though one assumes that, as with other caste histories, the featured families may have sponsored the publication and its advertisements in order to be included in the book. ⁷¹ The articles and interviews of families in *Marwar* describe the strict upbringing, disciplined work habits, and industrial or business strategies of these Marwari stars, and stress the advantages of joint families in giving a competitive edge in business. The lead article, "Man of Steel," discusses L. N. Mittal, who runs Ispat International from London and is widely considered to be the richest Indian in the world. ⁷² Also featured is Amit Jatia, nicknamed McJatia, who brought McDonald's to India, promising that Indian franchises would not sell beef, pork, or their by-products. ⁷³ Generally, the featured male industrialists are photographed with wives and children, with quotations about how the daughters are taking various domestic courses and

preparing to be housewives, or about how the husbands have "allowed" their wives to take a hand in the family business or in family philanthropy. ⁷⁴ The prominent women featured include those who run boutiques or restaurants, or who patronize art and dance. One exception is Shobhna Bharatiya, daughter of K. K. Birla, who runs her father's newspaper empire, the Delhi-based *Hindustan Times*. She comments that while Birla women may not necessarily work in the office, "we always had aunts looking after and managing schools, hospitals, and auditoriums." ⁷⁵ In organizing the articles around the various *kul-deepak* (lights of the lineage), *Marwar* follows the structure of the more standard caste histories of the Marwaris, by taking each family (*kul*) as the object of analysis. ⁷⁶

Mapping Community in Calcutta: Marwaris of the Burabazar

Here, a Bengali is like a traveler who has lost his way ... if someone comes here, he will easily assume that it is Rajasthan. Bengali is not the language of communication. If someone does not know Hindi, he will face great difficulty.

—*Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 1995 ⁷⁷

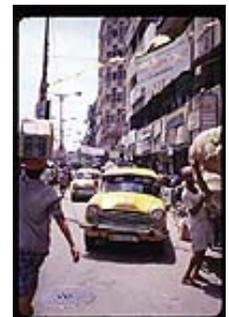
While the Marwaris have mapped their identity in Rajasthan, it is Burabazar—a chaotic, dirty, and urban place—that has long been considered as the traditional locality of Marwaris in Calcutta. This business area in northern Calcutta forms the more immediate context of Marwari mapping among Bengalis. Burabazar has existed in some form since before the arrival of the British over three hundred years ago. The original market, Sutanuti Hat, was the regional center of the yarn and thread trade, and by 1707 the area was already crowded with houses and shops, probably giving it its new



name, the Big Bazaar. Once affectionately named "Buro" Bazar for "old" Lord Shiva, Burabazar (Big Bazaar) is a cramped section of northern Calcutta, north of Dalhousie Square, bounded by Central Avenue, Brabourne Road, and Harrison Road, covering an area of approximately one square mile.

Timberg writes that the first business firms from Shekhawati were already in place in Calcutta by the 1840s, being extensions of firms further west dating from the eighteenth century. ⁷⁸

The supposed first Marwari *baniya* in Calcutta, Nathuram Saraf, notes Timberg, reportedly arrived in the 1830s from Mandawa and worked as a guaranteed broker to Kinsell and Ghose. ⁷⁹ Though Burabazar is cosmopolitan in the sense that traders of all backgrounds have worked and lived here, since the 1870s it has acquired a Marwari identity. ⁸⁰ The 1911 Calcutta census lists more migrants from Rajputana in



the neighborhood than from anywhere else in India, and those chiefly from Jaipur (8000) and Bikanir (7000), with the total number having jumped from 15,000 to 21,000 in the preceding ten years. ⁸¹ The tiny, dirty streets one sees today, littered with garbage, suggest that the area suffers from poverty, but this is not the case. Though many Marwari families have left Burabazar, moving family residences and sometimes also businesses to more posh localities, it is now estimated that Burabazar houses sixty percent of the total wealth of Calcutta Marwaris. ⁸²



Burabazar has not been a place for production but for transaction. As colonial Calcutta's center of "indigenous banking" and commerce, Burabazar has housed thousands of small *gaddi*. *Gaddi* literally means "seat cushion," but is a euphemism for a business firm. ⁸³ Sitting on their *gaddis*, starting in the 1850s Marwaris

and other *baniyas* conducted *crores* (tens of millions) of rupees of business as agents and brokers for the European managing agencies, as well as wholesale and retail trade in cloth, thread, utensils, and many other local and international commodities. ⁸⁴ Marwari *baniyas* traditionally kept their accounts in large red cloth ledgers, which, along with their *gaddi* cushions, were changed every year on Diwali, with the blessing of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. ⁸⁵ The *vahi* (account books) were kept by a system known as *parta*, by which daily accountings of cash and credit standings are counted and recorded at the end of every business day. ⁸⁶ This method of closely monitoring cash flow has been seen as the secret to Marwari success, particularly in speculation, when money changes hands very quickly. ⁸⁷

During business hours I observed merchants and traders sitting cross-legged on their *gaddi* with a wooden cashbox, pen, large accounting books, and cellular telephones as their primary equipment. Traditionally, Marwari boys learned arithmetic and accounting and calculated the sums in their heads, without having to use paper. ⁸⁸ At night, recent



arrivals with connections to the *baniya* or merchant sleep on the *gaddi* cushion-mats that during the day constitute the traditional office decor. This is a practice that has continued for centuries from the earliest days of migration. One reason that the census enumeration underestimated the Marwari population was that so many of them slept in offices, thus constituting a group of people who may not have been counted in residential areas. ⁸⁹

In the eyes of the colonizer, the image of dirty, congested



Burabazar was described as the antithesis of Dalhousie Square, where the wealthy British managing agencies controlling the jute, coal, and tea industries sat side by side on tree-lined streets near the Writer's Building, which is still the seat of the Government of Bengal. Unlike the "white town" of Dalhousie, Burabazar was the territory of local merchants. When the construction of Harrison (now M. G.) Road was finished in the 1890s, Marwaris bought up the land on either side and put shops on the ground and first floors, and residences on floors further up. The strong economic position of Marwari traders in Burabazar helped facilitate a colonial discourse that described Burabazar as the site of contagion and urban filth. Both *bustee* (slum) and general living quarters in Burabazar were the special target of colonial sanitation inquiries in the late nineteenth century. ⁹⁰

Clemon and Hossack wrote that the area consisted of "extremely valuable property in an intensely insanitary state" and that the "excessive and reckless overbuilding which has been allowed in the past, the accumulations of filth and rubbish, the overcrowding, the abominable conditions in connection with the dry removal of excrement, the foul and stinking state of innumerable narrow passages, alleys and courts, the shocking condition of certain bustees and kutchra tenements—all these...combine to make this ward one of the worst areas of its size in any city with which we are acquainted." ⁹¹



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These discourses of public health and hygiene are still in widespread circulation, especially among Bengalis. The pervasive images of Marwaris as unsanitary and unhealthy individuals have persisted even though a large number of prominent Marwari families have left Burabazar. Questions of health and sanitation form a sphere for a contemporary cultural and ethnic critique. Evidence of these continuing cultural stereotypes of Marwaris as a generally wealthy but unhealthy population is found in the methodologies of current scientific and medical research. Upper-middle and high economic class Marwaris have been the target population in medical studies of hereditary and environmental factors related to coronary artery disease. They were chosen, the authors of the study claim, because of their lifestyles of high stress associated with trading, low physical activity, and a vegetarian diet consisting of large quantities of hydrogenated and saturated fats and oils, such as ghee. ⁹²

In the second decade of the twentieth century, the Calcutta Corporation commissioned the internationally-known city planner Patrick Geddes to survey the district and submit suggestions for structural changes in the Burabazar neighborhood. Geddes's 1919 report, *Barra Bazar Improvement*, focused on the problem of congestion in the commercial areas of Burabazar. Citing arguments of economy and sanitation, Geddes recommended

widening current roads and adding new ones, and creating public playgrounds and gardens. These improvements would provide better access for police and sanitary inspectors and would also increase sunlight and ventilation for mothers and children. Geddes's major planning critique was economic, however, and concerned the need to modernize the chaotic handling of goods by numerous coolies and bullock-cart drivers, which entailed "costly superintendence, endless toils, delays and confusions" and could arguably be replaced by more efficient American methods. Geddes's aim was to modernize the traditional Indian "localisation of business," by which business interests are grouped into different areas. This "old world" arrangement of business bore much in common with the ultra-modern, spacious, and well-lit American produce exchanges, in which commodities could be most efficiently exchanged. ⁹³ In this way, wholesalers of one product would all be located in the same business quarter.

Burabazar Architecture and the Revival of Vernacular Design

Early colonial observers commented on the distinctive styles of architecture in different Calcutta neighborhoods. James Long wrote, "It is said that everybody who passes three nights here falls in love with Calcutta.

But why? ... He will, during his stay, find in the natural way different communities in different areas who have their own ideas and way of life and have different domestic architecture." ⁹⁴ The development



of Rajasthani vernacular architectural styles by the new landowning Marwaris in Burabazar became a means of appropriating local space. In establishing their new residences, at first Marwaris bought up lands lying next to the roads that had been opened up or widened by the Calcutta Improvement Trust. Along these major commercial streets, they remodeled old buildings and built large, imposing multistoried structures with space for *gaddi* and residential quarters alike. ⁹⁵

With the pressures of increasing population, the Marwaris spread deeper and deeper from the main roads into the narrowest lanes, in some places only about seven feet across, taking the places of Bengali traders in both occupation and residence.

These Marwari-built houses in Burabazar were typically crowded, dark, and sparsely furnished, and fostered a unique architectural style in Calcutta that resembled the Shekhawati courtyard houses and thus reflected the community's origins in Rajasthan. These once grand buildings are noteworthy for their prominent arcaded loggias (galleries), separated by columns, overlooking both the street and the inner courtyards. The Rajasthani architectural style, especially the courtyards, mimics the features of the Shekhawati *havelis*, although I did not observe any wall paintings. Some accommodations were made for the urban environment. In Calcutta, considerations of inclement monsoon weather and the need to maintain domestic privacy in a crowded urban area prompted the use of wooden *jhilmil* (blinds) and intricate plaster lattice work (*jaffrey*) on iron

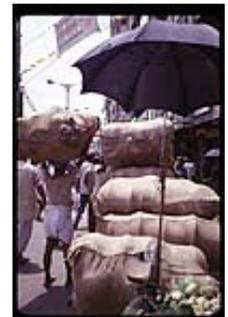
frames; these features shielded occupants from wind, sun, and unwanted male stares. Ironwork railings, arches, and balconies, originally cast in England and Scotland, were also distinctive features of this Rajasthani architecture style. [96](#)



My research brought me to Burabazar on many occasions, for archival work in public reading rooms and in the headquarters of the All India Marwari Federation, and to visit Marwari women. Traveling from southern Calcutta, where I lived, to Burabazar was a long and exhausting process, entailing a frustrating journey through a seemingly unending traffic jam—whether by taxi or by a rather haphazard combination of minibuses, the subway, and rickshaws. The streets of Burabazar are tiny, crowded, and confusing, so when I first started going there I dared not go without bringing a map. Because detailed maps of even central, touristy Calcutta are hard to come by, I resorted to using my hand-drawn map of major streets that I had copied out of the colonial archival files on Burabazar sanitation. This very personalized but highly necessary use of colonial knowledge struck me at the time as both ironic and embarrassing.

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What I did not expect, however, in my first forays into the rough-and-tumble world of Burabazar, was an overwhelming sense of *déjà vu* from having read the colonial reports on sanitation. Just as I had read, in Burabazar I saw rusty pipes sticking out of buildings, leaking foul-smelling liquids into the walkways below. Slippery brown mud, especially after the monsoon, covered the unevenly tuckpointed brick streets, making me lose my footing on many occasions. I learned to wear only dark colors and older clothes on Burabazar days. Inside one of the buildings where I often went for research, a frequently-in-use and foul-smelling men's urinal was prominently perched about five feet inside the entrance, prompting me to make an unusually fast entrance up the three flights of stairs to the office upstairs to get past the stench. The tiny streets and narrow lanes of Burabazar are crowded with traders, handcarts, and bundles of cloth goods lying on the streets. The one time I rode there in a car, we got stuck in one of the small lanes for several hours. Unlike other areas of Calcutta, there are very few women to be seen on the streets. Since I was usually alone, I sometimes received salacious comments from passersby, who addressed me in Hindi, perhaps mistaking me for an Anglo-Indian. Although I did not really fear for my safety, some incidents of random shooting on M. G. Road gave me the impression that there is perhaps more violent crime in Burabazar than in other localities of Calcutta. It is these images of chaos and filth that get associated with the Marwaris of Burabazar, not the spectacular domestic architecture and philanthropy in Rajasthan.



In the 1990s, the organization CRUTA (Foundation for Conservation and Recreation of Urban Traditional Architecture) attempted to foster architectural conservation among the residents in Burabazar, explicitly using Patrick Geddes's work as their inspirational model. CRUTA and its founding member, a Bengali architect named Debashish Nayak, attracted international attention for their innovative participatory, resident-centered conservation and architectural heritage approach. ⁹⁷ CRUTA sponsored architectural walking tours of northern Calcutta, including Burabazar. When I went on one such walk with other AIIS (American Institute of Indian Studies) fellows, the guide showed us how some residents have learned to sweep up their garbage carefully and place clay-potted flowering plants along entrance ways. Was this for the benefit of tourists? The guide also pointed out, rather sullenly, places where wet clothing hung from the ironwork balconies, left to dry in the breeze. The discourse of civic responsibility spoke volumes. ⁹⁸ Far from recognizing the practicality or innovation of such tiny gestures in the flow of everyday living, especially in such a congested area of the city, the guide took offense at such supposedly antimodern, subaltern spatial appropriations. CRUTA'S language has obviously embraced the logic of colonial and nationalist civic modernity. These are the aspects of Burabazar that have become notorious among Calcutta Bengalis. As many Bengalis note, there are two kinds of Marwaris: the "Burabazar types" and the new industrialists.

Leaving Burabazar: Marwaris at Large

Gone are the regulated living, thrift, caginess and indigenous book-keeping. Instead you have the club-hopping man-about-town with expensive habits, carefree outlook and computerised accounting system.

—Arup De on the new Marwaris ⁹⁹



Starting from the First World War, and especially in the 1940s, some of the wealthier Marwaris began to leave their *gaddis* and homes in Burabazar for more spacious homes in less densely populated localities. Some of them kept their *gaddis* in Burabazar, and others relocated their businesses to modern offices and corporate boardrooms. The reasons that Marwaris left Burabazar are many. Some of the social reformers left the neighborhood because they were ostracized for implementing reform. ¹⁰⁰ Some informants claimed that at least part of the out-migration from Burabazar came as the result of fierce rioting in localities adjacent to and in Burabazar. Marwari land speculation in southern

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and hitherto unsettled parts of Calcutta in the 1940s was widespread and raised land prices considerably. Until independence, they stayed on the major roads and did not buy residential property located in narrow lanes populated primarily by Bengalis. 102



With the transfer of political power at independence, European companies were bought out, especially by Marwari industrialists, from 1946 into the mid-1960s. 103 Along with these changes in industrial control came increased shifting of residential and office locations; many of the palatial mansions owned by Europeans in the posh neighborhoods of Alipur and Ballygunge were bought up by elite Marwaris.



Even though many Marwaris live in what used to be predominantly Bengali locales, the Marwaris are identified with Burabazar. Bengalis sometimes describe such intracity migrations as a type of "invasion" by outsiders coming in to "their" areas. The fear that prices of land and rent will skyrocket when Marwaris come to a neighborhood makes Bengalis nervous. These fears were articulated in a 1997 newspaper article entitled "Land Sharks Demolish Keshab Chandra Sen's House," 104 one of many such newspaper

stories that comment on the decline of historical monuments and the lack of resolve on the part of the West Bengal State Government to take action against further decay and destruction. Two Marwari business partners had purchased the land and torn down the decrepit structure that once housed one of Bengal's most prominent nationalist leaders, in order to clear a space for the construction of an office complex with the conspicuously Hindu name of Ganapati Chambers. Most of the house had been demolished by the time some Bengalis obtained a court order to preserve the monument. The story encapsulates many of the themes that I encountered in my research: the declining role of the (Bengali-identified) state in protecting monuments from land developers and from Marwaris who had, admittedly, purchased the land legally, but felt no remorse about razing a piece of the Bengali cultural past.

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The economic disparities between Marwaris and Bengalis are one reason the internal migration of Marwaris within Calcutta has been such a contentious issue for Bengalis. Academic knowledge may play a role here. Mirroring the ways that the colonial state identified certain identities with certain localities, academic descriptions of Calcutta itself often serve to fix locations of community within the city. N. K. Bose's *Calcutta: A Social Survey* maps the relationships between community and occupation and the placement of voluntary institutions ward by ward, thus creating normative visions, or stereotypes, of where certain people, their work, and their institutions really belong. 105 Naturally, academic descriptions such as Bose's are enabled by colonial ideas of urban space, administration, and urban planning, but in

themselves they help perpetuate existing attitudes about the ties between community and locality and about the lack of intercommunal integration.

Built Interiors and the Performance of Marwari Domesticity

During my appointment anthropology, I had ample opportunity to observe the domestic spaces of many Marwari households. For the most part the households were located in Ballygunge, in central Calcutta, and in Alipur, a posh neighborhood of mansions to the west. Upon ringing the bell and eventually being let into the households by suspicious servants, I was routinely made to wait. Since the waiting time always lasted at least fifteen to forty-five minutes (and once I waited for four hours!), my impatience often led me to wonder whether people were really so preoccupied and busy, or whether this was a performance to reiterate the importance of the person with whom I was supposed to meet. [106](#)

When visiting the women of families whom I got to know much better, I did not have to wait at all. I could move a little more freely around the household and was no longer confined to the outermost waiting room. In those cases, I would sit in the bedroom, a space reserved for intimate acquaintances. But in the hottest summer months, even with families I was meeting for the first time, I was often taken into the master bedroom, where the air conditioning was at its best. Generally, however, I was seated in the most public receiving area of the residence. The living rooms of the wealthiest people were vast expanses of extravagantly decorated space, replete with chandeliers, wall-to-wall carpeting or marble, oriental rugs, lavish curtains, and expensive and gaudy furniture, consisting usually of a sofa, chairs, and a coffee table, settings very reminiscent of the opulent mansions often depicted as the stereotypical homes of the wealthy in Hindi films.

Interestingly, none of the mansions outside of Burabazar looked anything like the *havelis* or even the courtyard buildings of Burabazar. These mansions were built either in colonial styles (if they were old) or in very modern styles, and did not reflect the sensibility of separate quarters as in the *haveli*. The interiors, however, reinvent a sort of Rajasthani "ethnic chic" through particularly garish styles of furniture and interior decorating. Marwaris are not unique in using domestic furniture and interior design in this way. Recent scholarship on domestic architecture and furnishings has shown how the changing material culture of the home is indicative of the transformations in familial relationships and in the relationship between private and public. Domestic spaces, particularly those intended for visitors, become sites where exhibitions of family coherence and familial orientation to the larger world are very conspicuously on display. [107](#) This became especially clear in the most public room of the Marwari homes, the formal Western-style living room where visitors like me sit.

After being seated on a living room couch by a servant, I would wait. This otherwise boring waiting time provided an intimate vantage point from which to take note of the material culture of Marwari households. The largest homes had two different kinds of living rooms, side by side. In many of the houses and mansions, adjacent to the more Western-style living space where I would sit, there would be a more traditional *gaddi* arrangement for formal entertaining. This space generally consisted of large, ten-by-ten-foot white padded cushions on the floor with *pash balish* (bolster pillows) thrown about for back support. Some hostesses explained to me that this room was used for dinner parties and entertaining business colleagues. Less affluent, middle-class households did not have the luxury of space for two separate living rooms. Instead, in a modified arrangement the single living room would often blend the heavily stylized ornate furniture on one end with a modified *gaddi* and cushion arrangement on the other. Unlike most middle-class Bengali households, there was often no reading material to be seen in these rooms. Interestingly enough, the Marwari families who had joined the professions—such as law, education, or medicine—and who lived in Bengali neighborhoods outside of Burabazar had much simpler, plainer, and more inexpensive household furnishings, similar to those I was used to seeing in Bengali homes, and, of course, lots of books.

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I was interested in observing how in Marwari mansions various architectural forms accommodated large joint families with grandparents, parents, unmarried children, and brothers with their wives and children. Space is an important factor. After all, no joint family can continue to expand indefinitely without eventually breaking into separate parts. In the large flats of the upper-middle classes, each married brother would generally have one large bedroom for his wife and children, and they shared a common kitchen. Among the superrich, who live in the mansions of the erstwhile colonizers, an entire wing is devoted to each son and his family. Each wing has its own kitchen for the preparation of tea and snacks, but regular meals were prepared in the main kitchen and taken together. One extreme example is the Mittal family, one of the wealthiest families in India, who take up an entire building. The Mittal Bhavan (house) in Bombay houses 69 family members from three generations (excluding daughters who have married out), all eating from a common kitchen on the eighth floor. The Mittals are currently building Mittal Bhavan II next door, to accommodate the overflow. [108](#)

In addition to marking ethnicized territory through changing

appropriations of residential space, the development of Marwari public institutions around central Calcutta has been noteworthy as well. The cityscape of Calcutta is now dotted with philanthropic and charitable institutions built by prominent Marwaris over the last sixty years: Hindu and Jain temples, *dharamsalas* (rest houses), colleges, hospitals, auditoriums, and public drinking-water facilities. The Birlas have built a new and lavish temple, planetarium, museum of industry and technology, an art gallery, and a temple/sabhangar (auditorium), along with schools and colleges for girls. Most of these institutions bear the Birla family name.



Philanthropy and Mapping the Kul: Industrialists and Temple Building



A national chain of the "Birla temples," temples of grandiose scale and design, have become major landmarks and part of the cityscapes of Indian urban life in the late twentieth century. The Birla temples exist in conjunction with other large industrial and philanthropic ventures of the wealthy Birla family, including major institutions of technology, medicine, and education, all of which make attempts (albeit contested) to claim national and international social merit. As Haynes's *Rhetoric and Ritual* points out, merchants do not establish reputations through business and industry alone but also through religious giving and moral leadership. [109](#)

Birla temples have redefined religion to conform to modern ideals of philanthropy and humanitarianism, combining the worship of a deity with a public institution that contributes to civil society.



The architectural forms of the two newest Birla temples incorporate innovative, dual-purpose structures into the temple design that alter temple practices to reflect the concerns of modern public culture in a religious site. One must consider, however, whether the Birla temples are a convincing kind of social performance. Does temple-building on a national scale in fact give legitimacy and merit to the donors and patrons, especially merchants and industrialists with scarred social reputations in other arenas? It might be



tempting to make the argument that the Birla temples announce the arrival of capitalism in India, and that industrialist donors have now replaced royalty as temple patrons. My own research, however, reveals that we need to consider carefully issues of public reception in determining whether the builders succeed in gaining legitimacy from public acceptance. While merchant donors build temples with the intent of gaining both social and religious merit, they do not always succeed. A performance, in other words,

is not always convincing.

Merchant temple-building in historical context

Temples have arguably been the most prevalent form of charitable institution in Indian history to date. According to Hindu literature and custom, merit is due to the patron of a temple. As is well documented, temples in India were traditionally sponsored by royalty and Hindu kings, regal patrons who had access to the wealth of a country and could afford to build. Temple-building went hand in hand with the construction of state power. Burton Stein argues that premodern temples were in fact so indispensable as symbols of authority that the relationship between human leaders and deities installed in the temple could be characterized as a "shared sovereignty." ¹¹⁰ In this model of rule, both deity and ruler were critical in maintaining a structure of authority.

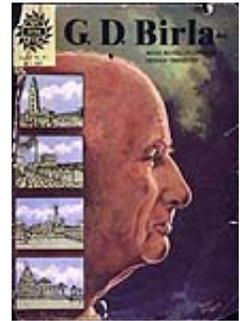
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Many scholars have pointed out that, at the same time that kings and rulers sought divine legitimation through temple patronage, other prominent individuals, particularly merchants, were also patrons, involved in both constructing new temples and renovating old ones. ¹¹¹ According to such anthropologists as Arjun Appadurai, making a gift to a temple creates a relationship of reciprocity between the donor and the deity, which in turn makes a performative statement about the authority of the donor to a community of worshippers. ¹¹² The donor provides a forum for a community of worshippers to gain access to gods. In precolonial India, donations for temple building undoubtedly provided a way for merchants to manage and negotiate their relationships with local rulers. Starting in the mid-sixteenth century, however, endowments from state donors decreased and were supplemented or replaced by gifts from prominent local residents and merchants. ¹¹³ Hites Sanyal notes that many of the temples built in Bengal during the temple-building boom of 1750 to 1900 were constructed by ordinary and "socially handicapped" people, who were trying to acquire upward caste mobility and social power. ¹¹⁴ Unlike the Birlas, these increasingly powerful individuals did not have a great impact on the technical or architectural aspects of temple building and perhaps did not change the essential cultural meanings of the temple.

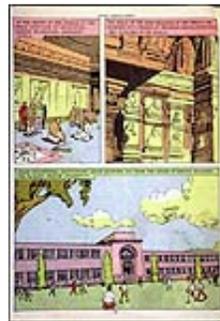
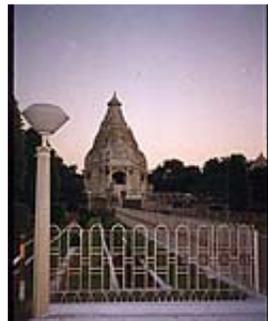
By the late nineteenth century, merchants and traders had become increasingly involved in the Congress and other political movements, bringing to this nationalism their interests in Hindu cultural revivalism, building temples, shrines, bathing platforms, and pilgrimage rest houses. The first Birla temple in New

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Delhi, constructed by famed industrialist G. D. Birla during the heyday of the nationalist movement in the 1930s, now displays pictures of G. D. Birla that reflect association with Gandhi and other nationalist figures. Because the temple was no longer directly connected to the divine legitimation of kingship, temple-building had become increasingly secularized. In the second half of the twentieth century, as royalty and kingship have declined almost entirely, merchants have emerged single-handedly as the sole financial benefactors of large temples. In contributing to temple-building, modern merchants have implicitly drawn on idioms of royalty in creating a public representation of themselves and their "good works." As Haynes has pointed out, contributions to temple-building constructs a public identity for merchants that rests on religious values. In turn, the display of these religious values is meant to imply trustworthiness in business. ¹¹⁶ The interdependent relationship between deity and king has given way to a theoretical but contested interdependence between religion and business.



Three Birla Temples



The Saraswati temple in Pilani, Rajasthan, was built between 1956 and 1960 by G. D. Birla, twentieth-century patriarch of the Birla family, and was officially consecrated in 1960. With certain innovations, the temple is a replica, in marble, of the Khandariya Mahadeo temple at Khajuraho. The Saraswati Sharda temple is on the campus of the Birla Institute of



Technology and Science (BITS). The location of the temple on a college campus thus continues a long tradition of the intermingling of temples and education. Temples have traditionally been the sites of general education, offering lessons in grammar, astrology, and the recitation of sacred texts. ¹¹⁷ In addition, endowments to temples have often provided for the establishment of colleges. A volume published for the Diamond Jubilee of the Birla Education Trust states that the Saraswati temple was built at a cost of 23 *lakhs* (2.3 million) rupees. Statues of the temple patrons, G. D. and Mahadevi Birla, are placed prominently at the edge of the temple. The Birla Institute authorities claim that this temple may be the first in India to be dedicated to Saraswati, the goddess of education. The temple is meant to give intellectual attainments a spiritual sanction. Faces on the walls of the Saraswati temple in Pilani reflect a variety of ancient and modern thinkers and rulers, including Confucius and John F. Kennedy. The collage of pictures of scientists, saints, and philosophers on the exterior walls suggests a form of Hindu cosmopolitanism, promising to bridge a gap between scientific and technological achievements and Hindu spirituality.



The construction of the Lakshmi-Narayan temple at Jaipur was begun by B. M. Birla, brother of G. D. Birla. B. M. Birla was unable to complete the work on the temple during his lifetime, and the work was finished by his foundation. Like the Pilani temple, the Jaipur Birla temple demonstrates how traditions of lineage and kinship are reenergized and reproduced in changing historical and social circumstances. In the placement of two prominent statues of the main donors, Mr. and Mrs. B. M. Birla, the temple draws on older themes of kingship and royal patronage, in this case through a representation of the Birla donors as a modern conjugal couple. The positioning of their images in front of the temple suggests that they are the first devotees of the deity, in the same way that a king would have once been considered to be.

The architectural style of the temple is modeled on North Indian design, particularly that of Rajput. The *garbagriha* has a design, and motifs such as rosewood doors, like palaces of classical India. There are eighteen marble pillars surrounding the outer portion of the temple. The pillars are in the sculptural tradition of Rajasthan, with Hindu religious saints and deities as well as a host of non-Hindu figures, including Christ, a Madonna, Zeus, Moses, Socrates, and Confucius. The inclusion of renowned figures of the Western world suggests that the temple stresses the values of tolerance, though through assimilation into the Hindu fold. A printed brochure put out by the B. M. Birla Foundation points out that the temple's "architectural wonders" were in fact constructed by Muslim artisans, apparently thus reinforcing the nationalist theme of unity in diversity and, again, "tolerance" through assimilation. There are two other modern features of the temple. First, the temple brochure also notes that the rather high



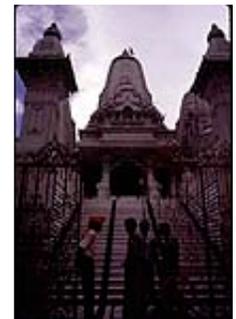
elevation of the Lakshmi and Narayan images inside the temple allows people driving by on the road to pay their respects and pray even if they don't have the time to stop. Having the major deities exposed to the outside is a remarkable contrast to traditional Hindu temples, which house their major deities within the protective *garbhagriha* of the inner chamber. Second, the temple is claimed to be the first air-conditioned temple in all of Asia.



The Jaipur temple combines space for both religious and cultural uses. According to the brochure, "the temple is constructed on a marble platform of about twenty-nine thousand square feet. The basement will accommodate an air-conditioned museum, library, administrative office and meditation hall." ¹¹⁸

Underneath the Lakshmi-Narayan Temple, and using a separate side entrance, is the B. M. Birla Family Museum. Two large halls display material artifacts relating to the contributions of the Birla family to Indian industry and social welfare. One room displays the traditional and modern clothing of various generations of the Birla family, certificates of appreciation and honorary degrees, and letters from dignitaries and heads of state. The other room is a collection of photographs of the Birla family, documenting their involvement in industry and social welfare projects. Of special note is an exhibit on the production of the first Indian car by the Birla concern Hindustan Motors.

The Birla Temple in Calcutta, built by K. K. Birla, a son of G. D. Birla, is the newest addition to the Birla national temple chain. Over thirty years in duration, the Sri Radhakrishna Temple construction was upset by numerous labor disputes, as is common in Calcutta. The temple was consecrated on February 21, 1996. The temple dedication is inscribed in the wall of the temple in Hindi and in English: "The prayer of the entire Birla family is: may this temple spread the message of the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita and other religious scriptures of our saints and holy people; may it lead people along the path of piety and dedication to God; may it inculcate the spirit of adherence to the principles of humanitarianism, compassion towards the poor and the needy, and of amity and goodwill among mankind."



This inscription clearly brings a modern humanitarian



discourse into the public message of the temple. An account of the consecration program in *Asian Age* (Feb. 22, 1996) reports K. K. Birla's announcement that the Birla *Mandir* was already listed in some tourist guides published in foreign countries. Mr. Birla's remark suggests how the search for religious and public merit through philanthropic acts has itself become part of the growing mentality of globalization.

Like the bifurcate temple structure in Jaipur, the Calcutta temple includes secular space.



Innovatively housed underground beneath the temple structure is a lush theater called the G. D. Birla Sabhaghar, named after the father and patriarch of the three living Birla brothers. Like the family museum in Jaipur, one enters a side door to gain entrance to the theater, suggesting a different mode of experiencing the space. A very large seating area for the audience combined with an extraordinarily plush interior makes the G. D. Birla



Sabhaghar the best theater in Calcutta. Combined with the temple upstairs, it is easily the most prominent landmark in Ballygunge. And yet the very luxuriousness of the theater-temple structure has raised questions about Marwari industrialist philanthropic gestures. Even these temples have been seen by Bengalis as part of the Marwaris' business empire.

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Efficacy of Marwari Temple-Building—Sri Sri Siddheswari Limited

Most research on temple-building has claimed that donors make temples to acquire religious and social merit. The question of popular response to the temples—whether the donors have actually succeeded in gaining the social reputations they sought—has been relatively neglected.

The Bengali intelligentsia's rejection of Marwari cultural capital in the realm of religious good works is far older than the more recent history of Birla philanthropy in Calcutta, and provides the context in which subsequent Marwari philanthropy is situated. Bengali literature contains some hilarious illustrations of how Marwari charity has been viewed in Bengal, particularly in relation to traditions of merchant temple-building. ¹¹⁹ Set in 1915 (Magh 1326 on the Bengali calendar), Parusharam's "Sri Sri Siddheswari Limited" is a delightful story about a couple of Bengali businessmen, Shyambabu and his brother-in-law Bipin Choudhuri, who are partners in a firm known as "Brahmachari and Brother in Law, General Merchants." ¹²⁰ (Brahmachari means a holy man who has renounced the material world; the Bengali word

for "brother-in-law," *sala*, is also a common abuse approximating "son of a bitch.") ¹²¹ The author, Parashuram, who in real life is the well-known satirist Rajsekhar Bose, presents a humorous parody of what he perceives as the hollowness of modern Bengali and Marwari religiosity:

Shyambabu took a little Ganga water and uttered some mantras and then sprinkled the water in the room. Then he brought out a rubber stamp smeared with vermilion from the drawer of the table and printed the name of Devi Durga for one hundred eight times [an auspicious ritual]. Twelve lines of 'Sri Sri Durga' are marked on the stamp, so he has to imprint it only nine times. Mr. Bipin is the inventor of this labour saving machine. He named it 'The Automatic Sri Durgagraph' and tried to get patent of it.

As the partners sit in the firm's office and discuss the details of a deal, Shyam's Marwari friend, Babu Ganderiram Batparia, arrives. (*Batparia* means "thief" in Bengali.) They discuss the prospectus for their business venture, Sri Sri Siddheswari Limited, which is a for-profit Hindu temple. Their business plan reads as follows:

The ordinary people have no idea about the huge income of the famous temples of India. It is known from a report that fifteen thousand devotees go to one temple in Bengal everyday. If one person gives four annas [twenty-five paisa], the yearly income of a temple is about thirteen and a half lakh rupees. Whatever be the cost of maintenance, there is enough money left but ordinary people do not get the profit of it. To get rid of this problem of our country, a joint stock company called "Sri Sri Siddheswari Limited" is founded. With the money of the religious minded shareholders, a big temple with wakeful goddess will be built... Shareholders will get unexpected amounts of dividends and they will be blessed by obtaining virtue, wealth, love and final salvation.

Ganderi, the Marwari, who speaks Hindi slang among his Bengali associates, unveils his plan to speculate on the shares in order to increase their market value. He also suggests that they start a secondary business to sell a product called *ghai*, which is an impure clarified butter (as opposed to pure *ghee*) made from the milk of cow, goat, and buffalo. Ganderi assures his associates of his innocence in the "ghai" business, by claiming that since he is only involved in lending money to the business and collecting interest and half the profit, he has no actual contact with the impure substance. In fact, Ganderi had given several thousand *laks* for the construction of *dharmasalas* (guest houses for religious pilgrims), earning him enough merit to dissolve any trace of sin. After all, it is another man, Kashem Ali, who runs the *ghai* business in faraway Hatras.

As the details of the plan are discussed—marketing the goddess and selling shares, and secondary businesses such as guest houses, a village theater, and other kinds of entertainment that will accompany the temple—a deal is struck for how the directors will split the dividends. Ganderi will invest one *lakh* (one hundred thousand) rupees and the other directors will invest fifty thousand each. Shyam and Bipin convince a retired Bengali man, Tinkaribabu, to become a co-director in the company in exchange for giving them his pension savings to invest in their business venture. Tinkari also hopes to give employment to one of his less fortunate relatives.

Tinkari: Achha [OK], I think your office will need many people now. I have a relative—the son of my sister-in-law, can't you give him some work? He is jobless and destroying my money. He is not well-educated, spoilt by mixing with bad people. If he gets a job, it would be great. That young man is smart and well-behaved.

Shyam: The son of your sister-in-law? You don't have to say anything else. I shall make him the head priest of the temple. Now at least fifteen applications came for that post, among them five are graduates. But of course, priority goes to your relative.

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At first, Ganderi's prophesy that the shares would increase in value through speculation comes true. The shares of Sri Sri Siddheswari Limited are indeed bought and sold in the market for a high price. One year later, however, at the board meeting of Brahmachari and Brother-in-Law, there is a great financial crisis. Huge sums are owed to the coal seller, the brick merchant, the printer, and many others who had taken on contract work for the temple. While Tinkari demands his investment money back, Shyam insists that the temple could continue to be built. Shyam tricks Tinkari into buying off the rest of Shyam's sixteen hundred shares in the company for eight rupees, which makes Tinkari the director of the company, and therefore responsible for both profit and debt. But Ganderi advises Tinkari that Shyam has in fact bought up all of the shares from the other directors, leaving the company's debt at about ninety thousand rupees, with liquidation imminent after just two days. The story ends with Tinkari alone responsible for the huge debt; Ganderi bids him farewell, sarcastically using the religious greeting, "Ram Ram." The moral of the story: Marwaris trick Bengalis and make off with the money.

The story reveals a great deal about the place of the Marwari merchant trader in the Bengali business landscape and about how Bengali writers have satirized the Bengali-Marwari relationship as a way of resisting the cultural influence of the Marwaris. The way that shares to the temple are bought and

sold in the story reveals the profit-making potential of religious institutions in Indian public life and questions their true philanthropic value and intent. To a certain extent this reflects colonial-era anxieties about whether charity and philanthropy to religious institutions were indeed genuine or whether they were merely tax shelters for the indigenous elite. The references to the adulteration of ghee into the spurious produce called "ghai" attest to the misery that Marwaris have sometimes inflicted onto local Bengali populations. ¹²² But Parusharam is not simply making a communalist argument. In his story it is not just Marwaris who are full of unscrupulous business tricks and scams; Bengalis, as evidenced by the characters of Shyam and Tinkari, can be equally greedy in the world of commerce and material gain. Unlike the Marwari character Ganderi, however, the Bengalis are not as clever at making money. Though Shyam and Tinkari escape being responsible for Sri Sri Siddheswari Limited's very troubled finances, they ultimately do not profit as much as Ganderi, who protected himself by selling out to Shyam only after claiming his one *lakh* profit. Though this account is a fictionalized satire of the modern reception of merchant temple-building, there are strong continuities with how Bengalis and other Indians today view the construction of temples by industrialists.

Popular Responses to Marwari Temple-Building

In Calcutta there has been considerable debate among the Bengali middle classes over the ways in which the Birlas have reputedly used the temple and attached theater as a means of investing enormous sums of money that are not subject to taxation. Often, as a way to get people to talk about the Marwaris generally, I asked middle-class Bengalis about their responses to the Birla Temple. Many people pointed out that the temple's auspiciousness is diminished because it bears the name of a businessman. Many people responded that, when entering the temple, they felt overwhelmed by a sense of commercialism, noting the gaudy decor or the brightly colored fluorescent clothing placed on the deities, often in bold yellows or hot pinks. Brochures describing the Birla temples attest to the vast sums of money spent on construction and decoration. The Calcutta temple has a couple of chandeliers that are rumored to be worth several *crore*, or tens of millions, rupees apiece. The temple is a means, some Bengalis argue, of making black money into white. Even the theater building, with its notoriously high rental charges and high ticket prices, could be another money-making enterprise for the Birla family.

This popular Bengali discourse of corruption derives in part from the colonial policy on temple management. Though the colonial state presumably left aside questions of ritual in an attempt to maintain noninterference in religious affairs, the British did not hesitate to legislate matters of temple management. As Dirks and Appadurai have pointed out, under colonial rule temple management underwent a process of bureaucratic rationalization. ¹²³ In attempting to manage temples, the British colonial state brought the everyday administrative affairs of temples

into the domain of public life, thereby opening temples up to charges of misuse and corruption. The postcolonial nationalist state's explicit commitment to a discourse of accountability and disclosure despite ample practices to the contrary enables a popular discourse of corruption. ¹²⁴ At the same time, however, Bengali accusations of financial corruption in regard to the Birla *Mandir* are arguably an extension of the wider contentious social relationship between the majority Bengali population and the Birla family, who are seen by the Bengali middle classes as part of a larger and disreputable Marwari migrant business community.

The contention over the Calcutta Birla Temple stems in part from the widespread Bengali patronage of the theater, and not necessarily the upper temple portion itself. Bengalis can choose whether or not to visit a Marwari temple, but the widespread use of the G. D. Birla *Sabhashar* as a site for cultural production, often of Bengali language shows, reveals both an irony and a tension about the existence of the Birla Temple. An informal survey conducted of middle-class Bengalis showed that while few of them had any plans to visit the Birla temple, they did show interest in attending a cultural event in the G. D. Birla *Sabhashar*. Of course, there are plenty of other theaters in Calcutta, including the West Bengal State-sponsored Nandan, but these have fallen into increasing disrepair. The patronage of a temple, housing the most luxurious theater space in Calcutta, suggests the dominance of the business class on a cultural level. With the Marwari-backed G. D. Birla *Sabhashar*, as well as the acclaimed Kala Mandir Hall on Theater Road, Bengalis appear to have lost out on "ownership" of cultural production.

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And yet, despite what educated middle- and upper-class Bengalis think, the immense popularity of the Birla Temple as one the city's foremost attractions is undeniable. The lines to get into the temple and deposit one's shoes in the cloakroom are discouragingly long. The couple of times that I visited the temple, I went with girls from wealthy Marwari families who live nearby on Queen's Park. The chauffeur drove us down two blocks in our stocking feet to the front gate so that we could avoid waiting in line and just go right in. As we circled around the deities, I noticed that the area around the temple complex, forming a public space overlooking the street, was typically filled with large groups of people sitting on the cool marble floor, talking with each other and simply enjoying the space. Besides Marwaris and North Indians, it seems, the major visitors to the temple are working-class people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

Merchant temple-building in India is not a new activity, since it has existed for centuries alongside of royal practices of temple patronage as well. Yet in emerging as economic and social leaders, and as such effectively replacing royalty as temple donors, wealthy merchant families such as the Birlas deploy royal idioms of temple-building to claim their own positions of social and economic leadership. Merchants draw on these older royal modes of

patronage in making claims to traditional "symbols of substance." ¹²⁵ In doing so, the construction of temples reflects values of royalty and kingship, and thus temples do not merely reflect a bureaucratic reality. The temples combine both South Indian and Rajasthani temple architectural styles to draw upon the traditions of South Indian kings as well as a regional association with Rajasthan.

Yet what is new, in particular with regard to the Birla temples, is how temple architectural structures also reflect modern demands of humanitarianism by providing civic and ostensibly secular spaces inside of religious ones, literally blurring the lines and spaces between what is religious and what is secular. In considering such appropriation of civic spaces into the realm of Hindu worship, one could argue that the space of philanthropic public culture, instead of becoming increasingly secular, has actually become more religious. Last, and most importantly, we should be careful not to assume that merchant sponsorship of temples has necessarily been efficacious in generating social respect and reputation for their business family patrons. The ambivalent—and sometimes even hostile—local responses to Marwari philanthropy, such as regarding Birla temples as profitable ventures, reminds us of the potential problems in assuming that the intent of philanthropy and mapping necessarily generates either a very predictable or very desirable public response. Performances are not always successful.

In the case of temples, it appears that merchants and industrialists replacing kings as the primary patrons of large temples have actually not quite usurped the legitimacy once derived from royal temple-building. The construction of Birla *Mandirs* across India has undoubtedly changed the nature of religious philanthropy in South Asia by combining civic and religious spaces. And yet these are also temples already associated with the names of founders who have been heavily criticized for their unscrupulous business practices. I have shown an example from Bengali literature that provides evidence of contested readings of merchant religious philanthropy. What I have not examined, and what remains an open question here, is whether or not the temples succeed in gaining the acceptance, and thus hegemonic consent, among the subaltern classes that do frequent their spaces, especially in Calcutta. We should not assume, however, that the intent of gaining social capital through temple-building necessarily produces the same local response across all social classes. More research needs to be done on these subaltern responses.

Conclusions

The official administrative creation of linguistic provinces in independent India demonstrates how, in official and popular minds alike, cultures and identities were essentially tied to certain places. ¹²⁶ Thus, Bengali culture was to be found in Bengal, Tamil culture in Madras/Tamil Nadu, Malayalam

culture in Kerala, and so on. The Marwaris, however, are an interesting case of a community that has never had any clear territorial referent, thus highlighting the inherent limitations of the regionalized way that colonialists and nationalists have often thought about Indian identities. In addition to drawing on the pioneering work of Bernard Cohn, the ideas in this chapter are informed by recent anthropological discussions about the relationship between power, culture, and place. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson contend that anthropologists have formed an "ethnological habit" of naturalizing groups of people as belonging to a particular territory, creating a fixed relationship between territory and culture. ¹²⁷ Even as increasing anthropological and historical attention is being placed on examining various diasporic, refugee, and migrant groups, however, Gupta and Ferguson warn that scholars should be careful not to make uncritical "spatial and temporal extensions of a prior, natural identity rooted in locality and community." ¹²⁸ As such, Liisa Malkki theorizes that the invention of homelands by deterritorialized peoples is made through "memories of and claims on places that they can or will no longer corporeally inhabit." ¹²⁹ An excellent illustration of this kind of trans-regional work is Karen Leonard's monograph on the creation of a biethnic Punjabi-Mexican identity in California, exploring how one diasporic Indian group has made various "ethnic choices" which both complicate and inform their relationship with their homeland. ¹³⁰

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The relationship between identity and place for the Marwaris challenges the normative quality of the colonial, nationalist, and anthropological idea that identity formation is conventionally tied to territorial rootedness. My project does not attempt to examine transnational imaginations of community, but examines how such processes get worked out for an internal diaspora in the context of British colonialism. My choice of the word "process" here is a deliberate one, for I wish to argue that the a diasporic Marwari identity and an imaginary homeland of Marwar are not simply objects narrated by state discourse and cartography. As an invented homeland, Marwar is not simply a matter of colonial knowledge (a map), but a place that is practiced, performed, enacted, and brought into being through a series of cultural and material practices (mapping).

This chapter has been an attempt to illustrate the relationship between regions, both objective and subjective, as they reflect the construction of identities of Marwari and Marwar in Rajasthan and Calcutta. Marwari identity is neither a primordial given nor the sole creation of the colonial state. It has arisen in local contexts relating to Indian trading networks in Central Asia, engagements with the colonial mapping of the "Marwari" languages in Rajputana, through tourism and print culture, and through the built environment of Marwari residential neighborhoods in Calcutta. In both Rajasthan and Calcutta, mapping of community onto locality is a technique deployed in both self-ascribed and other-ascribed forms of identity claims.

By engaging but not exactly aligning with the cartographic knowledge of the colonial state, Marwari practices of naming, mapping, and performing a sense of homeland *vis-à-vis* Marwar and Rajasthan stand their ground against modern cartographic maps positing other kinds of geographical truths (namely, telling us that Marwaris are not from Marwar). While still acknowledging the discursive power of maps in creating various regimes of truths, this evidence leads me to question postmodern assertions about the extinction of nonstatist cartographies such as the following: . As Thongchai Winichakul wrote, "Another ultimate loser [to new notions of sovereignty and boundary] was the indigenous knowledge of political space. Modern geography displaced it, and the regime of [European] mapping became hegemonic." ¹³¹ Ranajit Guha's point about dominance without hegemony in the colonial reconfiguration of categories is of central importance in this regard.

Notes:

Note 1: Timberg, "A Note on the Arrival of Calcutta's Marwaris," *Bengal Past and Present* 90 (1971): 75–84.[Back.](#)

Note 2: Bernard Cohn, "Regions Subjective and Objective: Their Relation to the Study of Modern Indian History and Society," in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, 100–135.[Back.](#)

Note 3: A 1929 Hindi literary magazine's special Marwari issue, on the past and present conditions of Marwar, noted that the place that is politically known as Rajputana is geographically and socially known as Marwar. *Chand, Marwari Ank* (November 1929), 79.[Back.](#)

Note 4: On the economic role of *baniyas*, see David Cheesman, "'The Omnipresent Bania': Rural Moneylenders in Nineteenth-Century Sind," *Modern Asian Studies* 16:3 (1982): 445–462; Lakshmi Subramanian, "Banias and the British: The Role of Indigenous Credit in the Process of Imperial Expansion in Western India in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century," *Modern Asian Studies* 21:3 (1987): 473–510. [Back.](#)

Note 5: There is a small but important literature on Marwari migration and business. See Timberg, *The Marwaris*; Thomas Timberg, "A Note on the Arrival of Calcutta's Marwaris"; Omkar Goswami, "Then Came the Marwaris: Some Aspects of the Changes in the Pattern of Industrial Control in Eastern India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 223 (1995).[Back.](#)

Note 6: "Upcountrymen" was a term used in northern India. In South India *chettiar* describes a "caste cluster" of trading groups. David West Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).[Back.](#)

Note 7: Col. Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*, new edition, ed. William Crooke (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1903), 561.[Back.](#)

Note 8: D. K. Taknet, "Heroes of a Desert Land," in *B. M. Birla: A Great Visionary* (New Delhi: Indus, 1996), 2.[Back.](#)

Note 9: Jug Suraiya, "The Poor Marwari Who Can't Help Making Money," in *Marwar: A Chronicle of Marwari History and Achievement* (Bombay, Arpan Pub.: 1996), 70.[Back.](#)

Note 10: Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*.[Back.](#)

Note 11: Though my example is rooted in the historical and cultural particularities of India, the implications for further research are multiple. The world abounds with examples of constructions of social identity based on subjective forms of geographical information. The so-called "Indians" of North America, let alone the "Americans" for that matter, have a geographically oriented name whose use remains common today. Even though Iberian explorers soon realized that North America was not the promised water-route to Asia, the use of the name "Indian" to describe indigenous peoples continues to this day. Indian groups in San Antonio, for instance, reject the descriptive term "Native American" which they claim robs them of their pride in being "Indian."[Back.](#)

Note 12: Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Imaginary Institution of India," in *Subaltern Studies 7*, eds. Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992): 1–39.[Back.](#)

Note 13: Dennis Wood, "The Fine Line Between Mapping and Mapmaking," *Cartographica* 30 :4 (Winter 1993): 50–60. [Back.](#)

Note 14: Bhanwarmal Singhi and Nandkishore Jalan, *Sammelon ka Sanskrit Itihas* [A short history of the All India Marwari Federation (1935–1985)], Golden Jubilee edition (Calcutta: Akhil Bharatvarshiya Marwari Sammelon, 1986), 17–18.[Back.](#)

Note 15: Peter Sahlins, "Natural Frontiers Revisited: France's Boundaries since the Seventeenth Century," *American Historical Review* 95:5 (1990): 1423–51.[Back.](#)

Note 16: Susan Gole, *Maps of Mughal India: Drawn by Colonel Jean-Baptiste Gentil, Agent for the French Government to the Court of Shuja-ud-daula at Faizabad, in 1770* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1988); Irfan Habib, "Cartography of Mughal India," in *Medieval India: A Miscellany*, vol. 4 (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1977).[Back.](#)

Note 17: Henri Stern, "Power in Traditional India: Territory, Caste and Kinship in Rajasthan," in *Realm and Region in Traditional India*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Durham: Duke University Program in Comparative Studies on Southern

Asia, 1977): 52–78.[Back.](#)

Note 18: Thomas Trautmann has shown how early maps were an important part of constructing India's place in Biblical chronologies. Both medieval-era Muslim histories and early modern European histories shared the view that Indians were descendants of Hind, the son of Ham, who was a son of Noah. Thomas R. Trautmann, "Finding India's Place: Locational Projects of the *Longue Duree*," (lecture given at the Regional Worlds Program Globalization Project, Chicago Humanities Institute, 14 March 1996).[Back.](#)

Note 19: Arthur Robinson, "Maps of People and their Activities," in *Early Thematic Mapping in the History of Cartography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982): 109–153. One minor criticism of Robinson is that he focuses almost exclusively on the available technologies, such as shade and copperplates, that enabled mapping differences among human populations, rather than looking at the ideology that made certain forms of ethnographic mapping productive for the colonial state.[Back.](#)

Note 20: Thomas Trautmann, *The Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).[Back.](#)

Note 21: The linguistic formation of Indian states started in 1953 with the creation of Andhra Pradesh, where Telegu is spoken. Robert Stern, *Changing India: Bourgeois Revolution on the Subcontinent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 181.[Back.](#)

Note 22: G. N. Sharma writes that the first time the term "Rajasthan" appears is in a Jodhpur Inscription: "In the pre-British days the entire region neither formed a single political unit of India nor was known by any single common name before the 17th century A.D. The first mention of Rajasthan as a compact land of the princes with territorial divisions, plains, and mountains occurs in the Inscription of V. S. 1765 (1708 A.D.), vv. 64–71." (G.N. Sharma, *Social Life in Medieval Rajasthan* (Agra: Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, 1968), 1 n. 1.) The relevant lines that Sharma refers to are: "*desha dharma kshetra saagar sapavitra kshetra tanmadhye meru shikhara saraaj vijaya raajasthaan sannrpanviaasah.*" I thank Jennifer Joffe, Dept. of Art History, University of Minnesota for providing me with the text of the inscription from the Sardar Museum, MS Collection, Jodhpur. I do, however, disagree with Sharma's interpretation of the inscription. My translation of this inscription would read, "In the pure domain of country, religion, land and sea is Mount Meru and the victorious Rajasthan." This certainly cites Rajasthan as a place-name but does not necessarily connote Rajasthan as a unified and "compact land."[Back.](#)

Note 23: John Hitchcock, "The Idea of the Martial Rajput," in *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, ed. Milton Singer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1959): 10–17.[Back.](#)

Note 24: Colonel James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829; reprint, New Delhi: Oriental Books, 1994); Derek Lodrick, "Rajasthan as Region," in *The Idea of Rajasthan: Explorations in Regional Identity* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994), 10.[Back.](#)

- Note 25:** Sukumar Sen, lecture given at Rajasthan Information Centre Calcutta, October 12, 1975, published in *Rajasthan: Bangiya Dristi May*, ed. Pandit Askychandra Sharma (Calcutta: Kayan Charitable Trust, 1989), 16–17.[Back.](#)
- Note 26:** Timberg, *The Marwaris*, 9. [Back.](#)
- Note 27:** Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, 1104.[Back.](#)
- Note 28:** Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, xvi.[Back.](#)
- Note 29:** Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990).[Back.](#)
- Note 30:** Peabody contradicts Ronald Inden's assessment that Tod was not strictly Orientalist in his approach to Indian society. Inden's *Imagining India* does not account for the Orientalist/Anglicist controversy and the subtle varieties of European positions on Indian history, which he lumps together as merely Orientalist. Norbert Peabody, "Tod's Rajasthan and the Boundaries of Imperial Rule in Nineteenth Century India," *Modern Asian Studies* 30:1 (1996): 185–220.[Back.](#)
- Note 31:** Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, vii.[Back.](#)
- Note 32:** Peabody, "Tod's Rajasthan," 204.[Back.](#)
- Note 33:** The Census of India from 1901 onward reported on the princely states in its description of general ethnographic material.[Back.](#)
- Note 34:** Charles Black, *A Memoir on the Indian Surveys, 1875–1890* (London: Secretary of State for India in Council, 1891).[Back.](#)
- Note 35:** Black, *A Memoir on the Indian Surveys*, 90.[Back.](#)
- Note 36:** See especially Chapter 10 of Matthew Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).[Back.](#)
- Note 37:** Rev. S. H. Kellogg, *A Grammar of the Hindi Language* (Allahabad & Calcutta: Am. Pres. Mission Press: 1876).[Back.](#)
- Note 38:** For South Indian language classifications, see Robert Caldwell, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages* (London: Harrison, 1856).[Back.](#)
- Note 39:** Lodrick, "Rajasthan as Region," 16–17.[Back.](#)
- Note 40:** G. A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India, Indo-Aryan Family* (vol. 9), *Central Group, pt. 2, "Specimens of the Rajasthani and Gujarati"* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1908), 1.[Back.](#)

Note 41: J. D. Smith, "An Introduction to the Language of the Historical Documents from Rajasthan," *Modern Asian Studies* 9:4 (1975), 436.[Back.](#)

Note 42: Ibid., 435.[Back.](#)

Note 43: Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* listed five major subgroups and enumerated the speakers of Rajasthani language, including Marwari (6,088,389), Middle-eastern (2,907,200), Northeastern (1,570,099), Malwi (4,350,507), Nimadi (477,777), and others that did not fit into his classification system (907,288). These figures are cited in the *Rajasthan State Gazetteer Volume I: Land and People* (Jaipur: Government of Rajasthan, 1995), 155. Also see David Magier, *Topics in the Grammar of Marwari* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1983).[Back.](#)

Note 44: Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, 16.[Back.](#)

Note 45: Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, 17.[Back.](#)

Note 46: Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, 18.[Back.](#)

Note 47: Stephen Dale, *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade 1600—1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 59.[Back.](#)

Note 48: He was fifty-five years old when he wrote the book, believing that he had lived for half of his life, and therefore called the work "Half Tale." I consulted a version of *Ardhakathanaka* that was translated, introduced, and annotated by Mukund Lath. *Half Tale: A Study in the interrelationship between Autobiography and History* (1641; reprint, Jaipur: Rajasthan Prakrit Bharati Sansthan, 1981).[Back.](#)

Note 49: Lath, Introduction to *Ardhakathanaka*, vi.[Back.](#)

Note 50: Ibid., v.[Back.](#)

Note 51: Baines, 34.[Back.](#)

Note 52: *Census of India 1901*, 127—128.[Back.](#)

Note 53: Luhrmann, *The Good Parsi*. Chapter five will have more to say about this question of "lateness."[Back.](#)

Note 54: Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil Nadu 1891—1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), xxi.[Back.](#)

Note 55: *Report on the Census of Calcutta 1891* (Calcutta), lxxviii.[Back.](#)

Note 56: Modi, *Desh ke Itihas Mein Marwari Jati ka Stan*, 601—602. [Back.](#)

Note 57: Karine Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma and the Chhayavad Age of*

Modern Hindi Poetry (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 244 n. 8.[Back.](#)

Note 58: Ibid., 244.[Back.](#)

Note 59: *Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad* [brochure] (May 1993); on Pratiba Agarwal's work, see her autobiography, Pratiba Agarwal, *Dastak Zindagi Ki* [Life Is Calling] (Calcutta: Aprastut Prakashan, 1990).[Back.](#)

Note 60: For an example of Marwari, see John Robson, *Selection of Khyals or Marwari Plays* (Beawar: Beawar Press, 1866). The text is accompanied by a glossary of Marwari terms not generally found in ordinary Hindi or Urdu dictionaries.[Back.](#)

Note 61: *Rajasthan State Gazetteer, Volume 1: Land and People*, 156.[Back.](#)

Note 62: *Census of India, Calcutta, 1891*.[Back.](#)

Note 63: *Census of 1901, Calcutta*, vol. 7, 48.[Back.](#)

Note 64: I compiled these figures from tables in the *Census of 1901, Calcutta*, Vol 7, 35.[Back.](#)

Note 65: Laidlow defines Mahavir as the Jain "Great Hero," "the last Jina (conqueror of desire), and an elder contemporary of the Buddha. Laidlow, *Riches and Renunciation*, 396. An article about Mahavir International describes its transregional purpose: "The Nagarik Swashya Sangh used to hold a camp in Calcutta every year with its team of doctors and technicians from Jaipur to attend to cases. This was a problem for the handicapped in the eastern region who had to wait for the yearly camp to happen or go all the way to Rajasthan for treatment. And so Mahavir International, Calcutta branch was born: to deal with patients in the city and to make the Jaipur foot available and get it fitted with medical expertise." Paramita Acharjee, "On a Hope, Prayer and Good Hard Work," *Statesman* (Calcutta), 2 March 1997, 7.[Back.](#)

Note 66: "Marwari Yuva Manch to Encourage Regional Language," *Assam Tribune*, 10 March 1989.[Back.](#)

Note 67: Ilan Cooper, "What's in a Name," *Marwar: A Chronicle of Marwari History and Achievement* (Bombay, Arpan Pub.: 1996), 37–43.[Back.](#)

Note 68: Ilan Cooper, "A Painted History," *Marwar*, 6–17.[Back.](#)

Note 69: "The Poor Marwari," "Manic about Marwaris," and "Voices in the Dark," *Marwar: A Chronicle of Marwari History and Achievement* (Bombay, Arpan Pub.: 1996).[Back.](#)

Note 70: This interview can be viewed at www.marwar.com.[Back.](#)

Note 71: Rishi Jaimini Kaushik Barua is the Assamese Brahmin author of the multi-volume caste history, *Main Apne Marwari Samaj ko Pyar Karta Hun* (Calcutta: Jaimini-Prakashan, 1967—). The title is literally translated as "I so do

love my Marwari Society." Barua showed me stacks of the camera-ready copy he had written about some Marwari families who had neglected to pay him for his efforts, so he did not include the material in the published volumes. Maybe he does not really love them that much. Some Marwaris complained to me that Barua is a crook who tries to fleece them.[Back.](#)

Note 72: "Man of Steel," *Marwar: A Chronicle of Marwari History and Achievement* (Bombay, Arpan Pub.: 1996), 18—27.[Back.](#)

Note 73: "McJatia," *Marwar: A Chronicle of Marwari History and Achievement* (Bombay, Arpan Pub.: 1996): 84—90.[Back.](#)

Note 74: Rajshree Birla, the wife of the late industrial giant Aditya V. Birla, commented about her husband's wishes for their daughter: "He wanted her to go for the arts, learn dancing, singing and cooking. He encouraged her in that. He was not too keen that she go for higher studies. He taught her driving, sometime even taught her cooking . . . as of now she is not interested in business. She is more fond of painting and singing and other things. She wants to be a good housewife." Quoted in *Marwar*, 154. Rajshree looks after some Birla trusts and charitable activities. Son Kumar Mangalam looks after his father's billion-dollar empire, consisting of over seventy plants making chemical and industrial products, energy, cement, and other commodities. Gita Piramal, *Business Maharajas* (New Delhi: Viking, 1996), 153.[Back.](#)

Note 75: "Lady in the News," *Marwar: A Chronicle of Marwari History and Achievement* (Bombay, Arpan Pub.: 1996), 35.[Back.](#)

Note 76: The most comprehensive caste history of the Marwaris is Rishi Jaimini Kaushik Barua's eighteen-volume, *Mein Apney Marwari Samaj Ko Pyar Karta Hun* . [Back.](#)

Note 77: "Burra Bazar Taake Burra Bazar" [From Bura Bazar to Bura Bazar], *Ananda Bazar Patrika* , 11 March 1995.[Back.](#)

Note 78: Bunny Gupta and Jaya Chaliha, "Burra Bazar," in *Calcutta: The Living City*, vol. 2, ed. Sukanta Shaudhuri (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 113—116.[Back.](#)

Note 79: Timberg, "A Note on the Arrival of Calcutta's Marwaris,"[Back.](#)

Note 80: Rev. James Long wrote that by 1872 Burabazar had become a distinctly Marwari area. James Long. *Calcutta in the Olden Times* (Calcutta: Granthan, 1994); James Long, *Calcutta and Its Neighborhood: History of people and Localities from 1690 to 1837* (Calcutta: Indian Publications, 1974).[Back.](#)

Note 81: L. S. S. O'Malley, *Census of India 1911, vol 6. City of Calcutta Report* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1913), 15.[Back.](#)

Note 82: CRUTA Foundation, *Barra Bazar Improvement: A Manual Towards Civic Action* (Calcutta: CRUTA Foundation, 1995), 4.[Back.](#)

Note 83: Medha Malik Kudaisya, *The Public Career of G. D. Birla: 1911–1947* (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1992), 15. There is a striking linguistic similarity here to the Spanish colonial *asiento* (literally, seat) that was a colonial trading monopoly in the new world.[Back.](#)

Note 84: Prajnananda Banerji, "Growth of Burra Bazar," in *Calcutta and Its Hinterland: A Study in Economic History of India 1833–1900* (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1975), 110–111.[Back.](#)

Note 85: Jain, *Indigenous Banking*, 90; Omkar Goswamy, "From Traders to Capitalists: Marwaris of Calcutta, 1918–1950," *Statesman* (Calcutta), 12 Jan. 1986.[Back.](#)

Note 86: The *parta* accounting system was adapted by G.D. Birla to industrial applications, through which the daily expenditure for a big company could be tracked very quickly and efficiently. Piu Chatterjee, *Evolution of the Marwari Community—Its Growing Strength and Relations with Nationalist Politics (1920–30)* (Master's thesis, Calcutta University, 1991), 81–83. [Back.](#)

Note 87: Kudaisya, *The Public Career of G. D. Birla*, 16.[Back.](#)

Note 88: Jain, *Indigenous Banking*, 38.[Back.](#)

Note 89: E. A. Gait, *Census of India, 1901, vol 6. The Lower Provinces of Bengal and their Feudatories, Pt.1 "The Report"* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902), 42. [Back.](#)

Note 90: *Report of the Commission to Enquire into Certain Matters Connected with the Sanitation of the Town of Calcutta* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1885), IOL V/26/840/8.[Back.](#)

Note 91: Frank G. Clemon and Wm. C. Hossack, *Report upon the Sanitary Condition of Ward VII (Burra Bazar) Calcutta* (Calcutta: Caledonian Steam Printing Works, 1899).[Back.](#)

Note 92: For examples of this type of research, see P. P. Majumder, Sujata Nayak, R. N. Das, and S. K. Bhattacharya, "Genetic and Cultural Determinants of High-density Lipoprotein Cholesterol and Serum Triglycerides among Marwaris of Calcutta," *Indian Journal of Medical Research* 103 (February 1996):112–119; Partha P. Majumder, Sujata Nayak, S. K. Bhattacharya, K. K. Ghosh, S. Pal, and B. N. Mukherjee, "An Epidemiological Study of Blood Pressure and Lipid Levels Among Marwaris of Calcutta, India," *American Journal of Human Biology* 6 (1994): 183–194.[Back.](#)

Note 93: Patrick Geddes, *Barra Bazar Improvement: A Report to the Corporation of Calcutta* (Calcutta: Corporation Press, 1919).[Back.](#)

Note 94: Long, *Calcutta and Its Neighborhood*, iii.[Back.](#)

Note 95: Meera Guha, "Concentration of Communities in Burra Bazar,

Calcutta," *Man in India* 44 (Oct.—Dec. 1964), 289.[Back.](#)

Note 96: CRUTA, *Burra Bazar Improvement*, 50—60.[Back.](#)

Note 97: Debashish Nayak, "Getting Cities Back to the People," *Indian Architect And Builder* (December 1993); "Redesigning History," *Economic Times Calcutta*, 14 October 1995. [Back.](#)

Note 98: Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Of Garbage, Modernity and the Citizen's Gaze," *Economic and Political Weekly* (7—14 March 1992): 541-547.[Back.](#)

Note 99: Arup De, "Transformation of the Marwari," *Mainstream* (29 July 1995): 25—30.[Back.](#)

Note 100: See chapter five for further discussion of social reform.[Back.](#)

Note 101: Interviews; the names of some informants are confidential.[Back.](#)

Note 102: Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Calcutta: A Social Survey* (Bombay: Lalvani Publishing House, 1964), 36. [Back.](#)

Note 103: Goswamy, "From Traders to Capitalists."[Back.](#)

Note 104: "Land Sharks Demolish Keshab Chandra Sen's House," *Telegraph* (Calcutta), March 1997.[Back.](#)

Note 105: Bose, *Calcutta: A Social Survey*.[Back.](#)

Note 106: My most unpleasant fieldwork experience was when I once forgot to keep an appointment to meet a Marwari leader of one of the community associations. When I realized my mistake and called to apologize, the man shouted abuse into the telephone and said that he could not believe that I was the kind of person that would behave so badly. He slammed down the receiver in my ear before I could say anything.[Back.](#)

Note 107: Jordan Sand, "At Home in the Meiji Period: Inventing Japanese Domesticity," in *Mirror of Modernity*, Stephen Vlastos, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998): 191—207. Xiaobing Tang, "Decorating Culture: Notes on Interior Design, Interiority, and Interiorization," *Public Culture* 10:3 (1998): 530—548.[Back.](#)

Note 108: Gurcharan Das, "Divided We Fall, United We Are Unassailable," *Marwar*, 72—81. [Back.](#)

Note 109: Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India*, 38. [Back.](#)

Note 110: Burton Stein, introduction to special number on South Indian Temples, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 14 (Jan.—Mar. 1977), 7.[Back.](#)

Note 111: George Michell, *The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to Its Meaning*

and Forms (1977; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 51.[Back.](#)

Note 112: Arjun Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).[Back.](#)

Note 113: Velcheru Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamilnadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 89.[Back.](#)

Note 114: Hitesranjan Sanyal, *Social Mobility in Bengal* (Calcutta: Papyrus Press, 1981), 71.[Back.](#)

Note 115: C. A. Bayly, "Patrons and Politics in Northern India," *Modern Asian Studies* 7:3 (1973), 352.[Back.](#)

Note 116: Douglas Haynes, "From Tribute to Philanthropy: The Politics of Gift Giving in a Western Indian City," *Journal of Asian Studies* 46 (May 1987): 339-360.[Back.](#)

Note 117: Michell, *The Hindu Temple*, 58.[Back.](#)

Note 118: *A Story of Devotion and Service: Hindustan Charity Trust* (temple brochure) (c.1995).[Back.](#)

Note 119: I am indebted to Gautam Bhadra for drawing my attention to the characterizations of Marwari businessmen in Bangla short stories. I am grateful to Mundira Bhandury for her translations of these texts. [Back.](#)

Note 120: Parusharam (Rajshekhar Basu), "Sri Sri Siddheswari Limited," in *Gaddhalika* (Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar and Sons, 1915): 1–32.[Back.](#)

Note 121: This definition of *sala* comes from Peter Hook, *Hindi Structures: Intermediate Level* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Papers on South and Southeast Asia, 1986), 7.[Back.](#)

Note 122: This is discussed in greater detail in chapter four. [Back.](#)

Note 123: Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*; Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule*.[Back.](#)

Note 124: Akhil Gupta, "Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State," *American Ethnologist* 22 (May 1995): 375-402.[Back.](#)

Note 125: I borrow this expression from Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*.[Back.](#)

Note 126: Selig Harrison, *India, The Most Dangerous Decades* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960)[Back.](#)

Note 127: Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "'Beyond Culture': Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference" in *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, 40.[Back.](#)

Note 128: Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Culture, Power, Place: Ethnography at the End of an Era," Introduction to *Culture, Power, Place*, 7.[Back.](#)

Note 129: Liisa Malkki, "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees," in *Culture, Power, Place*, 52.[Back.](#)

Note 130: Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).[Back.](#)

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